

5 LENT
APRIL 1/2, 2017

1st MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

PSALM 84:1-4, 10-12; LUKE 18: 31-19:10

Eyes to See

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own
that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will
revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

If you know the children's song about Zacchaeus, please sing it with me now:

Zacchaeus was a wee, little man
And a wee, little man was he
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see
And as the Savior came that way
He looked up in the tree
Spoken: And he said, Zacchaeus you come down
For I'm going to your house today
For I'm going to your house today

When Carolyn and I visited our daughter's family in Atlanta last Fall, we got to worship at our son-in-law's church. Tim has a pretty sweet deal there: a member of his congregation sees it as her **calling** to do *all* the Children's Sermons (hint, hint)... **That** day she told the story of Zacchaeus – but with a bit of *southern flair* to it. When she got to the part about Jesus stopping under the tree, she said, *The Lawd looked up and sayed, Zacchaeus, y'all come down, now, y'hear?*

I'm thinking that the Zacchaeus **song-and-story** is one of those biblical accounts that has worked its way into the general lore of society. It joins songs like, Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore and Amazing Grace – those which **most** people, even if they're **not church-goers**, either **remember** from childhood or've heard in some **other** venue.

As such, the **meaning** of the story **also** seems pretty *cut and dried*. This week it appears that we meet **one more rich man** who needs Jesus to *open* his eyes to **see**: a) the suffering of the people around him, and b) the errors of his lavish and selfish lifestyle.

On **top** of that, the theme of *God calling the rich to be mindful of the poor* is near and dear to the **heart** of the Gospel write Luke. His is the **only** Gospel that records Mary's song after the young pregnant woman met with her kinswoman Elizabeth. In it she sings:

*God has brought down the **powerful** from their **thrones**,
and lifted up the **lowly**;
he has filled the **hungry** with **good things**, and sent the **rich** away **empty**.*
(Luke 1:52-53)

Plus Luke is the **only** one to record Jesus' very **first** sermon in which he says:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has **anointed** me to bring good news to the **poor**.*
(Luke 4:18)

Finally, reading the story this way **also** reflects the power that *Jesus exhibits* to radically change peoples' **lives**, right? Jesus raises dead people, he heals sick people, he sets free those who are **demon**-possessed, and he forgives those with a **sinful past**. **So** it is with **Zacchaeus**: it seems that the mere **presence** of **Jesus** causes this Chief Tax Collector to **mend** his despicable ways...

..and there you **have** it – **that's** what history has done with this story – and we've identified some very good evidence for just giving Jesus a **thumbs-up** for freeing Zacchaeus from his bondage to wealth. We could toss the Lord a couple of **atta-boys**, say **Amen!** and...we could all go home early today...

That would be the **easy** way...which **I'm not** going to choose – because you'd just come to expect a 5-minute sermon **every** week, am I right??

Plus, *oftentimes* it's true that the harder way is the better way, a more interesting way to go. **And** it's often true that the harder way can reveal even **more gospel truths** if we have the **eyes** to see. In **fact**, there're a number of clues in the passage that indicate *something else might* be going **on** here, another emphasis that might just very well **jolt** us out of our **comfortable** understanding of *Zacchaeus*.

Luke 19:2-8: A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 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." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus 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."

Take another look at vs. 2-8 of chapter 19, and tell me what we know about Zacchaeus. Shout out a fact that you've learned about our guy:

1. Chief tax Collector
2. Rich
3. Wanted to see Jesus
4. Short
5. Despised
6. Generous??
7. And, as Kelsey Anderson at Bible & Brew on Thursday, pointed out:
Zacchaeus was also...*a good tree climber*, so add that to his resume!

Again, the story that we've known and loved says that **short** Zacchaeus, a **Big** Tax Collector, is so **inspired** by Jesus' positive presence, as **well** as his promise to visit him, that his heart is **changed** on the **spot** – kind of like the *Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, or *Ebenezer Scrooge*. They come to moment of **crisis**, and **respond** with faith. And, we believe **this** version of the story because it comes from a **plain reading** of the text. That means if we were to have a group of ordinary people (like us!) read this story, there's a **very** good chance that a **great majority** of us would **agree** on what it **says**.

Well, Prof. Matt Skinner, at Luther Seminary, offers **another** way to look at some of these facts. And it **all** has to do with translation: from the **Greek** of the original New Testament, into the **English** of our **modern** version. The **first clue** that something else might be going on with Zacchaeus is the reference to his height.

