

EXPOSITION

- This account is unique to Luke. The setting - Then *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho. You will remember Jericho from the Old Testament Scriptures as walled city which the Israelites marched around 7x and shouted, causing the walls to fall so that they could lay waste the city. God put a curse on the city, saying that whoever rebuilt it would do so at the cost of their sons. Eventually the city was rebuilt, and at the time of Jesus is a very prosperous city for two reasons: the first was the existence of the Balsam tree, from which was made expensive balms. The second was that it was a major trade route and intersection. It was called a "little paradise", and Antony had given the city to Cleopatra as a token of his affection.

I. THE MAN REVEALED1.) His name - *Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus*

- Behold – dramatic call to our attention. His name is of Jewish origin, and while it was common for a Jew to have a Greek or Roman name, it was much less likely (because of the pride of Rome) that a Roman would take a Hebrew name. On that we assume that he was himself a Jew.

2.) His occupation - *who was a chief tax collector*

- A tax collector was one who was employed by the Roman government whose job was to assessed the value of goods being bought and sold, and exacted taxes from them. He is a chief tax collector, meaning that he was the overseer of the tax collectors in Jericho. It is also likely that he was the one who would deliver the revenue to Rome, and so was a very well known and important man. One of three Palestinian tax offices (also Caesarea and Capernaum)
- Because of this connection with the Roman government, the tax collectors in general were despised, and even more so the chief. The possibility of his being a Jew even aggravated the situation more, and he would be considered also a "chief" sinner, a traitor to a foreign power.

3.) His economic status - *and he was rich*

- Remembering what we already considered about the prosperity of the city, it is no surprise that Zacchaeus was wealthy. His vocation had done him well, and as a result he was prosperous, lacking no worldly thing. As we will see, this wealth did not all come by honesty, but part of his wealth was gained by the oppression of the poor.

4.) His desire - *And he sought to see who Jesus was*

- We are not told that he came for a healing, or to hear his teaching, or ask a question, but simply to see who he was. From the narrative it seems that he was something of a celebrity chaser. You know the sort: those who gain a certain kind of thrill at being around someone famous. Someone who is enamored with seeing someone that people recognize, to say "I met someone famous." Little did he know what was in store for him.

5.) His obstacle - *but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature*

- As he hears about the coming of Jesus, the teacher and rabbi who some people say did miracles and was the Messiah, he follows the crowd to try to catch a glimpse of him. But there was a multitude around Jesus. Added to this was that difficulty of being of less than normal height. Imagine him try to stretch his neck and look around the people to try to see Him. The crowd was moving along the path, which made it even more difficult.

6.) His solution - *he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.*

- Zacchaeus doesn't give up, but devises a plan. He looks down the road they were going and sees a tree. He runs ahead of the crowd and climbs the tree. (Perhaps if Z. lived in our day he could be a paparazzi.) Again we are told that he does so merely to see him, as he would pass that way with the crowd.

II. THE ENCOUNTER DESCRIBED

- Z. had a specific purpose, to see the Lord Jesus. But in the providence of God, there was much more planned for him. We see in this encounter:

1.) The Sovereignty of Jesus - *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."*

- From the accounts of the Gospel, this is Jesus' only trip to Jericho. We have no indication that Jesus had ever met Zacchaeus, though there is an outside chance that He heard his name and position before. But even if so, we should still see this event as amazing. In the midst of the throng of people, as Jesus is walking down the road He "came to the place." The language used here gives the idea of destination. There is an intersection of two lives, a divine appointment. He comes to the place, looks up, and sees this small man in the tree. Remember, Jesus is swarmed about with people. There are possibly 100's of people listening, asking questions, begging for help.
- Yet in the midst of this Jesus stops. He looks at the man in the tree and calls out His name: "Zacchaeus!"
- The Lord immediately takes control of the situation. As we have seen throughout Luke, it was not uncommon for people to invite Jesus to their home for the purpose of hospitality (not always with good motives). In this instance, Jesus declares what is going to happen.
- He tells Z. "Hurry and come down." In other words, get down out of the tree right now. The reason He gives is plain: today He must stay at Z.'s house. This is not a request, but a statement of fact. It is necessary that the Lord Jesus stay in Z.'s house. Jesus has a mission to accomplish, and it won't be done out here in the street, but in the home of this chief tax collector. We see Jesus' willingness to reach not only to the poor, but also the rich.

