

Meeting the Christ on the Margins

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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 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." (Luke 19:1-10)

1. The Town Meeting

Last Monday and Tuesday nights, Christine and I attended a special town meeting at Bourne High School. One of the main concerns of Bourne residents was whether the Bourne voters want to keep the ban on recreational marijuana retail sales or not. The voters voted to keep the ban on pot sales in our town. Residents also voted in favor of indefinitely postponing a vote on a proposed zoning bylaw to regulate marijuana in the Town of Bourne.

Do you know how many people were present at the meeting? On the first night about 700, and the second night roughly 660 people were present at the meeting. I was impressed by the number of people who cared about the welfare of the Town. But I learned the priority was quite opposite. Some want to increase revenues by allowing pot sales in the Town. On the other hand, other people think pot sales will bring problems in our town. Figuring out what our priorities are is very important in our lives. Do we have a clear idea of how to define our top priorities in life? We can find some insight from today's scripture passage, Luke 19:1-10.

2. Transformation of Zaccheus

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem just before his trial and crucifixion. In order to get to Jerusalem, Jesus had to go through the city of Jericho. Jericho was a center of commerce and trade. In this city, there was a man by the name of Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector who worked for the

Roman government. There is a certain amount of taxes for the government, but tax collectors often collected more and were allowed to keep the rest. Zacchaeus became very rich and his fellow citizens hated him. The people considered him a traitor. Many of his friends left him. Zacchaeus was alienated from his neighbors and was not allowed to attend the synagogue because he was called “unclean” by the religious leaders.

One day, Zacchaeus heard that Jesus would be going through Jericho. Zacchaeus was anxious to see Jesus. When Jesus goes to the town, there are large crowds of people who welcome Jesus and his followers. There is no way for Zacchaeus to see Jesus over the crowd because Zacchaeus was short. He runs ahead of the group and climbs up a sycamore tree. Zacchaeus is above the crowds and is able to see everything. He waits there. Why do you think Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus? Although he was rich, Zacchaeus was not happy at all. No one wanted to be his friend. Zacchaeus was excluded from the fellowship in his neighborhood. He lived on the margins of society.

Zacchaeus realized that his lifestyle was not right. The meaning of his name “Zacchaeus” is “pure.” Yet his life did not reflect the meaning of his name. Zacchaeus felt empty and lost. Zacchaeus hears that Jesus heals people and forgives their sins. People believe that Jesus was the Messiah and would establish a new kingdom. Zacchaeus probably heard about Matthew, a tax collector who left his job and followed Jesus. Zacchaeus wanted to know what made Matthew make such a radical decision. When he hears that Jesus is on his way to Jericho, Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. He expected Jesus to change his life as well.

From the sycamore tree, Zacchaeus sees Jesus and his followers as they approached where Zacchaeus is. Jesus suddenly stops and Zacchaeus does not know why Jesus stops. Then Jesus looks up at Zacchaeus. Everyone looks up at Zacchaeus as well. Jesus says, “**Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today** (verse 5).

Jesus knows who Zacchaeus was. How did Jesus know who Zacchaeus was among the many residents in the town of Jericho? Why does Jesus want to go to Zacchaeus’ house? Why does Jesus choose to stay with the most hated person in town? It is because Jesus knows Zacchaeus is one of the most marginalized members of society. Jesus knows what people would say about Jesus going to Zacchaeus’ house. They would criticize Jesus for being with Zacchaeus, a traitor. But Jesus does not mind giving up his reputation for Zacchaeus.

Jesus does not ask anything of Zacchaeus to do, but Zacchaeus makes a radical decision right there and says to Jesus, “**Look, half of possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything,**

I will pay back four time as much” (verse 8). When Zacchaeus meets Jesus for the first time, the importance of money fades away. Zacchaeus is grateful to Jesus for meeting him and staying with him. I am sure they had a big party that evening. Zacchaeus realizes that priority was given to making more money than having a good relationship with others. However, after he meets Jesus he wants to share half of his money with the poor. Zacchaeus would pay back to those whom he cheated. Jesus does not ask Zacchaeus to do anything. Yet Zacchaeus voluntarily makes up his mind to live a quite different life. His priority has changed.

