

Faithfulness ... During Times of Prosperity

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” (II Corinthians 9:6)

Friday, August 12, 2022 5:00 p.m.

Lesson: Luke 19:1-10; Time of Action: 30 A.D.;

Place of Action: At Jericho

I. INTRODUCTION. Jesus had previously told His disciples the story of a rich man who, instead of trusting Jesus, kept trusting in his riches and went away from Jesus sorrowful and lost. Jesus then told His disciples that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. However, He also told them that what was impossible for man was possible for God (see Luke 18:25-27). We are reminded of what God can do and the joy and change in life God brings to those who trust Him.

II. BACKGROUND FOR THE LESSON. This is a continuation of Jesus’ teachings while on His way to Jerusalem for His final time (see Luke 13:22). He gave the parable of the ambitious wedding guest (see Luke 14:7-14), the parable of the great supper (see Luke 14:15-24), and three parables about the cost of discipleship (see Luke 14:28-35). Then, when surrounded by Pharisees, publicans and other sinners, Jesus gave the parables of the lost sheep (see Luke 15:3-7), the lost coin (see Luke 15:8-10) and the lost son (see Luke 15:11-32). Following the teachings on these parables, Jesus taught about the proper use of money with the parable of the unjust steward (see Luke 16:1-13). He rebuked greed and taught about divorce (see Luke 16:14-18), and then Jesus told the story of Lazarus and the rich man (see Luke 16:19-31). He continued His teaching by giving instructions regarding offending, forgiving and faith (see Luke 17:1-10) followed by the cleansing of the ten lepers (see Luke 17:11-19). Then Jesus foretold His second coming (see Luke 17:22-37). In chapter 18, Jesus gave His hearers two parables on prayer: persistent prayer (see Luke 18:1-8) and the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (see Luke 18:9-14) which taught that those who enter the kingdom are humble and repentant, like the despised tax collector, not arrogant and self-righteous like the Pharisee. Then some parents brought children to Jesus and He blessed them (see Luke 18:15-17), and then He had a conversation with a rich young ruler about eternal life (see Luke 18:18-27). After telling His disciples that there are rewards for those who sacrifice for Him (see Luke 18:28-30), Jesus foretold His death and resurrection (see Luke 18:31-34). Then as they approached Jericho, Jesus gave sight to blind Bartimaeus (see Luke 18:35-43).

III. A TAX COLLECTOR EAGER TO SEE JESUS (Luke 19:1-6)

A. Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19:1-2).

1. (vs. 1). *“And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.”* Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem and the cross when He came to Jericho that day. The ruins of what was Old Testament Jericho, was seventeen miles from Jerusalem. The New Testament city of Jericho, which is the place of our lesson, was a magnificent city constructed by King Herod and was situated a short distance south of the ruins of the old city. This was the place where Jews coming from Galilee would cross the Jordan River. From there it was a short seventeen miles up a steep incline to Jerusalem.

2. (vs. 2). ***“And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.”*** Here we are introduced to “a man named Zacchaeus.” The name “Zacchaeus” comes from a Greek word for “pure.” Yet “Zacchaeus” was far from pure in Jewish eyes, because he was “the chief among the publicans.” This describes “Zacchaeus” as a powerful and influential public official who, as “chief among the publicans” was responsible for hiring other tax collectors and supervising them as they collected the various taxes in Jericho and the surrounding areas for the Roman government. “Publicans” were tax collectors. The concluding statement here about “Zacchaeus” was that “he was rich.” This was nothing unusual for a man in his position. Being a tax collector was a license to steal. They were given legal power to collect taxes on whatever they thought was the proper value of property or freight and set the tax rate. A man in Zacchaeus’ position was required by Rome to only submit a fixed portion of what was collected. Therefore, the opportunity for excessive corruption and great wealth lay in his office.