2.) Zacchaeus' response - *So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.*

- Who knows what all rushed through Z.'s mind, but he obeys without hesitation. Assuming for a moment that he was just chasing a celebrity, this would have been thrilling. That Jesus, the well-known teacher, was coming to his house! This is more than he expected. And in the presence of all of these people Jesus called out his name! Now he was going to be able to host Him! How exciting!

III. THE COMPLAINT MADE - *But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."*

- Not everyone is as excited about this situation as Zacchaeus. We are told that when "they" saw it, they complained. Who is the "they" here? It seems that it was the accompanying crowd, who were mostly from Jericho. As citizens of that city, they would know this man very well. That's Zacchaeus...that no good tax collector, the chief of 'em all...he is the traitor working for the government...he even takes advantage of the poor...
- They complained when they saw "it", meaning when Jesus goes to the home of Zacchaeus to stay with him. They may have been asking "What kind of teacher is this? He is going to be king? Is he just another corrupt political figure, hanging out with the wealthy government lackeys?"
- Perhaps the crowd disperses with disappointment as Jesus walks into Zacchaeus' home. "so much for our hope."

IV. THE IMPOSSIBLE ACCOMPLISHED

- Just what WAS Jesus doing there? What was the purpose of this Sovereignly ordained visit? I suggest that it is safe to assume that Jesus did what He did in those other occasions that we find Him at someone's home. He preached to them and taught them. He would teach about who He was as the Messiah, the Kingdom of God, the duty of real obedience and faith. Perhaps the conversation eventually went to the recent event of the rich young ruler (I think certainly one of the reasons Luke puts them in such close proximity). Jesus had said how difficult, yes impossible with men it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Then at some point in that visit we have:

1.) Zacchaeus' declaration - *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."*

- We are told that he "stood". This indicates that in the midst of the hospitality and all that is going on, he stands for the purpose of making a formal declaration. It also indicates a kind of oath publicly declared for all to hear. Zacchaeus, in the presence of the other guests, makes a solemn declaration to the Lord Jesus.
- He starts of this declaration with "look". It is to call attention to what he was about to say. He wants to get everyone's attention. Then He says to the Lord two primarily things.
- First, He gives half of all his goods to the poor. Unlike the rich young ruler, this man's heart had been, as a result of Jesus' preaching, loosed from covetous and a love for the things of the world. Of his goods, including his clothes, house, valuables, etc. ½ was going to be outright given to those who were poor. Convicted of his covetousness, he is now moved to be exceedingly liberal in his giving.
- Second, there was going to be a restoration. Here he essentially confesses the truth that he had gained some of what he had by unlawful means. What is likely meant is that he had been a part of what was practiced among the tax collectors which was inflated appraisal. As people were taxed for goods bought and sold, it was the tax collector who had the authority, on the spot, to appraise the worth of the items. Because he would get a cut from the taxes received, the higher he could appraise it, the more was his gain.
- Zacchaeus states that there will now be restitution. He commits himself do something very unusual. Under the Old Covenant law, if someone "fessed up" to stealing before they were caught, they were required to restore the worth of the thing and an addition 20% to compensate the person stolen from. If they found out involuntarily, and taken before a court and found guilty, they had to pay 4 or 5 times the value of what was stolen.
- Though Zacchaeus had not been caught, he realized that in the presence of Jesus he was standing before a higher court. Convicted of his sin of thievery, he is now moved to make restitution.
- We see that his repentance toward God was evidenced in his love toward men

2.) Jesus' response - *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."*

- THIS was the purpose of Jesus' coming to Zacchaeus' home. It wasn't to hobnob with the wicked, but rather to see salvation brought to this man. God had worked in this man's heart, and now it was evident that salvation had come. He, by his response of faith accompanied by works, was a true son of Abraham.
- Jesus clearly, in the midst of the business of the day, in the midst of the crowd had looked into that tree, saw a man who was one of the lost sheep He must bring to the Father's fold, takes control of the situation, preaches the Gospel to Him, and the man is instantly and dramatically converted. He sought, and saved, that which was lost.

APPLICATION

- 1.) Let us not neglect to get people within the means of grace, whatever we think their initial motive may be.
- 2.) Let us confidently trust that Christ can and will accomplish the salvation of all His people.
- 3.) Let us, as we have opportunity, use our time wisely with the lost, to speak the Gospel to them.
- 4.) Let us examine ourselves, whether there is evidence of our faith by works. *The best evidence of conversion lies in the undoing or reversal of those things by which our former sinfulness was chiefly marked...The frozen heart had melted down, the clenched fist had opened, and – unlike the rich young ruler – the idol had been dethroned. - JFB*