

March 24, 2019
Lesson 17: Calling to Salvation
Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Context:

After discussing what it means to be lost and then be found through the parables, the lesson moves to a story with names and a person who went from being lost to being found. The story of Zacchaeus is found only in the Gospel of Luke and is a parallel to the immediate story of the blind beggar made whole.¹ The setting is in Jericho, the ancient city that fell when the Israelites entered the land flowing with milk and honey.

The only detail about Zacchaeus is that he is a “chief tax collector,” meaning he was tangled up in local money affairs as well as the Roman government that had overtaken Israel and the surrounding regions. However, his title is not necessarily a positive one. While he may be affluent, the Roman government had a corrupt tax system.² This system functioned on high interest rates and those who were higher up continue to make a profit off those who are not as financially prosperous. Thus, tax collectors may be the wealthiest in an ancient community, but they are not the most respected.

Yet it does not mean that tax collectors wanted to be isolated from the community. From what we read today, Zacchaeus was just as interested in the marvels and wonders of the day. Thus, as Jesus enters town, Zacchaeus wants to catch a glimpse of him passing by. Because of his short legs, Zacchaeus has to climb a tree to see him.

When Jesus sees him, he does not preach at him or call him out, but instead invites himself to Zacchaeus’s home. As others see this action, they grumble that Jesus has chosen to spend time with someone they consider a sinner, isolated from the community because of his greed and willingness to benefit off of the less fortunate. What should Jesus have to do with such a man?

Yet when Jesus and Zacchaeus talk, there is hope. This infamous tax collector makes an offer to give half of his possessions to the poor and restitution to anyone he may have cheated, highlighting the radicality of grace.³ Who knows what Jesus and Zacchaeus discussed while at his house, or if Zacchaeus stopped to make this confession before they went to his home. The important part is that there was a change in someone who was transformed by the gospel.

This is a story of salvation of a man who was rich and in need of redemption. But it is not just Zacchaeus who is transformed in this story. When Jesus blesses him, he blesses the whole household. For the author of Luke, the salvation that came to his household is probably a reference to the family and the servants as the author was

¹ Fred B. Craddock, “Luke,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1990), 218.

² *Ibid.*, 218.

³ *Ibid.* 219.

interested in entire communities being transformed.⁴ The salvation given is not just for an individual. It is Jesus at work in Zacchaeus's life, the lives of his family and servants, the lives of those Zacchaeus had cheated, and the entire community.

Application

When I first read this passage, all I could think about was the song from childhood about the "wee little man Zacchaeus." It's a great song to sing and teaches children about this funny biblical character whose conversion is momentous. Zacchaeus's story reveals how God wants to save and redeem all people, even the most vile among us.

The focus on today's lesson is on the salvation that Zacchaeus receives from God. While the salvation of Zacchaeus is important, I am also struck by Jesus's words that salvation comes to his whole household that day. Often, when we think of salvation, we think of the individual. It makes sense that in the American understanding of life, we think of our individual being as we seek "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Yet this passage makes clear that salvation is more than just an individual being redeemed. Their redemption coincides with whole groups being transformed. Because one life is changed by Jesus, multiple lives are changed by Jesus.

For Christians this brings the question of how our walk with Christ not only feeds us, but equips us to do life with others. Some of the strongest Christians are those who practice their spiritual disciplines not just for themselves, but for others around them. For example, their prayer life is not just for them to have a good day or for their needs to be met, but it is for the church member struggling with suicidal thoughts or for the hungry children they see in their city. They understand that their tithe on Sunday is not just for their consumption of the coffee bar on Sunday, but is for a ministry that may never directly give them satisfaction.

The point is that those disciples understand that the salvation we receive from Jesus is not just about us and our individual needs being met. It is about Jesus coming for all people and offering redemption and hope. We have a part in it and we receive that gift freely. But the gift of salvation isn't just for our own souls or for us to receive our "go to heaven when I die card." Our salvation leads to a life of obeying Jesus and seeing that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves.

Think about Zacchaeus's conversion after meeting and coming to know Jesus. He found himself being more generous and giving back to the community. He made all his wrongs right and even gave back to those he cheated. His household experienced the change and then probably had to make changes in their own lives. The community who received their money back probably had a change in their hearts about tax collectors and saw Zacchaeus differently. The whole community was transformed.

How do you experience the salvation of the Lord? What marks do you see in your own life? And as a result of those marks, where do you see transformation in other's lives? Who are some modern day Zacchaeuses that you see around you? How do you see salvation that transforms whole communities?

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⁴ Ibid., 220.

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