B. Zacchaeus up a tree (Luke 19:3-4).

1. (vs. 3). ***“And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.”*** We are told that Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, but we are not told why. We can only speculate, but no doubt he had heard about the healing of the blind man earlier which caused crowds to grow (see Luke 18:35-43). In addition, maybe he had known or heard of Levi (Matthew) the former tax collector who had become one of Jesus’ disciples (see Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27-28). Perhaps he had heard stories of changed lives from those who had encountered Jesus. Regardless of his reasons for wanting to see Jesus, God used His curiosity to prepare him for a personal encounter with the Lord. However, there was a problem. He couldn’t see Jesus ***“for the press, because he was little of stature.”*** The word **“press”** refers to the crowd of people that pressed around Jesus hindering Zacchaeus from being able to work his way to the front. And of course, being a tax collector, no one was going to help him. The crowd may have been very large since many people were going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (see Mark 14:1).

To complicate things even more, “he was little of stature” meaning he was short. All he could see was the sea of bodies between him and Jesus. Although Zacchaeus was short, he was not short on ingenuity as we will see in the next verse.

2. (vs. 4). ***“And he (Zacchaeus) ran before and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.”*** Filled with curiosity and desperation, Zacchaeus decided to take drastic measures. Disregarding how undignified and maybe even disgraceful it would appear to others who would see him, he “ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him.” Zacchaeus ran ahead of the crowd and climbed up into a sycamore-fig tree and waited on its wide branches for Jesus to walk by. He knew that Jesus “was to pass that way” so he was sure to get a good look.

C. Zacchaeus out of the tree (Luke 19:5-6).

1. (vs. 5). *“And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.”* The phrase “And when Jesus came to the place” reveals that this was not a chance meeting but was a divine appointment. Jesus knew exactly where and when this tax collector would be on this day. It all was planned by the Lord in order to bring salvation to this man. Looking up into the tree, Jesus “saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down.” Even though there is no record that Jesus had ever met this publican, He knew his name just like He knows ours. The words “make haste” indicate the urgency of the moment, and that Jesus was eager to spend time with him. Therefore, Jesus told Zacchaeus to hurry up and come down out of that tree “for today I must abide at thy house.” Not only did Jesus take time to speak to this hated tax collector, but He also honored him by staying at his home. The word “must” refer to a divine necessity (see Matthew 16:21; John 4:4), and “abide” probably included staying for the night as well as having dinner with him.

2. (vs. 6). *“And he (Zacchaeus) made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.”* Zacchaeus’ response to Jesus’ command to come down out of the tree was immediate. We are told that “he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.” This shows Zacchaeus’ grateful and rapid response to the Lord’s command. The word “received” translates a verb used for welcoming a guest into one’s home. This tax collector welcomed Jesus into his home “joyfully.” He was overjoyed that this Jesus to whom everyone looked would enter his home and share his hospitality, even though he was despised by other Jews. Unfortunately, Christ’s compassion was not understood by the crowds. Even today some people are surprised to know that Jesus “came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (see Luke 5:32).

IV. A TAX COLLECTOR REJOICING OVER MEETING JESUS (Luke 19:7-10)

A. **Zacchaeus and Jesus are criticized (Luke 19:7).** *“And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, that he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.”* The reaction from the crowd to Jesus’ decision to abide with Zacchaeus didn’t reflect the same joy that Zacchaeus had shown. We are told that “when they saw it, they all murmured.” The word “it” refers to Jesus leaving with Zacchaeus. The phrase “they all murmured” in the Greek has the idea of a repeated or continuous action. In other words, they were “murmuring” or “grumbling.” The reason for the crowd’s grumbling was because Jesus “was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.” It appears that many in the crowd felt that there were far better places for Jesus to stay than with a man who was a religious outcast, “a sinner.” Surely, He should’ve known better! Maybe they were jealous because the Master didn’t choose to stay with them. The grumblers considered the publican to be “a sinner” because he didn’t adhere to Jewish traditions and was one who got rich at the expense of his own countrymen through tax collections.

