

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
May 29, 2016

Lesson Text: Luke 19:1-10
Lesson Title: Joyous Faith

Introduction

The story of Zacchaeus is one of the most memorable and beloved stories of the Bible. Perhaps you first heard this story in Vacation Bible School or your parents or grandparents read the story to you from a Bible story book. How many of you remember the song, “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he?” Did you do the hand motions or just stand there?

While the story of Zacchaeus is often viewed as a children’s story, it is in fact a very grown up story. It is not a normal occurrence for a money-minded, self-centered man to climb a tree, suddenly change his entire life and make amends for wrongs done to other people. But, that is exactly what happened in this story and the end result was salvation and joyous faith. The same glorious change can happen to any sinner who will look to Jesus, talk to Jesus, and obey His word.

Joyous Faith: Jesus Coming for Me (Luke 19:1-4)

Verse 1-2

“And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.”

As the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry drew near, Jesus slowly moved toward Jerusalem. Within just a few days, the religious leaders would have their way and Jesus would be crucified. But before that happened, Jesus continued to teach some valuable lessons to His disciples. One of the lessons was the joy saving faith brings to the heart of the repentant sinner.

Jesus was headed to Jerusalem for the final Passover. He did not need to “pass through Jericho” for the sake of travel. He went out of his way “through Jericho” primarily because of “Zacchaeus.” The first-century Jewish historian Josephus described “Jericho” as “the most fruitful country of Judea, which bore a vast number of trees with from which juice dropped down like tears.” There would be a single sycamore tree that would become the most famous and fruitful of all trees in Jericho. It was the tree where “Zacchaeus” would tap into the juice of joyous faith!

Jericho was a city of importance because a highway passed through it. It was also a city of priests, Levites, and other religious leaders. There is no indication Jesus paid the slightest attention to the religious elite of Jericho as he “passed through” on this occasion. He gave His whole attention to “Zacchaeus,” the richest man in town. Ironically, the name “Zacchaeus” means “innocent.” He was anything but!

“Zacchaeus” was a “publican.” A “publican” was a Jew who collected taxes for the Roman government. Luke tells us he was “the chief among the publicans.” That means he was one of a handful of men who managed the tax collecting system. This gave him immense power over the lives of the people and direct access to the taxes collected. His salary and theft provided a lifestyle few could imagine. To say he was “rich” is an understatement. He had possessions most people could only dream about.

Verse 3-4

“And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.”

When “Zacchaeus” heard Jesus was coming, he decided to get a look at this well-known religious figure. He had probably heard of this “Jesus,” who traveled from place to place with a bunch of poor people following him. At this stage of our Lord’s ministry, there were thousands following him. So, “he sought to see Jesus who he was.” That implies he had heard things about Jesus but wanted more information.

Because he was one of the important men in Jericho, Zacchaeus could have arranged an official meeting with Jesus. Instead, due to the size of the crowd and “because he was little of stature,” he “ran before” the crowd “and climbed up into a sycamore tree” in order to see Jesus. At this point in Zacchaeus’ life, his biggest problem is “he was little of stature.” He will soon find out he has a bigger problem than his “stature.”

Zacchaeus may not have fully realized it, but he did not “run” and “climb up into a sycamore tree” on his own initiative. Think about what is happening here. A notable tax collector with a well-known reputation is climbing up into a sycamore tree. God is at work in bringing this sinner to saving faith. God works in the salvation of every repentant sinner.

Joyous Faith: Jesus Communicating with Me (Luke 19:5-6)

Verse 5-6

“And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.”

Zacchaeus' plan was to get Jesus in his sights. Jesus' plan was to get Zacchaeus in His sights! When Jesus “came to the place” beneath the sycamore tree, “he looked up, and saw him...” Jesus “saw” Zacchaeus as a sinner in need of salvation. Everyone “saw” Zacchaeus as a crooked tax collector, a thief, a person Jericho would be better without. But Jesus sees sinners with an eye of love and saving grace.

Note: If you are lonely and lost, Jesus sees you (Genesis 16:13; John 1:48-49).

Jesus not only “saw him,” He also “said unto him...” “And said” are powerful words. Jesus' first recorded words in the Bible are in Luke 2:49, “...Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business.” This is the “business” to which He referred. Jesus speaks to sinners (1 Samuel 3:9; Hebrews 1:1-2). There were no doubt many people in Jericho to whom Zacchaeus would not speak and they would not speak to him. But by God's amazing grace, Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus.

