

Zacchaeus

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Date: 04 June 2018

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[0 : 0 0] we read that Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. At the end of the previous chapter, we see how that as he was coming into Jericho, that's when he healed the blind man who had persisted in crying out, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.

And he had said to him, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said, I'll then receive thy sight, by faith that saved thee. And immediately he received his sight and followed him, glorifying God.

And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God. Now we know from other gospel accounts that this blind man's name is Bartimaeus. And in some ways it should be perhaps a kind of comforting thought to recognize that as Jesus would be approaching the sycamore tree where Zacchaeus had climbed up into hoping to secrete himself there, having climbed up there, that in the crowd which followed Jesus, Bartimaeus would be in amongst the throne.

There he would be following Jesus. He might be quite close to Jesus because he would have been right there beside him when Jesus opened his eyes. And then it says he followed him in the way.

We're better to be in your native city than following Jesus. And that's where, no doubt, we must take it that we find Bartimaeus now as Jesus approaches this sycamore tree where, unbeknown to everybody else, Zacchaeus has secreted himself.

[1 : 2 9] But Jericho, where Jesus is, is a city that was accursed at the outset, certainly from the time of the conquest of Canaan. Jericho was accursed.

It was a city which technically ought never to have been rebuilt. If we glance back to Joshua, chapter 6, we read at verse 17 and 18, The city shall be accursed, said the Lord.

Even it and all that are then into the Lord, only Rahab the harlot shall live. She and all that are within her in the house because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise, keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed when ye take of the accursed thing and make the camp of Israel a curse, a curse and trouble.

Sorry, that was Joshua speaking on behalf of the Lord. And then we read at verse 26, Joshua adjured them at the time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord that riseth up and buildeth this city, Jericho.

He shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it. And we find this prophecy fulfilled in 1 Kings chapter 16, where we read at verse 34, In his days, that's in the days of Ahab, the king of Israel, did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho.

[2 : 5 0] He laid the foundation thereof in Abinam, his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son, Segu, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua, the son of Nun.

So Jericho was a city accursed. It was a city which, as we say, ought never to have been rebuilt, but it had been. And for hundreds of years, people had dwelt in it and gone about their ordinary daily lives.

And Jesus, in coming to Jericho and passing through Jericho, and this is really the only time that we actually read him and being in Jericho, is the incident with Bartimaeus and then with Zacchaeus and so on.

And as he's passing through the city, and this is the only time that we read of it, that which was accursed becomes blessed. It becomes, as it were, almost sanctified by the presence of Jesus in it.

And although we could say it ought never to have been rebuilt, and although it may be under the curse all the time that it's been set up and built up and the curse has come upon the person that came to do that, it doesn't follow that everybody who's ever lived in it since then is guilty of the same thing that the man who set it up is, nevertheless, they're still under the cloud, as it were, of that cursing.

[4 : 05] But one of the wonderful things about our Saviour is that he doesn't deal with things or places or people as they ought to be. He deals with them as they are in reality.

Jericho was a city accursed. You could say that the people in it lived under the shadow of that curse, but what are we if not accursed under original sin and under the cloud of being separated from the Lord?

Jesus doesn't deal with people and places and things as they ought to be in an ideal world. He deals with them as they are in reality.

He comes and meets them in their cursed state. He comes and deals with them in their sinful condition. He meets Bartimaeus in his blindness.

He hears his cry from his blindness. He comes and finds Zacchaeus hiding in the tree, hoping to be kept from the gaze of all men.

[5 : 07] He knows exactly what kind of man Zacchaeus is, but he comes and deals with them as he really is. Zacchaeus, come down for a meek haste and come down for today I must abide at thy house.

And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying that he was going to be kept for the man that is a sinner. He's going to be kept for the man who's accursed. He shouldn't be doing that. But the Lord does not wait for us to be as we ought to be.

He comes to meet us in our need as we are. Just as he does for Jericho itself, so he does for us in our lost condition.

The Lord is a saviour who comes to meet us in our need and not as we ought to be. Thank the Lord that we have such a saviour.

Zacchaeus, however, would have known and seen how Jesus was beginning to enter the city, no doubt, at the time of Bartimaeus. And he knew that in order, if he was going to pass through the city, there was only one main way he could go.

[6 : 08] So he goes ahead, runs ahead of everybody else and while nobody is looking, presumably, because otherwise it would have drawn a lot of attention and there have been crowds of wee boys point up and say, oh look at the man up in the tree so it wouldn't be very discreet.

He'd have to do it while everybody else was still coming with Jesus much further through the city. But he knew he'd passed that way and so he climbs up into the tree hoping to see him because he's too wee to see over the crowd.