Jesus says, ***“Today salvation has come to this house, because he too a son of Abraham”*** (verse 9). Jesus announces that the salvation of a lost person Zacchaeus has just happened. As a Jew, Zacchaeus was a descendent of Abraham, but his life did not reflect the life of Abraham, a blessing to others. Now by sharing his money with others, Zacchaeus becomes a blessing to his fellow citizens. Luke 19:10 says, ***“For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”*** As soon as he encounters Jesus, transformation happens.

3. Jesus Seeks Zaccheus

The focus of this story sounds like Zacchaeus is seeking Jesus. However, Jesus comes to seek Zacchaeus because Jesus already knew that Zacchaeus was lost living on the margins. Jesus knows that Zacchaeus was looking for Jesus. The purpose of Jesus’ arrival to Jericho is to meet Zaccheus. Jesus does not want Zacchaeus to live his life for more money but to be a blessing to others. Jesus wants Zaccheus to live a new life.

In the world, there are roughly 7 billion people. We are only one of the 7 billion. Each of us plays a small part in the world. However, the story of Zacchaeus reminds us what Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew 6:26; ***“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”***

Sometimes we may feel like no one cares about us. We might even feel like God has abandoned us or does not pay any attention to our lives. Jesus tells his disciples and us that if God takes care of the birds of the air, how much God cares for us. We do not need to worry about ourselves, because God already knows what is happening to us and wants to take care of us. As Jesus visits Zacchaeus, God would visit us or send us someone to help us.

4. Dark Waters

The other day I watched a movie trailer, “Dark Waters.” This movie will be released very soon. The movie is inspired by a shocking true story. A

tenacious attorney Robert uncovers a dark secret that connects the death of a farmer Wilbur's 190 cows due to one of the world's largest corporations, DuPont. He discovers that DuPont had been dumping chemical waste near the site where Wilbur was raising his cattle. The more serious issue was that drinking water for the 70,000 residents in Parkersburg, WV had been tainted by the chemical substance.

The attorney Robert fought for 20 years for a poor farmer, the Parkersburg residents and Environmental Protection Agency. In the legal battle, he risks everything-his future, his family, and his own life to expose the truth. In the end, Dupont agreed to pay about \$100 million. In this movie, the attorney played like Jesus who saved the lives of those who lived on the margins.

5. Conclusion

The story of Zacchaeus tells us that he experiences transformation through the meeting with Jesus. After he meets Jesus Zacchaeus learned that his relationship with Jesus and other fellow citizens are much more important than money. Zacchaeus is not only happy even after he gives half of his money to the poor but also his presence in the town of Jericho brings a big difference to many people. He becomes a blessing to the residents.

What do you think happened in the town of Jericho after Zacchaeus shared half of his money with his fellow citizens? I am sure many people began to show Zacchaeus respect and wanted to be his friends. Zaccheus is no longer a traitor, but a source of blessing. Even after Jesus leaves the town, people experience the love of Jesus through Zacchaeus.

6. Application

Christmas is a very special season for us. It is a season to remind us that God has come to seek us, his lost sheep. This Saturday, we are going to have a Christmas bazaar. Of course, one of the important goals is to raise money. I am sure we will raise more than what we might want. However, we learn from the story of Zacchaeus that Zacchaeus' relationship with Jesus and with his neighbors would be much more important than money.

As Jesus visited Zacchaeus and changed his life, I hope that at the Christmas bazaar, the visitors experience the love of our Lord through us. We are neither going to give them money nor giving everything for free. Yet I pray that our warm welcome, kindness, generosity, and every word and action would touch their hearts. May many of our visitors feel like they meet Jesus at the bazaar and want to come closer to Christ our Lord. Amen.