Jesus called “Zacchaeus” by name in order to let Zaccheaus know He knew him. In fact, Jesus knew Zacchaeus better than he knew himself (John 1:47-48). There were people in the crowd who only knew Zacchaeus by name and by reputation. This man Jesus knew everything about this sinner. He knows everything about us (Psalm 139:1-4). Joyous faith comes from the fact that we as sinners know Jesus knew our sinfulness and in spite of that knowledge died and rose again for our salvation.

Jesus then said, “Make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.” At this point Zacchaeus must have literally been shocked out of his mind. This man Jesus is speaking to him, knows him by name, and now He is inviting him to come down because He wants to go to his house. In other words, Jesus knows Zacchaeus and He wants to be with him and “abide” at his “house.”

In our culture, it is considered poor etiquette to invite oneself to another's home for room and board, but Jesus honored Zacchaeus by inviting Himself to the sinners home. Jesus said, “Make haste and come down” and that is exactly what Zacchaeus did.

He “came down” and “received him joyfully” literally means Zacchaeus came down “with rejoicing.” Joyous faith must respond obediently to the invitation of Jesus. Everything happening here in this story goes against the grain of social etiquette and protocol but it is without question the working of grace.

Joyous Faith: Jesus Confirming Me (Luke 19:7-10)

Verse 7

“And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.”

Jesus apparently went to the home of Zacchaeus, although Luke’s account is somewhat vague. The word “guest” suggests Jesus shared a meal in Zacchaeus’ home. The word “house” in verse 10 also suggests Jesus did actually enter and stay in the former tax collectors home. The response of the Pharisees also supports that interpretation of events.

When the Pharisees “saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.” The Pharisees are not happy that Jesus is fraternizing with “a sinner.” The attitude of the Pharisees kills the joy of faith and salvation. They are unable to make the connection between Jesus and Zacchaeus. There is a sinner up in a tree who has come down at the invitation of the Savior. Because of religious blindness and indifference, all the Pharisees can do is “murmur.”

If you have trouble seeing Jesus with sinners you will never experience joyous faith!

Verse 8

“And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”

At some point during the meal in Zacchaeus’ home, he “stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” For a “wee little man,” Zacchaeus is standing taller than ever before in his life. The city’s most public and despised sinner has repented and now possesses a heart of graciousness and generosity. He is right with God and he now wants to be right with his fellow man.

The use of the words “half, restore, and fourfold” indicate Zacchaeus’ crimes were financial. That meant he had records and knew exactly who he defrauded. “Fourfold” was not some number Zacchaeus pulled out of the air. “Fourfold” comes out of Exodus 22 and God’s law of restitution. All of a sudden Zacchaeus wants to do what God commands. Without hesitation or reservation, the sinful tax collector promises to make things right and make them right biblically! That is joyous faith!

Verse 9-10

“And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forso 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.”

In response to Zacchaeus' confession, Jesus declared, “This day is salvation come to this house...” Do you remember what Jesus said in response to the story of the rich young ruler when the people asked, “*Who then can be saved?*” (Luke 18:26)? Jesus said, “*The things that are impossible with men are possible with God*” (Luke 18:27). If you had asked anyone in Jericho if they thought it was possible for Zacchaeus to change his life and restore fourfold everything he had stolen from people the answer would have been, “impossible!” Jesus says, “It is possible!” Salvation can still come to a repentant heart.

Jesus called Zacchaeus “a son of Abraham.” That means he is now a true believer, a son in the highest sense. He now shared the faith and works of Abraham (John 8:39). This word must have stung the Pharisees who prided themselves on being sons of Abraham.

Looking at Zacchaeus, Jesus repeated His purpose in coming to earth: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Lost people like Zacchaeus are the reason the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus came. The crowds were angry that Jesus wanted anything to do with him. For them, it is good people, people who clean up their act, people who pull themselves up by their own bootstraps who deserve the grace of God. Scam artists and thieves like Zacchaeus have no place in God's kingdom as far as they are concerned. Jesus had no business talking to Zacchaeus or staying in his home. But that is not Jesus' perspective at all. For Jesus it is not the good who get His grace; it is those who know “*there is none righteous, no, not one*” (Romans 3:10). It is those who know they are the lost ones. Those are the ones Jesus came to “seek and to save.”

Conclusion

Regardless of who you are, where you were born, or your profession in life, you can experience joyous faith. It may seem impossible but the reality of it is Jesus may be standing beneath your tree.

The motives that lead men to Jesus vary and are sometimes hard to believe. For Zacchaeus, it began with curiosity and it ended in saving faith. Do you have a joyous faith? If not, why not? Jesus knows you, sees you, and is speaking to you right now through the power of His word. He is calling you by name and He wants to go to your house and be your Savior. Say yes to His

call. Confess your sins to Him. Open your heart and experience a lasting and joyous faith.

Amen.