He ran before, he ran on ahead and climbed up into the sycamore tree to see him for he was to pass that way. Zacchaeus came in order to look upon Christ and he resolved to take particular notice of him.

He wanted to see this person that was all the fuss about, all the knowledge of how he had helped people, how he had healed people, how he had met sinners exactly where they were. He wanted to see this man who had made such a difference.

He wanted to look upon Christ but he little thought of being taken any notice of by Christ. That was an honour too great and too far above his merit to have any thought of it because Zacchaeus was, it says at the beginning, not just a publican tax collector but he was the chief among the publicans.

[7 : 28] That means that all the other tax collectors in the area, they all answered to him. he was their boss and if the tax collectors were guilty as they probably were because if we go back to the beginning of Luke's account of the gospel we'll read it, we'll come back to this in a minute but it says when they asked John the Baptist what shall we do the publicans, what shall we do Master, he said, exact no more than that which is appointed you.

So the publicans were notorious for the fact that they exacted from people, they charged people more than they needed to. If the Roman tax was say, you know, 10 silver coins whatever, they might take 12 or they might take 15 or whatever, they would charge more and nobody could do a thing about it because if they accused anyone falsely as Zacchaeus says that he may have made game by accusing them falsely, who are the Romans going to back up?

When the soldiers come who are they going to say? Oh, this poor Palestinian peasant, oh, you're bleeding them too dry. No, they only care if Rome is getting its revenue. They will always follow the money and as long as the taxes are being paid they don't care how much one due charges another due.

It's none of their business. Their concern is that Caesar gets his amount. Now all the other tax collectors would be no doubt paying a cut, paying a percentage up the line and so whoever is cheaper the tax collectors, cheaper the publicans will be raking in not only from his own business but from all his lesser minions.

So we read that he was the chief among the publicans and he was rich and by his own admission further down the chapter clearly at least some of that wealth has been got by ill-gotten means.

[9 : 19] Half of my deeds to be capable if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation and that's not it. If maybe you know what I might have done he's recognising that he has done that some of his wealth has been wrongly acquired and this would not make him popular.

You know the tax collectors, the publicans were regarded as almost beneath their proper Jewish status. The publicans and sinners he was regarded as scum of the earth.

They were collaborators or quizlings they were regarded as non-Israelites really although they would be racially Israelite and this is the state Zacchaeus is in and he's a little man and he couldn't see over the crowds and he waited for them to come so he goes up into the tree.

He wants to see Jesus with his eyes but he doesn't want people to know that he's there desperate to see him but little thinking that Jesus would actually stop and take notice of him.

When I was a wee boy I used to live on the main D side road our house was on the D side road which of course was the route that whenever the Queen was coming to Balmoral she would drive along and I remember the first time being told almost with disbelief that yes that day the Queen having docked at Aberdeen or landed at Aberdeen airport or whatever was going to then drive along and off D side road and head out towards Balmoral the Royal cars would be coming roughly at such and such a time and standing up proudly to other people along the way waiting for a wee glimpse of her coming along and eventually what seemed like an age the posh cars came along the road very slowly and we all waved and I don't know I don't know whether we got a glimpse of her sitting in the back of the car whether it was Prince Philip that happened to be outside of the road or whatever everybody waved and no doubt she waved back a wee bit but I remember thinking was that it you know I thought there'd be at least a sort of carriage and horses and a crown and things but just say for the sake of argument that as she was going along the road she'd suddenly stopped and she'd stopped the car and she'd got out the car and she'd come over to where I was standing you know wee boy and said

[11 : 32] Andrew I'd like to come and stay at your house for tea tonight and everybody would go ooh and ah and amazing how does she know his name and everybody it would have been amazing if she'd actually stopped and come out and spoken to me or one of my family that's a wee bit of what it would be like for Zacchaeus only more so because he's not just an ordinary person in the crowd he's somebody who is hated by all the crowd he is somebody who's effectively an outcast and here is this person who's the nearest thing to like messianic royalty they've got this current for the moment celebrity that is stopping exactly where he is looking up and saying Zacchaeus come down Zacchaeus come down for I must abide at thy house today and the amazement that everyone would have felt we just can't really put it in words it doesn't convey it and yet Jesus who has never as far as we know ever encountered

