

Wisconsin's major newspaper, the State Journal, recently surveyed the vice presidents and personnel directors of the nation's largest corporations for their most unusual experiences interviewing prospective employees.

Their stories included:

- A job applicant who challenged the interviewer to arm wrestle.
- A job candidate who said he had never finished high school because he had been kidnapped and kept in a closet in Mexico.
- A balding candidate who excused himself, then returned wearing a full hairpiece.
- A candidate who wore earphones to the interview and, when asked to remove them, explained that she could listen to the interviewer and the music at the same time.
- A candidate who said she didn't have time for lunch, then started to eat a hamburger and fries in the interviewer's office.
- An applicant who interrupted the questioning to phone her therapist for advice.
- A candidate who dozed off during the interview.
- A candidate who muttered, "Would it be a problem if I'm angry most of the time?"

These people sound pretty incompetent... don't they? ... Yet it is not a stretch to say... this is the same sort of **incompetence** that we all bring to God.... whenever we approach Him on the basis of our worthiness. ... Every one of us is completely inept... when it comes to approaching God... if we believe that we **deserve** His attention.

Christian author, Philip Yancey recounts this story about C.S. Lewis:

During a British conference on comparative religions... experts from around the world debated what... if any... belief was unique to the Christian faith.

They began eliminating possibilities. ...Incarnation? ... Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. ...Resurrection?

Again... other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time... until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. ... "What's the rumpus about?" he asked... and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. ... Lewis didn't even miss a beat... He immediately responded, "Oh, that's easy. - It's grace." ... After some discussion... the conferees had to agree.

The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge... no strings attached... to everyone who does not deserve ANY of His kind attention... seems to go against every instinct of humanity. ...The Buddhist eight-fold path... the Hindu doctrine of Karma... the Jewish covenant... and Muslim code of law — each of these offers a way to earn approval. ... (LISTEN)

Only Christianity dares to make God's love **unconditional**. ...

Christianity... alone... advances the truth that God can only be approached on the basis of total grace. Each of the others require a system of demonstrating that you worthy enough to approach God.

The concept of grace may not be a **new** revelation to you. Perhaps you have heard that believers are all accepted by grace – before. Many Christians **have** this understanding... and yet... because it **does** defy

every instinct of humanity... we often try to approach God on the basis of our personal merit. ... We spend a lot of our Christian life trying to **earn** God's approval... so He might answer our prayers... so our health might remain vital... so we might avoid financial disaster... so our relationships with others might operate smoother... so our children might be kept safe...

A theological understanding of grace may be in place... but in our Christian walk... there may a distortion of the way we relate to Him through grace. It is like we view our Heavenly Father... to be like the father figure in one of master story-teller... Garrison Keilor's.... radio broadcasts that he used to call "Prairie Home Companion". In one of his episodes he recited this...

The town ball club was the Lake Wobegon Schroeders, so named because the starting nine were brothers, sons of E. J. Schroeder. E. J. was ticked off if a boy hit a bad pitch. He'd spit and curse and rail at him. And if a son hit a homerun, E. J. would say, "Blind man coulda hit that one. Your gramma coulda put the wood on that one. If a guy couldn't hit that one out, there'd be something wrong with him, I'd say. Wind practically took that one out of here, didn't even need to hit it much"—and lean over and spit.

So his sons could never please him, and if they did, he forgot about it. Once, against Freeport, his oldest boy, Edwin Jim, Jr., turned and ran to the centerfield fence for a long, long, long fly ball. He threw his glove forty feet in the air to snag the ball and caught the ball and glove. When he turned toward the dugout to see if his dad had seen it, E. J. was on his feet clapping, but when he saw the boy look to him, he immediately pretended he was swatting mosquitoes. The batter was called out, the third out. Jim ran back to the bench and stood by his dad. E. J. sat chewing in silence and finally said, "I saw a man in Superior, Wisconsin, do that a long time ago. But he did it at night, and the ball was hit a lot harder."

For whatever reason... we sometimes imagine that our relationship with God... is like that father/son relationship between E.J. and Edwin Jim Schroeder Jr. ... *“God is reluctant toward me. He won’t hear my prayer requests today... I may have been saved by grace... but now I have to work HARD for His reluctant approval...”*

If you have ever sensed that your relationship with God is anything like that... then today’s passage in Luke has something for you. ... Grace! God has grace and mercy toward you... and we are to approach Him in **this** manner... when we first come to Him... and every time after that... and **never** approach Him as though He is a reluctant father.

Last week our passage included a narrative about a rich young ruler who approached Jesus and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” His whole approach was that God must be similar to that reluctant father. He wanted to know how he might **perform**... what level of performance he needed... in order to be accepted by God. (Take a brief look with me at a part of last week’s passage...)

