

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

LUKE 19:1-10

CHRIST AND CHRISTMAS FOR THE LOST !

Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Is Christmas a special joy for children? Yes, much attention is heaped upon children at Christmas. Old people? Yes, special attention is given them with visits, caroling, etc. Sick people? Family concern is showered upon them. Concern and attention at Christmas make the holiday special. Our text gives us yet another category.

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. He had told the disciples that He was going there to be mocked, insulted, spit upon, scourged, killed. This does not sound like fun, does it? Mocked—laughed at, ridiculed and embarrassed by others—because of skin color, speech patterns, loyalties, you name it. The word “mocked” in English comes from the sound laughter makes---"mok, mok, mok, mok!"—at your expense. Jesus said He was going to Jerusalem to be laughed at AND “insulted.” To “insult”—to leap upon—is related to “somersault”—to “leap” over. They would “leap” upon Him with verbal barbs. He would be verbally shamed, bad-mouthed, and criticized with the intent to harm. In addition, He would be spit upon—shown contempt—not with a slap in the face, or punch in the stomach—but by the repulsive act of hurling body fluid upon Him, body fluid to be used for consuming and digesting food. He would be scourged—physically whipped and beaten to His harm. And killed--the ultimate disregard for another's welfare—an act of showing total lack of concern. Why would Jesus go forward to undergo all this? He wanted to give attention and joy to others. It's much like Christmas attention given to the children, the elderly, the sick, and more. Jesus is concerned about others. He is concerned about you.

On His way to Jerusalem He passed through Jericho. Jericho does not have the greatest STAR by its name. I don't know how it was viewed by others at Jesus' time, but in the Old Testament it is not presented as a fine upstanding community. It was an idol-worshipping city. When the Israelites entered the promised land of Canaan, the LORD told them to destroy utterly the community and its people—men, women, children. It was a city distasteful to God. The Lord caused the walls to fall down, and Joshua and the Israelites totally “did in” the city (Joshua 6). God warned the people of Israel never to rebuild the place, for it was cursed. Several hundred years later a man named Hiel rebuilt its walls (I Kings 16:34). The foundations were laid at the price of the life of his firstborn son, and the gates were set into the wall at the price of the life of his youngest son. Jericho is also mentioned by Jesus in His parable of the Good Samaritan. A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was beset by robbers. Were robbers and other transgressors often associated with the community of Jericho? Perhaps. Not a desirable place. Yet Jesus went through Jericho to give attention to two needy souls—a blind man, and then Zachaeus.

Briefly, the blind man. He is spoken of in the words right before our text begins. Imagine, not being able to see, to grope one's way around, to be always less than 100% sure of surroundings and circumstances. Helpless. He cried out for Jesus' help and attention. He cried out in faith, “Son of David!” He addressed Jesus as the promised King of Justice and Righteousness. The others told him to keep quiet, but Jesus sought him out and granted his request—his sight, giving him some very special attention, comfort, healing, and a little bit of “Christmas.”

Then Zachaeus. Zachaeus was a man with a different set of problems. He was a tax collector, a Jewish man who worked for the unloved Roman government. He was scorned for this work. Tax collectors were allowed by Rome to make a profit by overcharging. This made him even less popular with his countrymen. He was “good” at what he did. He was a “chief” tax collector—in charge of others—and He was rich. Maybe today he would have been regarded as a lead-man in the mafia. But he was a man who would have been “**unfriended**” by many on Facebook.

He was short. He was not readily able to demand respect with his presence. He was not readily able to take physical charge in his world and life. He had to climb a tree to see what was going on in a crowd. He did so when Jesus came. Zachaeus was not at peace. His easy-living world, his money-oriented life was apparently empty. He wanted to learn more about Jesus of Nazareth—a man just the opposite of him. No worldly goods, no ties to Rome, a man concerned about and attentive to the needs of others. Zacchaeus heard Jesus was passing by. He climbed a tree to see Him, much as a child would. His life must have been very empty.

