

Sermon Notes/Follow-up
4/13/08
Luke 19:1-10

Sources for my sermon included sermons by Tim Keller, William Willimon, and numerous commentaries, especially Tom Wright's *Luke for Everyone*. Keller was most helpful in understanding the place of money in the story, Willimon was most helpful in understanding how the story reveals grace, and Wright was most helpful in understanding the story within its historical context.

Tax collectors were regarded as quislings, as collaborators with the evil Roman Empire. But for precisely that reason, the case of the chief tax collector Zacchaeus shows how far God's saving power can reach. Zacchaeus is the camel who comes through the eye of a needle (Lk. 18:25). This is one of those "gospel in a nutshell" stories that shows us not only how grace forgives, but also how it transforms. In other words, this short but densely packed episode reveals many of the major themes of the gospel.

The story takes place in Jericho, so we naturally look for parallels and contrasts with earlier biblical stories involving Jericho. In the book of Joshua, before the city is destroyed, the prostitute Rahab hides the Hebrew spies in exchange for salvation for herself and her household. Rahab used righteous deception, and by her courageous actions showed that her true loyalty was with Israel and Israel's God. Zacchaeus is, at least in some respects, a new Rahab. No, he (obviously) not a prostitute – but he is "in bed" with the Roman Empire up this point. But in this story, he transfers his loyalty from Herod/Caesar to Jesus, the new Joshua. Thus, his house is saved, just as Rahab's was. In both Joshua 2 and Luke 19, we find salvation coming to the unlikeliest of candidates.

Note that when the first Joshua destroyed Jericho (Josh. 6), he threatened curses against anyone who rebuilt the city (Josh. 6:26-27; 1 Ki. 16:34). A later episode in the history of the city points ahead to its salvation, seen in Luke 18:35-19:10. Peter Leithart explains (<http://www.leithart.com/2004/02/11/sermon-outline-february-15/>):

Later, the prophet Elisha, whose played "Joshua" to Elijah's "Moses," came through the rebuilt Jericho and purified the waters (2 Kings 2:18-22), making the "city of Palms" (Judges 1:16) another Eden. Jesus' "conquest" of Jericho is more like Elisha's than like Joshua's; He brings healing and salvation rather than destruction (but cf. Luke 19:41-44).

These twin stories in Luke 18:35-19:10 show us not only that the blind and corrupt can be saved, but even a cursed city like Jericho is not beyond the reach of grace.

The case of Zacchaeus begs for comparison/contrast with the another wealthy man who meets Jesus in 18:18ff. Consider some of the connections:

- ruler/chief tax collector
- wealthy/wealthy
- Jesus addressed as “good teacher”/”Lord”
- Regarded as righteous by himself and crowd/regarded as a sinner by himself and the crowd
- Told to sell all for the sake of the poor/voluntarily gives away half for the sake of the poor
- Goes away sad, without salvation/received Jesus with joy and ultimately attains salvation
- Shows that salvation is very hard, even “impossible,” for the wealthy/ shows that the wealthy *can* be saved

The case of Zacchaeus also needs to be compared with the case of the blind man in the immediately preceding pericope. Both stories are put in the context of Jericho. Consider some connections:

- Outside Jericho/inside Jericho
- Beggar/wealthy man
- Outcast/outcast
- Multitude passing by/crowd around Jesus
- Crowd warns/crowd grumbles [OR: crowd praises God/crowd grumbles]
- Wanted to “see” Jesus/longed to see who Jesus was
- Cried out/climbed a tree
- Commanded him to be brought/commanded him to come down
- “Son of David!”/”Look Lord!”
- “Your faith has saved you”/”Today salvation has come to this house”

Twice Jesus speaks of “today” in the encounter with Zacchaeus. This should be connected with other references to “today” in Luke’s gospel (2:11, 4:21, 23:43).

Sycamore/fig tree most likely represents Israel (cf. Lk. 21:29ff). It’s not just that this is an easy tree to climb, with dense, low hanging branches; it’s that Jesus is calling Zacchaeus out of the old Israel and into the new.

Zacchaeus receives Jesus with joy. Indeed, throughout the gospels, a cloud of joy seems to encircle Jesus. Wherever Jesus goes there is joy; joy surrounds him, and those who embrace him always do so with great joy. See Lk. 2:10, 6:23, 10:17ff, 13:17, 15:5ff, 19:37, 24:41ff, etc.

Zacchaeus shows the fruit of repentance by his transformed use of wealth. See Lk. 3:12f.

Zacchaeus addresses Jesus as Lord. In so doing, he is submitting himself to Jesus' authority. He is putting his money and his life in Jesus' hands.

This is the story of an outcast being brought in to the renewed family of Abraham. Zacchaeus is the prodigal son, the straying sheep, the lost coin. Jesus has sought him out in order to save him. While the self-righteous crowd grumbles, angels in heaven are rejoicing (cf. Lk. 15).

In seeking out Zacchaeus, Jesus is fulfilling his role as the Good Shepherd of Israel (Ezek. 34; Jn. 10). Because Zacchaeus has entered into a relationship with Jesus, he is declared to be a part of the renewed family of Abraham. Jesus is showing that from here on, one's membership in the covenant community will be determined by one's relationship to Jesus.

Finally, it is fascinating to note that Jesus grants to Zacchaeus on the spot what he normally would have to have gotten from the temple. Salvation is no longer found in the temple precincts, but in the company of Jesus. In other words Jesus is upstaging the temple, subverting one of the most prominent symbols in the Jewish worldview. From now, God will be present with his people not as they gather in Jerusalem, but as they gather in Jesus' name. This is how N. T. Wright describes it in his book *Jesus and the Victory of God*:

...for Jesus, this repentance, whether personal or national, did not involve going to the Temple and offering sacrifice...Jesus offered membership in the renewed people of the covenant God on his own authority and by his own process...The crucial issue in the Zacchaeus episode...is that whatever Zacchaeus did or did not do with his money, Jesus declared on his own authority that Zacchaeus was a true son of Abraham, and that salvation had 'today' come to his house. In other words, what Zacchaeus would normally obtain through visiting Jerusalem and participating in the sacrificial cult, Jesus gave him on the spot...

Even if, as seems to be the case with Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10, the real problem was simply that tax-collectors were widely regarded as dishonest and rapacious, that does not lessen the point that they had a reputation not just as 'people of the land' but as sinners, regarded not just as Pharisees but by other 'people of the land' as a class apart, almost as the moral equivalent of lepers.

The temple was the heart and center of Judaism. Jesus' ministry was a challenge to the Jews of his day precisely because he offered something of a counter-temple movement. He took the meaning and purpose of the temple up into his own ministry, thus ultimately rendering the temple in Jerusalem obsolete for his followers. Jesus gave people on his own word what supposedly only the temple system could provide. Of course, this is because Jesus was the true earthly embodiment of YHWH, of which the temple in Jerusalem was only a shadow. In the gospels, fellowship with Jesus is in the process of

replacing temple worship; blessings normally received in the temple services are now received through the personal presence of Jesus. Jesus comes onto the scene as the eschatological replacement and fulfillment of the temple; now that the reality has arrived, the signpost is expendable (hence, the temple cleansing – an acted out parable of its coming destruction -- and prophesy of the temple's coming demise after Jesus enters the city). Just as Jesus' meals replaced the food laws of the old covenant, so his word of forgiveness/salvation replaces the ministry of the Levitical priests. The Zaccheaus story further highlights this theme in Luke.