

JESUS AND PEOPLE

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By Pastor Stan

Luke 18:35

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SERMON SERIES: WALKING WITH JESUS: STORIES ABOUT JESUS FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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INTRO.

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-- During the past several weeks we've been "walking with Jesus" as He makes His final trip to Jerusalem where He will do what He was born to do: die on the cross and make a way for lost sinners to be saved. That journey started back in Luke 9 and in chapter 19 Jesus makes His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, the event that we celebrate as Palm Sunday, which is, of course, one week from today.

-- Just prior to His arrival at Jerusalem, Jesus has two surprising and significant encounters at Jericho, a town located about 15 miles east of the Holy City. Luke tells us about these two encounters at the end of chapter 18 and the beginning of chapter 19. So let's turn to Luke 18.

-- As Jesus arrives at Jericho, His popularity is soaring to what we would refer to today as "rock star" status. He's surrounded by a crowd of disciples, and crowds of curious onlookers line the road through town hoping to see this miracle-working teacher that they've heard so much about

-- Although it's a busy time and Jesus has only a few more days left in His earthly ministry, He is about to devote one of those days to two people that He could have easily avoided. Instead, Jesus will go out of His way to meet these two men, both of whom are totally unable to increase Jesus' popularity in any way, and one who could put that popularity in jeopardy.

-- Let's look at these encounters and try to discover why Jesus would spend His precious time and even risk His popularity for them.

I. THE FIRST ENCOUNTER (18:35-43)

A. VERSE 35

-- Jericho was strategically located on a major trade route to Egypt and was the main road used by Jews travelling to Jerusalem, which meant that the blind beggar in the story had a prime location. The Gospel of Mark tells us that the beggar's name was Bartimaeus. This would have been a particularly good time of the year for Bartimaeus; the road was full of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to observe Passover, pilgrims who would have been in a giving mood, much like Christmas shoppers passing a Salvation Army kettle and bell ringer. But an encounter is about to take place that will change Bartimaeus' life forever.

B. VERSES 36-37

-- Bartimaeus hears an unusual commotion and asks what's going on, and someone tells him that Jesus of Nazareth is going by

-- Bartimaeus has obviously heard stories about Jesus. Everyone has been talking and speculating about this miracle-working rabbi who could cleanse lepers, cause the lame to walk, and give sight to the blind. Immediately, Bartimaeus' heart begins to pound, and he starts shouting.

C. VERSES 38-39

-- Notice what Bartimaeus is shouting: not "Jesus of Nazareth" (the expression used by the crowds) but "Jesus, Son of David." That's the equivalent of saying "Jesus, Messiah." In other words, Bartimaeus has already come to believe that Jesus is much more than a rabbi from Nazareth. Bartimaeus believes that Jesus is the Messiah, and so he shouts as loud as he can, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

-- The people leading the way ahead of Jesus are annoyed by this loud, beggarly shouting and tell Bartimaeus to shut up. By the way, it's quite possible that the ones saying this included Jesus' Disciples. Earlier in this same chapter parents were bringing their children to Jesus for Him to bless them, and what did

the Disciples do - told them to go away because Jesus was too busy to waste time on little children.

-- But Bartimaeus won't be quieted or deterred.

v. 39b, "he shouted all the more"

-- Bartimaeus not only refuses to stop shouting; he shouts even louder. Can you imagine the urgent desperation in that cry? Jesus can give sight to the blind - the only one who can - and He's right there, just a few feet away and about to pass by. No wonder Bartimaeus won't be quiet but shouts as loud as he can, "Have mercy on me!" If Bartimaeus is ever going to see, this is the time.

We're all like Bartimaeus, desperate for Jesus. We're not all blind. Actually, we're worse - we're dead in trespasses and sins, and the only one who can forgive those sins and give us spiritual life and open our eyes to see the glorious wonders of our God is Jesus. When we understand that, we too will cry out and won't stop until He hears and answers. As Augustus Toplady wrote in the hymn "Rock of Ages":

Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to Thy cross I cling;

Naked, come to Thee for dress;

Helpless, look to Thee for grace;

Foul, I to the fountain fly;

Wash me, Savior, or I die

-- Bartimaeus has cried out to Jesus in faith, not as teacher or miracle worker but as Messiah, and Jesus is going to validate that faith.

D. VERSES 40-41

-- Jesus never ignores a cry for mercy. Jesus hears that cry above all the noise and tumult, and He stops and tells them to bring Bartimaeus.

-- Notice, again, how Bartimaeus addresses Jesus, not as Teacher or Rabbi but as "Lord." And Jesus is about to demonstrate that that's exactly who He is.

E. VERSE 42

-- What Jesus says to Bartimaeus is a combination of a command and a proclamation.

-- The command is, "Receive your sight." That's just one word in the Greek. That's all that it takes, just a one-word command from the Lord to restore the man's sight.

-- Jesus follows this command with a proclamation: "Your faith has healed you." Literally, what Jesus says is, "Your faith has saved you," probably indicating that Bartimaeus was being healed physically and spiritually.

Then Luke concludes this story in verse 43.

F. VERSE 43

-- What we see here are 3 results of Jesus' command for Bartimaeus to be healed:

1. The blind man immediately regains his sight.

2. Bartimaeus starts to "follow Jesus," another way of saying that he became a disciple.

3. God is praised for this wondrous display of His glory. Even those who just minutes earlier had tried to keep this encounter from happening are now praising God because of it, something they will find much harder to do after the next encounter that is about to happen.

