

The Honor and Glory that God Deserves April 8, 2018

Luke 19:1-10

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." 6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." 8 Zacchaeus (zak EE us) stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." 9 Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

The Scripture tells us that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and is passing through a town called Jericho. There is a short man there who is a chief among the tax collectors and he is a rich man. He wants to see Jesus but he can't because he is small and the crowd is a big crowd. So, he runs ahead and climbs up a tree. Jesus calls him down from the tree and invites himself to stay with him. People complain about Jesus associating with a sinner. But Zacchaeus is happy because of his encounter with Jesus and becomes a changed man. Jesus' response is "salvation has come here in this house."

That is the story. As is typical in the Bible there is a lot more to the story than the story itself. So, let's take a look at some of the details in the order of their occurrence. This all happens when Jesus is going to Jerusalem – he is on the verge of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. So, according to Luke, Jesus is just passing through Jericho. Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector. Therefore, he is apparently in charge of a region. This would mean that he gets to sell the rights of collecting taxes to the highest bidder. Therefore, he can demand as much profit as he can collect. So, he is probably rich because he is a chief tax collector. He is in charge of system that is terrible and notorious for cheating people out of their money. The Romans taxed everything that they could think of and tax collectors were free to cheat the system in any way that they could think of.

People hated the tax collectors because they reduced the people to poverty. They worked for the Roman government at the distress of their own people. It was so bad that the tax collectors were considered to be traitors. To paraphrase the Scripture "a traitor climbed a tree so that he could see Jesus and Jesus invited himself to the hospitality of the despised and wicked traitor."

The Crowds following Jesus were huge because he had become famous. Zacchaeus is like child at a parade. He wants to see what is going on. He is more than curious; he has a strong desire to see Jesus. He is different everybody else that wants to see Jesus. Everybody else is in the crowd and they are content to be in the crowd. But Zacchaeus stands out by taking an unusual action; he takes the initiative and makes a special effort. Jesus notices this "Hey, there is a little man up in a tree." There is a man in a tree! We don't see men in trees whether it is in life now or back then in the Scripture. Jesus knows this man really wants to see him. So, Jesus elevates the man to esteemed status. One way is through this personal one-on-one encounter with Jesus, the invitation to stay with him, which is not just a dinner but an extended means of hospitality. The other way Jesus elevates his status is that after Zacchaeus repents Jesus classifies

him as a Son of Abraham. This means that he is one of God's chosen people, no longer outcast by his own people for his crimes against humanity.

The Bible is about the relationship between the divine and humanity. Today's Scripture is about the relationship between Jesus and Zacchaeus. Jesus does not judge Zacchaeus, instead he invites himself to his house. In the dynamics of normal human relationships, you avoid your enemies, you tolerate strangers, and you eat with your friends. But to stay with someone in their house is another dimension of hospitality.

The lesson that I want to emphasize today is that it is a lesson on joy. Zacchaeus is now a new man. He was accepted by Jesus when he was rejected by his community. His response to Jesus has three characteristics that I will point out. One is repentance – he has a changed heart. Another is his response – the physical action that he takes is based on the change – he gives his stuff to the poor and repays all of the victims of his past behavior. The third characteristic is a very important characteristic – that is joy.

This is a lesson on joy - it is the joy of giving! Great joy comes from repentance. One of the happiest times in the life of the believer is when he or she repents and changes. Great joy comes with Jesus! Great joy comes in knowing what God has done for you. And great joy comes in responding to God. I will repeat that because that is what is going on in the Scripture and it is so very important. Great joy comes in responding to what God has given. The reality of giving is located in his attitude. It is a response to the Lord which comes from the heart. He now gives according to how he has been blessed. Again, I will repeat for emphasis, he now gives according to how he has been blessed.

Before this, before he changed, before he encountered Jesus, he lived his life by and attitude of scarcity. He was taking in all he could take in and giving back the least he could. There was a big disconnect between greed and selfishness and the needs of, and care for, the people. In his life money was the most important thing to him. His life changed when he had his encounter with the Lord. Zacchaeus become aware of a better life with higher values; a life of internal happiness that is not dependant on external needs. It took a spiritual awareness for him to be able to let go of his stuff.

The contemporary lesson is in regards to how the Scripture speaks to us today. From the Bible we receive revelation that we live in a world with plenty of abundance. Because God created enough resources to sustain us and God even provides a surplus for us. This God of creation loves the people and cares for the people and is generous to the people. The honor and glory that God deserves lies within our obedience to God. Since God has given to us such a wonder offering, our response is to give our best offering back to God. Our response is to give the very best that we can possibly give to God. This action is the honor and glory that God deserves. To give the very best that we can possibly give to God. The new Zacchaeus begins living in the realm of God. He gives not by how the law requires. He gives not by impression, commitment, responsibility, or duty. No, he gives according to how he has been blessed. Again, another point to repeat for emphasis, he gives according to how he has been blessed.

You have a choice. Which realm do you want to live in? The realm of plenty, where God provides all we need, where there is the marvelous joy of giving as an expression of thanks to God who has given all. Or the realm of scarcity, where there is never enough, you are always needing more, and dependent on materialism for satisfaction. In the Bible, salvation is brought to Zacchaeus and his response is joyous. He celebrates his salvation and demonstrates repentance through the joy of giving. You see, giving is a joyous response to the blessing. Giving our very best to God is the honor and glory that God deserves.