Zacchaeus in the flesh he knows exactly who he is he knows exactly where he is and he makes this not offer but more statement to him it says in John chapter 10 verse 3 Zacchaeus Zacchaeus has been not so much in the fold but out of the fold he's been in bondage he's been in a state of being outcast hindering by his own sinfulness and here is he being led out of that as Jesus calls one of his own sheep by name Jesus came to the place he looked up and saw him and said in Zacchaeus calls him by make haste and come down for today I must abide at thy house now those that Christ calls they must come down they must make haste because there's a danger in delay you've got to get on with it you've got to jump in and say well Lord actually I quite like it up here

I think I'll stay for a wee while no he's got to come down he's got to do it soon and those that Christ calls must come down if he's up there and says I can see everybody fine from up here this is nice Noah he's got to come down if Christ calls then we must come down we must be prepared to humble ourselves and acknowledge the answer to Christ's call the first reaction of Zacchaeus was probably absolute you know grobly embarrassment anybody could see that there he was a man in his position hiding up a tree like a wee boy and Jesus spots he doesn't say oh look at the funny man up in the tree he doesn't invite laughter to humiliate him he just looks up and calls him my name and he says oh look there's somebody up in the tree oh look it's Zacchaeus what's he doing up there but Jesus does not attempt to humiliate or to make fun of him but rather he does require him to come down he can't stay up there he can't hide forever it's not like

Adam where art thou because I'm cringing and hiding from the Lord Zacchaeus you could say is hiding from the Lord but he's hiding from everybody he knows exactly where he is and he invites him down come down and it means he has to humble himself everybody knows now his little ruse everybody knows now where he was hiding everybody sees how undignified now he is so he can't get much more undignified by coming down the tree shitting up down the tree and standing in front of Jesus and in front of the crowd and everybody sees just how small and insignificant you look but you've got to humble yourself you've got to come down if Christ calls you can't stay hiding where you are sometimes we do that don't we we try to hide whether in the crowd or hide out of sight of the crowd we still want to see Jesus we still want the glimpse we still want a little touch or a little notice of him as he passes by we don't really know what we're looking for we just want to be able to see him but we don't expect or imagine that he's going to take notice of us but he does when he knows our need he calls his own sheep by name

John the Baptist said remember he must increase but I must decrease I may be up the tree just now but as long as I'm up the tree I want to be in Christ's call I have to come down up the tree I have to humble myself I have to let everybody see this is where I was hiding this is what I was doing yes it's very undignified but now the master calls the king has taken notice of me it's like the queen has gone out of her car and come over to the edge of the crowd to speak to a little boy and here now Jesus is addressing this little man and says to Zacchaeus make haste come down for today I must abide at thy house and you have to make haste he cannot climb any higher by his own efforts he cannot go any further up indeed the more the more effort he makes the more his own foolishness is exposed he has to come down he has to stand before

[17:06] Christ delay is dangerous already his own foolishness is exposed you might as well come to Jesus now of course there is opposition there is jealousy of other people he's going to be against a man he's a sinner he shouldn't be doing that this man's an enemy of the people this man is sold out to the Romans he's not even a proper Israelite this is an unrepentant sinner but the minute he comes down the minute Zacchaeus comes down he stood and said unto the Lord and notice he's not now sort of cringing away or hiding he's standing his full stature little as it is everybody can see what a tiny little pygmy of a man he is how insignificant he is physical appears but he stands before the Lord and he owns all that he has done and he addresses his words not to the crowd he's not trying to please men he's not trying to buy back their favour he addresses himself to Jesus that's what he does he addresses himself to Christ

Lord behold Lord the half of my goods I give to the poor it's present tense it's not well Lord this is what I'm going to do I'm going to make a very fine last will and testament and when I die the half my goods will go to the poor and the rest will go to my family no he's right now present tense I give present tense half of my goods to the poor and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation I restore him fourfold now fourfold of course was the the amount which if you stole a sheep in the Old Testament Exodus 22 verse 1 tells us if a man steal an ox or a sheep and kill it or sell it he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep if you stole anything fourfold was what you had to restore it and this is what he is seeking to do now to put back four times over whatever he may have taken from anyone by false accusation and that sort of implies that yes he had you accuse somebody falsely you say to the Romans this man hasn't paid enough tax he only paid this amount maybe that was the amount he was meant to pay but the tax director wants more if he makes a false accusation those who are in a position to be able to abuse their power each of us is in a different situation in life and each of us will be exposed to different kinds of temptations and risks and dangers and the ones to which we will be most exposed and which might be most of a temptation will be the ones which our position makes it most likely that we can get away with when I was a wee boy one of my classmates at school his father ended up in trouble because he had robbed the bank and before we get all kind of glamorous exciting notions of sun-off shotguns and stand-up raids and everything no he had robbed the bank and that he had taken money wrongly from the bank because he was the manager he had been in a position to be able to do it and he ended up in trouble of course and all manner of terrible things happened to him and to his family because being in the position of being able to get away with it he was exposed to that particular temptation and succumbed we are all of us susceptible to different temptations different potential abuses but those from which we will be most at risk will be those which our position or our task or our job makes us most susceptible because we're in a position where we might conceivably get away with it and that's what he was like and that's what the soldiers as well as the publicans were like in Luke chapter 3 we made reference to this a few minutes ago at John the Baptist ministry when it began we read there came unto also publicans to be baptized and said unto the master what shall we do he said unto them exact no more than that which is appointed you and the soldiers likewise demanded him saying what shall we do and he said unto do violence to no man neither accuse any falsely and be content with your wages violence and extortion the soldiers tax collectors equally susceptible because they're in a position to get away with it if half a dozen armed soldiers surround you and demand your money you're not in a position to fight back they're in a position to exact whatever they like they're in a position to do violence to whoever they want to but this is what John the Baptist says you've got to stop doing that you fulfill your duty you defend what