II. THE SECOND ENCOUNTER (19:1-10)

A. VERSES 1-4

-- We learn several important facts about Zacchaeus in these verses.

1. He was wealthy.

-- Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus were at opposite ends of the financial spectrum. In the language of the "Occupy" crowd, Bartimaeus was part of the 99%, and Zacchaeus was part of the 1%.

-- And yet, as different as they were, they had something very much in common: they were both outcasts. They both lived on the fringe of Jewish society - Bartimaeus because of his poverty, and Zacchaeus because of how he had become wealthy, which is the second thing we learn about Zacchaeus in these verses.

2. He was a tax collector.

-- Tax collectors were Jews who collected the Roman taxes. Each tax collector had a certain assessed amount that he had to turn over to the Romans, and whatever he was able to collect beyond that amount was his profit. It was a system that invited abuses and scoundrels. Zacchaeus was not an ordinary

tax collector; he was a chief tax collector, which meant that he was in charge of other tax collectors and was able to keep part of their collections as well.

-- But Zacchaeus' wealth had come at a price. Like all tax collectors, Zacchaeus was looked upon by other Jews as a traitor and a cheat. He was relegated to the same sinner classification as drunkards and prostitutes. He was shunned by his fellow Jews and banned from the synagogue.

3. He was short.

-- A third fact about Zacchaeus that Luke observes here is that he was short. I suspect that this is a very significant characteristic, that Zacchaeus was a runt who had been picked on, mocked and bullied all his life. Being a tax collector would have been a natural fit for Zacchaeus. He wouldn't have minded the rejection because he had always been rejected, and being a tax collector was an opportunity to take some revenge.

-- There's one more thing Luke tells us about Zacchaeus - and this one is rather surprising.

4. He wanted to see Jesus.

-- In fact, he was determined to see Jesus. So determined, that when his view was blocked by the crowds lining the streets, the little man climbed up in a sycamore tree. It was a very undignified act that would have invited even more mockery, but Zacchaeus seemed unconcerned about that - all he wanted was to see Jesus.

-- Zacchaeus didn't know it, but he was going to do much more than see Jesus.

B. VERSE 5

-- There are 3 important things to observe here:

1. Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name, which is significant because the two have never met before

2. Jesus invites Himself to Zacchaeus' home, something that's just all wrong. You don't invite yourself to someone else's house, and you certainly don't go into the house of a sinful jerk like Zacchaeus, even if he invites you.

3. Jesus says that He "must" go to Zacchaeus' house. Not just that He would like to go but that it was necessary for Him to go there. But why? Why is going to Zacchaeus' house something Jesus has to do? Because it is God's plan. Nothing about this encounter is an accident or chance. This encounter has been decreed by God's eternal counsel and has been orchestrated by God's sovereign providence. Zacchaeus thinks that he is the one doing the seeking, but the truth is that he is the one being sought.

C. JESUS' SURPRISING (SHOCKING) SELF-INVITATION PRODUCES 2 VERY DIFFERENT RESPONSES.

1. Zacchaeus' Response (v. 6)

-- Surprised but ecstatic, Zacchaeus scurries down from the tree like an amped-up squirrel and leads Jesus to his house, probably with a Tigger-like bounce.

-- But not everyone is so thrilled.

2. The Crowd's Response (v. 7)

-- "All the people" probably means everyone except Jesus and Zacchaeus - including Jesus' 12 Disciples - they're probably not very happy with what's happening. But Jesus never bases what He does on how popular it will be with people. Jesus isn't driven to please people; He's driven to please the Father.

-- Well, if the people in Jericho think that they couldn't be any more surprised or shocked than they already are, they are wrong.

D. VERSE 8

-- This amazing pronouncement from Zacchaeus has to be absolutely dumbfounding to everyone in Jericho. Zacchaeus - that cheating, no-good, scoundrel and jerk - is giving away half of his wealth to the poor, and with the other half he is going to pay back those he had cheated four times the amount. That means that Zacchaeus would be a man with very modest means at best. And he is doing all of this voluntarily - simply because of his encounter with Jesus.

-- What in the world is going on? Jesus is about to tell us.

E. VERSE 9

-- Zacchaeus' radical announcement is the evidence of the radical transformation that is experienced by those who find salvation through Jesus. Zacchaeus is a new man, a real son of Abraham. Now, Zacchaeus not only shares Abraham's genes, but much more importantly he now shares Abraham's faith.

-- Jesus is now ready to make one of the most important pronouncements in the Gospel.

G. VERSE 10

-- Jesus tells us clearly here what His mission is: to seek and save the lost. That's what these encounters with Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus were all about - seeking and saving those who were lost.

-- The greatest miracle that Jesus performed at Jericho was not giving sight to the blind but bringing salvation to the lost.

That was the mission that had brought Jesus to earth. That was the reason that the Son of God had left the glories of heaven and had taken our human form. That was the reason He was on His way to Jerusalem and to death on the cross - to seek and to save the lost.

And that is the mission that Jesus gave to His Church. That's where making disciples must begin - seeking the lost and leading them to salvation.

Seeking and saving the lost was Jesus' passion. Is it ours? What is our attitude towards the lost? Are we even convinced that they are lost? That apart from Christ they have no spiritual or eternal life and are headed towards the wrath and judgment of God that will take them to eternal hell? Are we concerned about the plight of the lost? Do we yearn and pray for them to be saved? Do we go out of our way to show and tell them of God's love and the salvation that is found only in Jesus?

Seeking and saving the lost is why Jesus came and why we must go.