

Sunday Lesson – March 21, 2021

GOSPEL: Luke 18:31 – 19:10

Zacchaeus Background



“Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to the Passover. At such a time pilgrims traveled in bands together. One of the commonest ways for a Rabbi to teach was to discourse as he walked. That was what Jesus was doing, and the rest of the pilgrim band were crowding close around him, not to miss anything that he might say. As such a pilgrim band passed through a village or a town those who themselves could not go to the feast lined the wayside to see the pilgrims pass and to bid them godspeed on the way.” (*Excerpts from Barclay’s Study Bible*)

Insight

“The theme of sight is emphasized all through the Zacchaeus narrative: he wants to see Jesus, but he cannot see him because of the crowd; so he climbs a tree; Jesus *looks up* at him; and the people see this and are unhappy. Jesus’ declaration that salvation has come ‘today’ is characteristic of his action in Luke. There is enormous Christological significance to this claim; ‘Jesus’ (*Yeshua*) means ‘God saves’, and God’s salvation comes when Jesus visits the house.” (*Excerpts from psephizo.com/biblical-studies/what-does-zacchaeus-teach-us/*)

Gospel Reading

31-43 “Then Jesus took the Twelve off to the side and said, “Listen carefully. We’re on our way up to Jerusalem. Everything written in the Prophets about the Son of Man will take place. He will be handed over to the Romans, jeered at, ridiculed, and spit on. Then, after giving him the third degree, they will kill him. In three days he will rise, alive.” But they didn’t get it, could make neither heads nor tails of what he was talking about. He came to the outskirts of Jericho. A blind man was sitting beside the

road asking for handouts. When he heard the rustle of the crowd, he asked what was going on. They told him, “Jesus the Nazarene is going by.” He yelled, “Jesus! Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!” Those ahead of Jesus told the man to shut up, but he only yelled all the louder, “Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!” Jesus stopped and ordered him to be brought over. When he had come near, Jesus asked, “What do you want from me?” He said, “Master, I want to see again.” Jesus said, “Go ahead—see again! Your faith has saved and healed you!” The healing was instant: He looked up, seeing—and then followed Jesus, glorifying God. Everyone in the street joined in, shouting praise to God.”

19:1-10 “Then Jesus entered and walked through Jericho. There was a man there, his name Zacchaeus, the head tax man and quite rich. He wanted desperately to see Jesus, but the crowd was in his way—he was a short man and couldn’t see over the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed up in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus when he came by. When Jesus got to the tree, he looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home.” Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck, delighted to take Jesus home with him. Everyone who saw the incident was indignant and grumped, “What business does he have getting cozy with this crook?” Zacchaeus just stood there, a little stunned. He stammered apologetically, “Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if I’m caught cheating, I pay four times the damages.” Jesus said, “Today is salvation day in this home! Here he is: Zacchaeus, son of Abraham! For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

““Seeing” is an important category in the *Gospel According to Luke* and, indeed, the life of faith more generally. “See,” Jesus says as he tells his disciples – for the third time! – about what

awaits him in Jerusalem. But they don't see. In fact, Luke records, "they understood nothing."

It is no accident, then, that in the very next scene a blind man, upon learning that Jesus is coming near, calls out and begs Jesus to have mercy. The people around the blind man, embarrassed by his outburst, try to silence him, but he only calls out all the louder. Why? Because he wants to see...fervently, desperately, with his whole heart.

Jesus, sensing his earnestness, stops and asks the simplest and perhaps most powerful question in Scripture: "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, let me see again." And he does, as Jesus heals him and lets him know that his faith has restored him, healed him, made him whole, and saved him.

"Lord, let me see again." I wonder, at times, what would have happened if the disciples had made this request. Would they have understood what was to come? Would they have continued on the road to Jerusalem and the cross? What would have happened if they could have seen who Jesus really was and understood his purpose and destiny.

Luke 19: The key to this story is not sin and forgiveness but *sight*. Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. When Jesus comes his way, he looks up and sees him and invites himself to his house. Why? Because Jesus has *really* seen Zacchaeus. when so many in the crowd despise and would ignore him.

And this is not what those around Jesus expect him to do. Indeed, it is not what any self-respecting messiah *should* do. Yet the God we encounter in Jesus doesn't care about our sense of justice or fairness or any of the other ways we seek to order our world. The only thing this God cares about is seeing – and seeking out – the lost and bringing them home again. God's love routines trumps justice and God's compassion overrides all of our sense of fairness.

At the heart of the Luther's Reformation was the recognition that he had been worshiping the wrong God. He was taught to

see and fear a God of holiness and justice, a God who expected righteousness and punished those who could not meet that standard. Jesus, from this point of view, was little more than a whipping boy, the one who stood in and took the beating we deserved. Luther, agonizing over God's righteousness, finally realized that righteousness isn't the standard God sets for us, but rather is the gift God gave to us. Righteousness isn't a requirement but a promise. The God Luther expected was all about justice; the God he met in Jesus was all about love. Jesus, it turns out, didn't die to make God forgiving but died to show us how forgiving God already is. Little wonder that Luther would later describe meeting this unexpected God by saying it was like having the gates of heaven opened to him.

God's unexpected salvation and grace--it's a message that is still needed to be heard and so easy to share: God sees us, God accepts us, God loves us, and God brings us home. No exceptions! (*Excerpts from davidlose.net by David Lose*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Matthew 20:31 & Mark 10:48](#) *Jesus heals beggars and they receive sight; rebuked by those nearby*
- [1 John 1:9](#) *If we confess sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us...*
- [Matthew 9:12](#) *It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick*

Thought for the Day

"Our days are happier when we give people a bit of our heart rather than a piece of our mind" ~ *Diane Porter*

A Prayer

Lord of the lost, we are quick to judge and slow to accept those whom we consider lower than ourselves. But you show us the way of acceptance, forgiveness, and peace. We honor your name for teaching us to love, for the sake of the one who is the essence of love itself, Jesus Christ our loving Lord. **Amen.**