you have to defend be content with your wages don't be mutinous and to the tax collectors do exact more than you should be whatever we're exposed to that may be part of our great temptation some people of course it'll leave them cold of it no one can discharge our duties absolutely without anxiety and hopefully part of being converted by Christ means that we become at least protected if not immune to such temptations because clearly this encounter with Christ almost instantaneously changes Zacchaeus' heart half of his goods instantly to the poor and then if you know anyone here is wronged and taken by false ideas and he was storing fourfold and this is going to be a huge chunk out of whatever his estate is it's already been cut in half 50% of his estate is already instantly going off to the poor and from whatever is left of that half that is still his he's going to restore 400% to anybody that he has wronged this is quite a change this is quite a transformation and it's going to cost it well and truly but in as much as he is making this statement and making it public then nobody could say oh well he's still as much a sinner because clearly now he is a penitent sinner and even for the

Pharisees and even for the scribes and those who have may regarded him most narrowly and with least charity they couldn't argue with the fact that one of the actually does this okay fair enough he's turning around he's changing his life he's doing exactly what even the law says as he stands before Christ Jesus is this day is salvation come to this house for so much as he also is a son of Abraham in other words if I was going to be defiled by going to this man's house before look see the statement of his repentance the statement of his faith his house is defiled no more his soul is defiled no more this day is salvation come to this house this man who had hoped simply to look upon Jesus looking was never going to be enough Ecclesiastes chapter 1 tells us in verse 8 all things are full of labor man cannot utter it the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing if you hear

God speak if you hear Christ speak your name as Zacchaeus did you ever get tired of it if we see if we were to behold Christ as we shall if we see him in glory do you think we say well that's that's been three days looking at Christ in the stone I think it's time to go and do something else the eye is never going to be satisfied the eye is never filled with seeing and that's true even in the world who sits even the world does not say well I've seen beautiful sea and landscapes and I've seen the boats out there I've seen fields and trees and birds and yeah I think that's enough now I'm going to bind up my eyes now and not look at anything more you never say I've looked enough now I think I think I'll just put my eyes out now and that'll be it the eye is not filled with seeing not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing it's never enough but it is satisfied with Jesus remember what the Greeks said to

[25 : 49] Philip sir we will see Jesus to behold Christ is to be satisfied to hear him speak our name as he spoke to Zacchaeus to behold wondrous things out of his law it's not that our thirst is quenched so that we never thirst again because we long for more and more of what Christ gives but it is satisfaction to the soul to the eye to the ear because this is not for which we were designed to behold the Lord to hear the word of the Lord to be filled with the Lord this is what Zacchaeus didn't even know that he desired until he encountered Christ it's like a person whose heart may be completely fine in their own and then suddenly they behold somebody they fall hopelessly head over heels in love with right away love at first sight and they didn't even know what falling in love was until wham it hits them like that and likewise he didn't even know his name of Christ until he encountered

Christ and it changed him completely and Jesus says this day is salvation come to this house for so much as he also is a son of Abraham now that would imply perhaps wife and children or more likely it's also servants and a household here but it's not just this individual heart that it's changed when Christ enters a heart it also enters a home he enters that home even if nobody else was touched salvation has come in amongst the people of that home it's a total contrast to what we read here in Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 9 woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house that he may set his nest on high that he may be delivered from the power of evil that evil covetousness infects his house salvation blesses his house this day is salvation come to this house to Zacchaeus his whole family his entire household whether they're our servants whether they may have been slaves for all we know maybe they won't be converted themselves there and then that day but they will encounter what salvation is they will have entered the home they will be having a leavening influence they will clearly see the head of their house their master is not the same man he was yesterday they will see that he has been changed they will see that he has been transformed he will be a far nicer person to work for now he will be a fairer boss he will be more kind he will be yes firm but true he will be straight in his dealings it will be like night and day they cannot deny the change that will have happened in the house where they are because they will see the difference Christ makes it may also be and this is something we should we should recognize that the incidents and the events in scripture are not necessarily hermetically sealed one from another this is one reason why I made reference to the fact that you're in the crowd as it surges around the sycamore tree almost certainly