He was trying to see who Jesus was,
but on account of the crowd he could not,
because he was **SHORT IN STATURE.**

(Luke 19:3)

Now it could certainly mean that the song has it **right**, that Zacchaeus was simply short and couldn't see over the crowd – that's the **plain** reading of the passage. But the Greek word for “*short in stature*” can **also** mean “*diminished*” in reputation or honor...in other words, he was either **short**, or **despised** for what he **did**. So let's put **these other** words in the verse instead:

He was trying to see who Jesus was,
but on account of the crowd he could not,
because he was **DESPISED.**

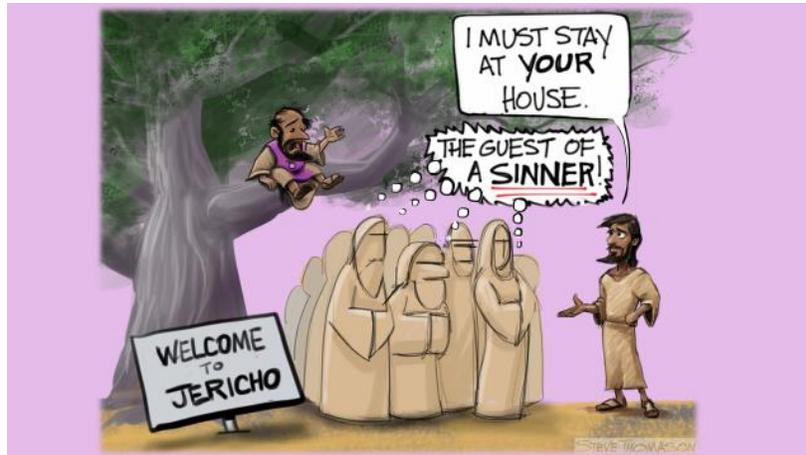
(Luke 19:3)

As a **tax collector for Rome**, Zacchaeus was regarded as a **betray**er of his people. As a **chief** tax collector, he'd be seen as one of the **worst** sinners of **all** – **and** one with a **lot** of **political power**, as well. So, it's not much of stretch to picture people in that crowd wanting to **prevent** Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus **just to spite** him.

They can't **punish** him for collecting their taxes. They can't **pick** on him. They can't **threaten** him – he has the Roman **soldiers** on his side. But that doesn't mean they can't **dis** him when they get the chance. If *I'd* been there, if we **all** knew that that this rascal was excited to see Jesus, I could see a **bunch** of us closing the gaps in front of him just to make sure he couldn't get up front...

And that's kinda what it **looks** like, right? This **wee**, little, **filthy tax**-collecting **scoundrel** of a rich man, hears that Jesus has come to town like a rock star with his entourage. You can almost picture Zacc trying to push his way through the crowd... who are all just **itching** for a little **payback** on this **pipsqueak**.

Zacchaeus soon realizes that he has no hope of seeing the miracle man. Whenever an opening appears, the people freeze him out, denying him the one thing he wants....



So, he swallows his **pride**, hikes up his **robe** like a kid, and climbs up a **tree** on the parade route in order to catch a glimpse of Jesus... Surprise, surprise, the Lord just happens to stop **right there**, he calls Zacchaeus by **name**, and invites himself over to the rich man's house.

This, of course, makes the *crowd* very **angry** – **why** would **Jesus** bless this **scoundrel** when there're so **many** people of **integrity** who deserve Jesus' time and attention! The crowd can't help but choke out the words, *He's gone to eat at the home of a sinner – and left us good folks standing in the dust!*

But, as the traditional story goes, before **anyone** even moves, Zacchaeus **stuns** them **all** with a change of **heart**, promising to give half of his wealth to the poor, even as he pledges to help people who've been **defrauded** by repaying them **4 times more than they lost!** It looks like a delightful conversion story, right? Finally, a **rich sinner** who sees the light, whose **conscience** is cut to the quick, whose **heart** is moved by the Spirit, whose **life** is changed on the spot...

Then here's a **second clue** to indicate that something **else** might be going on. Look again at verse 8:

Zacchaeus 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."

A brief English lesson is in order here: **what's the tense of the two verbs that the rich man uses?** They are the *future* tense, correct? We can tell that because we see very clearly the word "*will*" twice: says Zacchaeus, *I WILL give to the poor* and *I WILL give back*...

Well, again, theologian Matt Skinner says that **both** references, in the original Greek, are *actually* in...the **PRESENT** tense...which means the word **WILL** is not there. So what would it sound like if we read his statement in the **present** tense?

Zacchaeus stood there
and said to the Lord,
"Look, half of my possessions,
Lord, I ... give to the poor;
and if I have defrauded anyone of
anything, I ... pay them back four
times as much."

Might that change the story for us???

Here's **clue # 3**. At the **end**, Jesus says that *The Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost*. So here's my question: **Is there a way in which Zacchaeus was a soul who was lost, in need of being saved?** Think in terms of being lost to God **and/or** lost to the community...his family...his people...