Jesus came for those whose life was empty, for those who needed to know of the love and forgiveness of God, for those who had no real direction in life. Jesus had come to Jericho even to find Zachaeus. Likewise Jesus has come into this life, this Jericho, this less than desirable place to live, this place under the curse of sin and death. He has come calling for all, for you, with your empty way of life—live, work, eat, sleep, die, then what? No real anchor in life. He has come, born at Bethlehem, to give attention to you, to set you right with God and with life after this world.

Jesus came calling specifically for Zachaeus. He stopped at the tree and called out to Zachaeus, “Come down. I must stop at your house today!” Zachaeus who had been unfriended by so many, was not unfriended by Jesus. “He is interested in ME.” With joy he came down and welcomed Jesus to his home. And others scorned him and Jesus more. “This man has gone to be a guest of a sinner, a tax collector, a traitorous, cheating, tax collector.” And Jesus is also interested in you. He has come to this world, indeed for the world, but also just for you. You are not just another blade of grass in a vast range of pasture—here today and gone tomorrow without anybody noticing. Jesus knows you and has come for you, to give attention to you, not because of “who you are,” but because of who you are NOT. You are in need, you need His attention. He has called you by name, and you are His.

You see, I didn’t expound upon one important phrase earlier. Jesus said He came to be mocked, insulted, spit upon, scourged, killed, AND RISE AGAIN! Out of concern for you, Jesus allowed others to mistreat Him. He was unfriended by His own Father in heaven, getting punished for you. But He would die AND RISE AGAIN. In Jesus your empty and pointless way of life, your expendable way of life—you could leave and this world would continue just the same without you. Jesus came in concern for Zachaeus, and for you. He came to die and rise again, so that in His suffering and His victory, the Father in heaven is on the same page with you—for you, not against you—your sins are forgiven. Jesus through His Word comes calling for you every day. That’s what Christmas is all about.

Zachaeus received Jesus with joy. Receive Jesus with joy. Zachaeus now had purpose and direction in life. His tax collecting job and the wealth he could amass by it were now second to Jesus. “I will give back what I have dishonestly gotten, help others with the blessings God has given me.” Just as the earthly trappings of Christmas consume your life for days or weeks, so your life now, like that of Zachaeus, can be turned over to Jesus. Nothing is more important. If it means parting from sinful actions and earthly advancement, then part from them.

Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham! Jesus brings salvation to your house and your life too. In Him you are part of a very special group of people—you are a spiritual son and daughter of Abraham, the man of God. You are saved. You are safe and sound. Safe, secure from the onslaughts of Satan, and sin, and death, You are safe, like the runner at second base—although you really were not there to beat the throw, yet in Jesus the umpire legitimately pronounces you SAFE. You are safe and “sound”—like the fender on a vehicle, a fender which is solid and strong and sound, not dented and punched through or rusted through so that it’s only the paint that’s left! You are safe and sound. In Jesus, you are saved! *Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham!* – a spiritual child of Abraham, the man of faith in God’s Promise. Such joy at Christmas! -- to be assured again, that Christ has come for you.

The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Who needs Jesus’ attention at Christmas time and every day? The children, the aged, the sick? Yes, yes, yes. But above all “the LOST,” which includes all of the above and includes you. Really? Are you “lost” in life? Let me ask you, what are you going to do tomorrow? I didn’t say, What do you want to do tomorrow? What do you plan to do tomorrow? What are you going to do? You can’t say for sure, can you? On your own you are “lost” in the unfolding of the day-to-day events of this life. Plus your sin separates you from God. You are lost. But *The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost!* Jesus has come for you, to seek you out, and to save you—lost in the wilderness as you are. That’s what this Christmas is about. You, the lost, have been sought out, found, and saved—rescued in Jesus! Christmas is a special joy for **you!** Relish it—lost no more. Live for Jesus.

So be it! Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---