B. **Zacchaeus making things right (Luke 19:8).** *“And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”*

What happens in this verse probably took place after Jesus and His disciples reached Zacchaeus' home. Since Jesus would be spending the night, there was plenty of time for questions and conversation. At some point after spending time with Jesus, "Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." This hated and despised tax collector responded to his time with Jesus with a statement that demonstrated that he had indeed been changed by the Lord (see II Corinthians 5:17). Luke does not record the entire conversation, but there is enough here for us to recognize that Zacchaeus had been converted. Proof of his conversion is seen in that suddenly "Zacchaeus stood" up and voluntarily committed to taking two steps of action, both of which would benefit others. First, acknowledging faith in Jesus, he called Him "Lord." This was also evidence of the change in Zacchaeus for the Scripture says that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (see I Corinthians 12:3). Then Zacchaeus said "the half of my goods I give to the poor." It appears that Zacchaeus had already started giving half of his goods to the poor, because he speaks in the present tense. Therefore, his statement could be translated as "I am now giving half of my possessions to the poor" (The Amplified Bible). No doubt, in his position as tax collector, he had played a part in making many people poor. Being convicted by the Saviour, if he wasn't already doing it, he committed to giving half of what he owned to the poor. This reveals the change taking place in Zacchaeus' heart. It was unheard of for a tax collector to give away anything, especially half of what he owned. Second, Zacchaeus said "and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." He didn't say that he had not cheated anyone. In fact, the implication here is that he assumed that he may have cheated people. It was not hard for a publican to cheat people. Nothing was more common than for a tax collector to add a fictitious amount to the tax on property or income. But Zacchaeus' willingness to make restitution for anything he had taken "by false accusation" meaning an overstated tax amount, was an outward demonstration of an inward change of mind. Zacchaeus declared that to anyone he had cheated, he would "restore him fourfold." The Law required that only the principal amount or what was taken plus 20% interest (see Leviticus 6:1-5; Numbers 5:6-7) had to be restored. But Zacchaeus placed upon himself a much more severe penalty that was equal to what was required for robbery (see Exodus 22:1). Instead of giving back only what he had taken plus 20%, Zacchaeus said that he was giving back four times what was taken.

C. Zacchaeus assured of salvation (Luke 19:9-10).

1. (vs. 9). ***"And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham."*** Jesus saw into the heart of Zacchaeus and knew that this tax collector now believed in Him. This is seen in Jesus' words "This day is salvation come to this house." Even though Zacchaeus' words in verse 8 didn't include specific language confirming his belief and faith in Christ, the Lord's response here made it clear that an inner change had taken place in his heart. What Zacchaeus promised to do was the outward sign of the inward change that had occurred in his heart. This tax collector was not saved because of his act. He was saved because of his faith, which was shown by his act (see James 2:14-18). The result was salvation.

Not only did Jesus say that Zacchaeus was saved, He also declared that since he was saved, Zacchaeus "also is a son of Abraham." This tax collector had always been a Jew and a descendant of Abraham in a physical sense. However, Jesus was not using the expression "a son

of Abraham” in that way. He was speaking as the Bible speaks (see Romans 4:11-17; Galatians 3:6-9) of Abraham as the father of those who truly believe in God. Those who truly believe in God are the spiritual children of Abraham. They belong to the same spiritual family, and they bear the same spiritual family resemblance. Abraham was justified by faith, and those who share his faith are his sons and daughters.

2. (vs. 10). *“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”* Jesus concluded His conversation with Zacchaeus by stating His purpose for coming to earth. He said “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The whole purpose of Christ’s coming was to do what He had done for Zacchaeus—He had sought him out in the tree and had saved him from being lost. This episode in Jericho is an excellent example of Jesus fulfilling His purpose.

V. Conclusion. It has been said that happiness depends on circumstances, and joy depends on Jesus. Sometimes we face difficult and adverse circumstances in our lives, and we may not always be happy. However, we can always be joyful because joy depends on Jesus and He never changes. Joy comes when we accept Christ by faith and walk with Him by faith. Zacchaeus, the tax collector was despised and hated by his fellow countrymen because of his deceitful practices. However, he was finally able to experience true joy when he obeyed the Lord’s call.

Questions:

1. Why did Zacchaeus desire to see Jesus?
2. Why did Zacchaeus climb a tree to see Jesus?
3. What was the common belief about Tax Collectors?
4. Why was Zacchaeus willing to give half of his goods to the poor; and state if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”
5. What is the danger in trusting in one’s wealth, success, and not God?