As it turns out, if his heart **was** in the right place, and if he **was** secretly caring for his poor neighbors, it didn't **count** for anything with the people of Jericho, right?, **because they could see that he was a sinner...**

And **yet**, after his self-revelation, Jesus proclaims, *Today salvation has come to this house, for he too is a son of Abraham* (v. 9).

So:

- **if** Zacchaeus is already giving half his money to help the poor, and
- **if** he's being despised unfairly because **no one** knows of his generosity, then couldn't **he**, in a heart-wrenching way, be one of those *last, lost, least and lowly* souls who're searching for a sense of welcome from **Jesus** – cuz he **sure** hasn't found it from his **townsfolk**! He *may not* be **poor**, but he **may** very well be *poor in spirit, hungry for love, thirsty for friendship, and yearning for acceptance.*

And here's a **4th and final clue** to ponder: **Does anyone know what the name Zacchaeus means in Hebrew?** I certainly didn't until this week!

**Zacchaeus =
clean, pure, innocent, blameless**

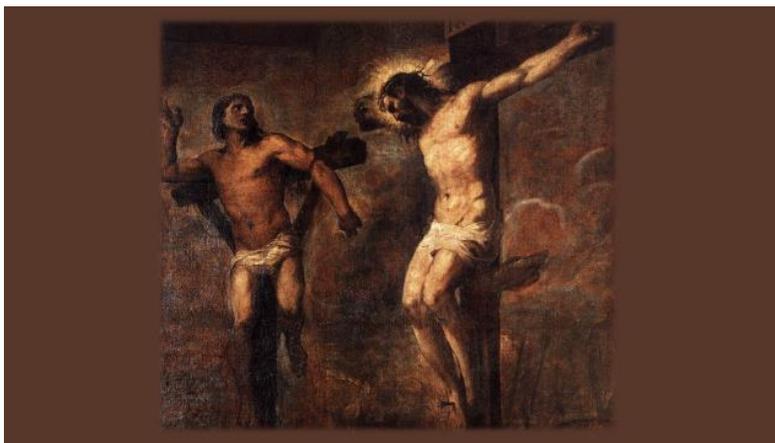
It means CLEAN, PURE, INNOCENT or BLAMELESS!!!

I like this new version of the Zacchaeus story for a **couple** of reasons. The **first** is that it reflects Jesus' balance to the way he *comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable*. **Last** week we met a *rich man* in Jesus' parable who died and found himself in **hell** because he *ignored* his neighbor Lazarus who had serious needs. **This** week we meet a rich man who **blows** the **roof** off God's call to care for the needy by giving **half** of his wealth to the poor.

Just for reference' sake, the Old Testament requirement for giving was the tithe, **10% of one's income**, with special offerings expected on **top** of that. According to the Health Research Funding Org., of those Christian families in the U.S. that make **less** than \$20k per year, **8%** of them give at least **10% in tithing**. For families making a minimum of *\$75k or more*, the figure drops to just **1%** who give at least **10% of their income** (<http://healthresearchfunding.org/21-tithing-statistics/>). Apparently, the more money we **have**, the **harder** it is to part with... **unless** your **name** is... *Zacchaeus!*

I **also** like this version of the story because it's a great reminder that the way the **world** views people is far different from the way that God views us. And if heaven considers **every** person to be a child of God, then we **can't** let our **prejudices** determine whom *we* think should be welcomed-in or kicked-out of the kingdom...

Jesus knows us – **not** the community image of us, or even our family's image of us, but **who** we **are**, deep down in our hearts, at the core of our souls, in the essence of our spirits. **He** knows us, *and* seeks us out anyway because he **loves** us, and wants us **all** to be **reconciled** – both with **God**...*and* with our **neighbors**.



I can't think of a better display of such unquestioning acceptance and love than the **interaction** that takes place between **Jesus** and the **thief** on the **cross**... The story of Zacchaeus is the perfect **precursor** to what **will** happen between the two men who are **dying** together.

One of the criminals **derides** Jesus, and challenges him to **prove** he's the Messiah by getting them **all** off their crosses. But the **other** criminal chastises the man, then **turns** to the **Lord** and says, *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*. The Son of God who has eyes to see, **looks** into the man's **heart** and says, *Truly, I tell you, today you will be **with me** in **Paradise***.

Says the **Lord** to Zacchaeus, ***Today**, salvation has come to this house*.

Says the **Lord** to the thief on the cross, ***Today** you will be with me in Paradise*.

Says the **Lord** to you and to me, ***Today**, you are my beloved child...**always**, and **forever***.

Amen.