Luke 18:18-23

Jesus wanted to drive the questioner to recognize the sin in his life... that there is no level of performance that we can achieve... so He directed the rich young ruler toward the Law. That is what the Law is meant for... it is to show us that no one can measure up... the standard is too high... we all fail... we miss the mark... we all have sin. ... But the man chose to lie ...and pretend that he was good enough because he kept the law. He tried to convince the Lord that he merited God’s favor because of his obedience.

... Then Jesus pressed in even harder to get him to admit his unworthiness.

Jesus, who knows the hearts of all men... knew that this wealthy young man had a problem with covetousness... so Jesus asked him to do something that He knew no person who struggled with covetousness would be able to do – “Go sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor...”

The rich young ruler – still - would not admit his sin... even though it was now brought into the open... he would not **recognize** that he was unworthy of God’s attention... that he **hadn’t** been completely obedient to the Law... covetousness loomed large in his life... so the man walked away unhappy... and unjustified.

This man could **never** earn God’s favor. ... **None** of us can. Do not ever approach God in prayer thinking something along the lines of... “*You know Lord... I’ve been a Christian for 20 years...during that time... I have given as much money to the church as I could... I’ve talked to others at work about you... I’ve even given up so many Wednesday evenings to come down here and help out at AWANA... so Lord... grant me now this request...*” ... You are likely to face some difficult lessons from the Lord... because of His love and mercy toward you... in order to show you... (just like this rich young ruler)... what you still lack... and how unworthy you really are.

This morning... Luke presents two more examples of people who wanted God’s attention... and these are presented in stark **contrast** to the previous

incident... involving the rich young ruler who wanted to justify himself... by pretending that he was **worthy** of God's attention. ... Notice how different these two approaches are...

Luke 18:35-43

Jesus and his disciples had been in Perea... ministering among the people and the Pharisees... teaching about the Kingdom of God. As we also saw in last week's passage... Jesus blessed the children and declared that *"such is the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all."*

Just before we read about the incident of the rich young ruler... Jesus had been teaching about the proper way we are to approach God. ... We are to approach Him as helpless as an infant to his surrounding world. ... Infants don't have any pride... they simply receive in humble dependence.

Then for the seventh time he told his bewildered disciples that he must continue his journey to Jerusalem, to be crucified for the sins of humanity, and that he would be buried, and raised on the third day. The disciples at this point were spiritually blind to God's plan of redemption.

Our text starts off - *"As he drew near to Jericho..."* ... Jesus was on His way to the cross. He is now only 17 miles away. He had headed south along the Jordan river... until he arrived at Jericho... the world's oldest city... located on the north shore of the Dead Sea... 600 feet below sea level.

Jericho was a city of publicans... of government officials who worked on behalf of the Romans... because of its central location for trade between Jordan and Israel and Egypt. ... Thus there were many tax-collectors stationed there.

"And a blind man was sitting by the road begging. And hearing a crowd going by he inquired what this meant. They told him Jesus of Nazareth was passing by..." ... Matthew 20:29-34 and Mark 10:46-52... also record this same event as our Lord was walking through Jericho on His way to the cross. ... In Matthew's account...**two** blind men were sitting by the road. Luke, in our passage this morning... only mentions the one. ... And in Mark's account of this event... the name of the **most vocal** one (probably the one Luke is writing about)... is given to us. It is Bartimeus... the son of Timaeus.

Upon hearing the shuffle of feet and the voices of a large crowd, Bartimaeus asked someone who was willing to listen... *"What is going on?"* He was told that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was passing by... and that he was accompanied by a crowd of local people.

Most humiliating of all to these two blind men... was the fact that that they had been reduced to the rank of beggars... a violation of Deuteronomy 15... the Law of God, which said "

...there shall be no poor among you, since the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, ...If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is

giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks" (15:4; 7-8).

It was bad enough that these two men were blind... but according to the Law... they should have **never** been forced to beg among their own people.

"And he cried out, saying, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' And those were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" ... Bartimeus... the more vocal of the two blind beggars... called out to Jesus in a most interesting way... addressing him by the Messianic title... "Son of David."

Earlier in his ministry, the crowd as well as the Pharisees watched as Jesus cast out a demon who had caused a man to be blind and dumb. The crowd said in amazement, *"This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"* The Pharisees at that time said no, he was not the Son of David, the long-promised Messiah, for he had cast out the demon by the power of Satan, they charged.

Notice that the crowd called Him "Jesus of Nazareth"... but the blind man used the title that the Pharisees had rejected - "Son of David." ... He was not afraid to shout his belief that Jesus was indeed the One referred to in 2 Samuel 7:12-16... as they were spoken to King David, *"...I will raise up your seed after you, who will come forth from you and I will establish his kingdom"*. ... The prophet Isaiah would write years later, *"Then a shoot will*

spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him..." (11:1-9). ... This blind beggar may also have known that the Messiah would give sight to the blind... according to the prophecy in Isaiah 35:5...