Bartimaeus would be there or thereabouts jostling along with the crowd perhaps standing right next to Jesus right there right then and which means also that it's likely given that Zacchaeus has heard of Jesus and much of what he has done that perhaps he is aware of what took place in the previous chapter chapter 18 verse 22 when the rich young man wanted to know what he should do to be saved we read that when Jesus heard these things he said to him yet lackest thou one thing sell all that thou hast and distribute to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven and come follow me and when he that was the ruler of the synagogue heard this he was very sorrowful for he was very rich and when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful he said how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God but here's a rich man Zacchaeus who is determined not to make the same mistake maybe he has heard of this man maybe he hasn't it is likely that the story has run before him it is likely that he has heard the news about this rich young ruler this godly man ruler of the synagogue who nevertheless would not part with his riches and went sadly away

Zacchaeus is not going to make the same mistake he jumps down he stands before Christ and he says before all the world I'm going to give half my goods to feed the poor and I'm going to restore fourfold whatever I may have wrong name on him with and the thing about saying it there and then in front of Jesus is not only that Christ hears you say it but all the witnesses round about you can't the next day say oh I never said that oh that's not what I meant come on because all these people heard him say it all these witnesses would be prepared to testify he is happy for his words to be heard he says them out public he says them out loud but he addresses them to Christ the generosity on the spot changes everything now Zacchaeus does not expect to be justified by his works but rather by the grace of God his good works now that they're going to be done in a state of faith because of course he can't do such a thing as any good works in a state of unbelief by definition that's another sermon another time however his good works now being done in a state of grace in a state of faith by then he will evidence the sincerity and genuineness of his faith and repentance now as we say possibly he'd heard the story of the man in chapter 18 who wasn't prepared to commit to Christ but Zacchaeus is putting into practice the evidence of his faith and repentance today this day is salvation come to this house for so much as he also is a son of Abraham now of course

Zacchaeus would have been racially an Israelite racially a Jew so he'd say well he already had Abraham to his father in a racial physical sense but you know as the Lord makes prayer what use is that the Lord can raise up stones to make children of Abraham if he chooses to no something different has happened here Galatians 3 tells us even as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness know ye therefore that they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham and at verse 9 so then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham he becomes a son of Abraham fully faithfully by putting his faith into practice this is that which is made whole that which is restored whatever his racial claims may have been before they would count for nothing in the tribunal of heaven nobody is going to be justified before God by the fact that they were

[33 : 33] Scottish or Irish or Welsh or English or whatever the case may be nobody is going to be able to say well I belong to a sort of Christian country that's going to count for something or even oh my family was associated with the Free Church of Scotland that's going to mean something well actually no the Lord isn't really interested in a badge that might be in a certificate somewhere he wants to know what think you Christ he wants to know what is your relationship to Christ where do you stand in relationship faith in Christ and if our faith is in Christ the Saviour then we too are made sons of Abraham whatever our gender may be we are honorary sons who inherit sons of a promise like Isaac not sons of bondage and of a flesh like Ishmael we are those who inherit we read that Abraham sent away his other sons but he gave all that he had unto Isaac and the God of Abraham sends away those who have no faith in his son he gives all that he has all the riches of his inheritance to those who are the sons of promise those who are the sons by faith so that they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham this day is salvation come to this house for so much as he also is a son of Abraham for the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost is it an accident that he happened to stop under that tree an accident that he happened to pass by that way an accident that it was put into the heart of Zacchaeus to run on ahead and climb into that tree no the Lord came seeking to this accursed city Jericho where he opens the eyes of the blind and changes the heart of the sinner the Lord comes to us as we actually are not as we would hope but as we ought to be he comes seeking sinners and not just so that we can wave and pass and say hello and go on the other way but to seek and to save that which was lost because our condition without him is not neutrality it is lostness without him we will be dead damned and lost for all eternity but when we encounter Christ we either stay up in the tree hiding away pretending nobody can see us or we come down and humble ourselves and are changed Zacchaeus make haste and come down let us pray great let us pray