Isaiah 35:5 (ESV)

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

Affirming his belief in Who Jesus was... "*Have mercy on me*"... cried the blind man. ... Mercy is the grace of God extended toward those who are helpless... those who can't change their circumstances.

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'. It was impossible to press through the throng, but he made himself heard. He was crying pitifully, begging at the top of his lungs. He was desperate, frantic.

Have you ever felt helpless... that you have no hope... that you are your wit's end? ... This is when God delights in hearing and answering the prayers of his people. ... If we have never cried out for mercy... we are not living realistically.

This blind man believed Jesus was the Messiah... and he was **shouting** it. It was dangerous to do so within the hearing of the Romans... but he did not care. ... He was sure Jesus could heal him. ...The blind had sight!

Someone once bluntly asked blind and deaf Helen Keller, "*Isn't it terrible to be blind?*" ... To which she responded... "*Better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes and see nothing.*" ... So it was with

the blind man. ... Sometimes blindness has its benefits. He had a lot of time to think without visual distractions — time to develop the interior life... and a contemplative spirit and to see with his heart. ... He thought about Christ... and came to an exalted Biblical view of Him... realizing his own need... and who Jesus was.

But take a look at the man's amazing... passionate... persistence. ... He rejected the crowd's control... shouting again and again... "*Jesus... Son of David... have mercy on me!*" ...Understanding something of Who Jesus was... and his own personal need... he kept saying this over and over... like a helpless infant.

Only a few days earlier Jesus had said regarding little children... or infants... as the wording indicates... "*I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child (infant) will never enter it*" (Luke 18:17). ... Bartimaeus was coming to Jesus like a small child... who is well aware of his helplessness and dependence.

And Jesus... being on the last leg of His very important journey to Jerusalem... turned aside from His task of redeeming **all** of mankind. ... Could there possibly be a **more** important task to be occupied with...? Jesus was about to be **flogged** with a whip... tortured... betrayed by a friend... and painfully killed... ... he had a lot on His mind. Just before this... He tried to explain it all to His disciples

Luke 18:31-33 (ESV)

And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the

*Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon.
And after flogging him, they will kill him..."*

Boy! Jesus sure had a lot on His mind here... Yet Jesus stopped and commanded that the man be brought to Him... When he had come near... Jesus questioned him... *'What do you want Me to do for you?' ... "Lord, I want to recover my sight!"* (Apparently he once **had** sight... he was not born blind... and he wanted to see again.) Now this certainly does not seem to be as important of a work... as what Jesus was being interrupted from. ... *"And Jesus said to him, 'Recover your sight; your faith has made you well (saved you). And immediately he recovered his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God; and all the people when they saw it, gave praise to God."*

God takes the time... He gives us **full** attention... He **pours forth** His Grace and His mercy – when we ... by faith ... recognize Who He is... and recognize our own unworthiness!

Are you right now facing a situation in your life... where you are tempted to think it isn't important enough to bring before the Lord...? ... *"He has other matters before Him... This isn't really important enough to ask for His attention... besides... I have not earned enough of His favor yet to make such a request..."* Let me say it again... God takes the time... He gives us **full** attention... He **pours forth** His Grace and His mercy – when we ... by faith ... recognize Who He is... and recognize our own unworthiness!

Luke... apparently doesn't want us to miss this concept... so Luke gives us another example... immediately following this one...

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus continued walking from the north end of city to the southwestern end... in order to get onto the Jericho road that leads up to Jerusalem... and the crowd followed Him through the city.

Also living in the city was a man named Zacchaeus. ...This man was a chief tax-collector in Jericho. ... Zacchaeus was like a commissioner of customs in Jericho.

From a tax-collecting perspective... Zacchaeus had it made. ... Taxes were collected at three places inland — Capernaum... Jericho... and Jerusalem — and Zacchaeus was the top dog... of one of the big three. ... Jericho had a commanding position at the crossing of the Jordan River... and one of the prime approaches to Jerusalem. ... And Jericho was rich due to its great palm forests and balsam groves.

As chief tax collector... Zacchaeus was head of a tax-farming corporation with collectors under him... who extorted the people... then paid him before he paid the Romans. ... He was the kingpin of the Jericho tax cartel... and more than likely... he had the scruples of a modern-day crack dealer. ... He was filthy rich in the fullest sense of the term. He was definitely **not** a likely-looking candidate for the kingdom of God!

And, of course... he was hated. ... In the eyes of his countrymen... his littleness was more than physical. ... He was a despised nobody.

No one would ever have guessed... on that spring day... that **Zacchaeus** would want to see Jesus. ... But as Luke says... "He was seeking to see

who Jesus was". ... Why? ... Perhaps he had heard of the conversion of **Levi** the tax collector... "Matthew" as we call him... who was now one of Jesus' followers. ... Perhaps he had even known Levi. ... Palestine was a small enough place... and tax collectors could easily have known each other... Because Jesus had invited Levi to be one of His close friends... and was known as a friend of "tax collectors and sinners" – perhaps all of this had aroused a sense of curiosity in Zacchaeus. Jesus evidently had a soft spot for people like Zacchaeus.

It is also very likely that Zacchaeus had found his wealth and lifestyle **unsatisfying**. A sense of unease made every pleasure unfulfilling. Nothing lasted.

Also, it is very probable that Zacchaeus was weary of being hated by his people. Socially he was an outcast. ... The relentless contempt of his people left him desolate and alone.

Tired of his sad life... the restless little man determined to see Jesus... "but being a short man... he could not... because of the crowd." The crowd probably enjoyed boxing the little man out. "*Sorry about the elbow, Zacchaeus, you're hard to see. ... Oh, that's your foot?*"

You can be sure that no one in that crowd was going to open up a space for him to get closer to the Lord. ... He was too small to demand a front row seat... so he ran ahead of the crowd on the main street and "...climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him... for He was about to pass through that way."

"[Jesus] looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus... hurry and come down... for today I must stay at your house.' ... And he hurried and came down, and received Him gladly. And when they saw it, they all began to grumble... saying... 'He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'"

When Jesus looked up into the tree... He saw a hated and spiritually desperate man looking down on Him. ... Zacchaeus wanted a new beginning... a good relationship with God and his people... and by what he was willing to do... we know that he was willing to make all wrongs right.

Zacchaeus was thrilled that Jesus had seen him... and he gladly invited Him into his home. ... Now... in **contrast**... the Jewish crowd showed their true colors of self-righteousness. ... They began to grumble... saying... "*He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.*"

But there is something that I would like for you all to notice with me here... As Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' home... Jesus did not say, "I would **like** to stay at your house..." ... But what did He say...? Jesus said - "**must** stay." ... Jesus regarded His encounter with Zacchaeus as a divine mission. His seeking Zacchaeus was a work of sovereign grace. Verse 10 wraps this whole narrative up by saying...

Luke 19:10 (ESV)

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

I don't think that I will ever understand how man can have his own free will... and God can be completely sovereign at the same time...? How is it that we choose Christ... and He chooses us... at the same time. ... But

here we see this very thing at work. ... Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus and Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus – and both of these efforts were the sovereign works of God. The crossing of their lives at the sycamore was a work of divine providence. This meeting was ordained before the foundation of the world. But Zacchaeus chose to seek Jesus.

Here is something for you to consider whenever you pray. ... Whenever you feel compelled to pray for **anything** in your life... could it be that God is seeking you at **that** very time and place...? You choose out of your own free will to seek God in prayer... but God at the same time is seeking **you**. ... His sovereignty and your own free will to decide for yourself... are both at work at the same time... making you want to pray.

This was certainly the case for Zacchaeus... and Zacchaeus was not a **deserving** person. Neither are you and I.

"And Zacchaeus stopped [stood in his home in front of all the other guests] and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.'"

This rich man is quite different from the rich young ruler. Sitting with Jesus and His disciples in his home... it was not long before he begins to understand the message of the kingdom of God... and how one could receive eternal life. ... Obviously... Zacchaeus was well taught in the Law of Moses, and now that law was now being used to convict him of sin. Zacchaeus was willing to repent of his sin and place his faith in Jesus as his Messiah, Savior and Lord.

And what was Jesus' response? ... *"Today, salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham."* ... This is an amazing moment for the crowd as well as Zacchaeus. ... The Lord saw this man's heart and his declared repentance... his willingness to turn away from sin and step towards Christ as his Savior. ... Zacchaeus was not just saying these words to Jesus... but to all within hearing range at the dinner. ... This was a practical demonstration of a true desire to repent of his sins... and he sealed it with his willingness to repay all those whom he had cheated.

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Here is what we are learning today from our two examples... on how to approach God.

It is not because of our worthiness that we can expect His kind attention. He places His attention on those who acknowledge their unworthiness.

God wants us to call out to Him with our need. He is not too occupied with greater things to give us His attention.

Your burden to pray... is quite possibly a work that God has already begun. He may be seeking you... while you seek Him.

Now before I dismiss us all in prayer... I would like to give you an opportunity to bring before the Lord a concern you may have had... but have been uncertain about receiving His kind attention. ... Have you feared not being Holy enough...? Tell Him that you recognize that you are **not** worthy and that you recognize that He is a loving Father Who operates

on the foundation of grace... not your having to earn His favor. Have you been fearful that your request is not important enough...? Confess that as sin and bring it before Him. Come before the Lord with a sense of Him calling you into His presence. He is seeking you. Will you now seek Him...?

