

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

JANUARY 23 - 27, 2023

Book of Luke • Jesus' Invitation to Hospitality

WELCOME TO THE TABLE

Epiphany Series
January 8 - February 19

MONDAY

Read **Luke 19:1-10; John 15:15-16; Jeremiah 29:11-14**

Today's Scriptures convey the mysterious integration of God's sovereignty—including His initiative in our salvation and His having done everything necessary to secure it—and our free will to respond (or not) to God's prompts. Ponder Jesus' statements, "*The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost*" (Luke 19:10) and "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you*" (John 15:16). Then consider God's seemingly incompatible promise, "*You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13).

The "binding agent" in this, the basis for such a glorious synthesis, is love. "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8). However, love cannot be imposed nor coerced—it must be voluntary and willful. In His love God, personified by Jesus in His first Advent mission, reaches for the lost. The Spirit continues in this pursuit, seeking and wooing unbelievers to receive Christ via life circumstances, the invitations, testimonies, and lives of friends and others, etc. God—love being one of His essential attributes—is "*unwilling that any should perish*" (2 Peter 3:9).

This week's story of Jesus and Zacchaeus beautifully portrays the interplay among God's sovereign pursuit of a desperately lost sinner, that sinner's resultant spiritual rebirth, and the regenerative transformation proceeding from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Tax collectors (“publicans”)—such outcasts that they were often excommunicated from synagogues—were reviled by Jewish countrymen as traitorous agents of Roman oppression. Their income came by marking up Rome’s tax obligations. Zacchaeus, a “chief tax collector ... was rich.” Note this sequence: Zacchaeus, “seeking to see who Jesus was ... climbed up into a sycamore tree ... [Jesus, seeing Zacchaeus above, called,] ‘Come down, for I must stay at your house today.’” Zacchaeus’ testimony, subsequent to his divine appointment: “Half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Luke 19:2-8).

What a powerful illustration of God’s goodness and love! Do you know any “publicans”—lost outsiders, affluent or not, regularly belittled and/or dismissed? How will you engage your “Zacchaeus,” showing him/her the One lovingly seeking him/her in a destiny-changing mission of salvation?

QUESTIONS

How do God’s sovereignty and human free will work synchronously in people’s salvation? What are some implications of the Apostle John’s declaration, “God is love” (1 John 4:8)? What biblical evidence was provided indicating Zacchaeus’ new-found, saving faith?

PRAYERS

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray for the African Enterprise (AE) Zimbabwe team who is seeking to mobilize churches to witness to the Good News of Jesus throughout the country.

TUESDAY

Read **Luke 19:2, 7; Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 18:9-14**

Reflecting upon Zacchaeus' story this week, note how tax collectors figured into Jesus' ministry. For example, the tax collector Levi—aka Matthew, penman and namesake for the New Testament's opening book and first Gospel—was likely the seventh of Jesus' twelve called disciples.

Consider how much people like Zacchaeus and Matthew sacrificed to follow Christ—they left high-income careers and everything else behind. Concurrently, however, they cast off the publicans' scheming lifestyle. “[Roman businessmen] would ... [secure] Jewish provinces for periods of five years. [They] would employ local Jews to collect the taxes from these territories. ... The highest [bidding publican] would win the territory, and ... would skim [citizens' tax proceeds] off the top for themselves.” (James Rochford)

Ironically, many of the 1st century priests—disdainful of tax collectors like most Israelites—had something in common with publicans: exploiting others for personal gain. They oversaw the money changers and sacrificial animal merchants operating in the temple courtyard, such corruption prompting Jesus twice—both at the beginning and end of His ministry—to overturn their tables and expel the animals (John 2:14-15; Mark 11:15-16). At least tax collectors, unlike Israel's corrupt religious leaders, were open regarding their income sources.

After Jesus called Matthew, He joined a gathering including the new disciple's former publican colleagues, prompting the Pharisees' disapproving challenges (Matthew 9:10-11). Matthew's and Zacchaeus' popularity likely did not skyrocket upon transitioning from tax collecting to following Christ. They moved from one despised group to another, upending ancient Jewish ways and threatening the authorities. However, the second group's relationship with the Savior produced joy which, hopefully, you find familiar.

Unlike the entitled, self-righteous Pharisee in Luke 18, forgiven sinners Zacchaeus and Matthew were grateful for God's mercy. Jesus commended the publican in that same parable for his surrendered, self-aware prayer, *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* (Luke 18:13). Do you ever pray like the humble tax collector?

Following Jesus for years can sometimes foster increasing judgmentalism and accompanying legalism, the prideful afflictions of many ancient Pharisees. Learn from the broken publican praying in the temple; bring your sins repentantly to God, asking Him for forgiveness and joy-producing restoration.

QUESTIONS

Why were tax collectors (aka "publicans") so despised in ancient Israel? Why did Jesus' ministry feature tax collectors (as well as Roman centurions and Samaritans) so prominently? What did ancient Israel's priests have in common with publicans?

PRAYERS

For African Enterprise (AE)

Thank God for the widespread use of the Student Discipleship Program in Ethiopian schools and universities, and pray that these young people would persevere in the truth.

WEDNESDAY

Read **Luke 19:3-4; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29; 1 Samuel 16:7**

People on the scene amidst Zacchaeus' meeting with Jesus were undoubtedly baffled. Zacchaeus—“*small in stature*” (Luke 19:3)—had climbed up a tree simply to see the Lord, presenting a challenge for him to have been seen by Christ or anybody else. Nevertheless, Jesus called Zacchaeus down and invited Himself to a meal with this diminutive, despised tax collector.

Had a poll been taken among those on hand regarding whom the Messiah would meet, who among them was a candidate for God's family, Zacchaeus would have been at the bottom of the list. Yet Zacchaeus was the benefactor of a divine appointment, another example of God's profession that “*My ways are higher than your ways*” (Isaiah 55:9).

Zacchaeus' story is one among many biblical instances wherein “*God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise*” (1 Corinthians 1:27). Consider several others: God used volatile, speech-impaired Moses to negotiate with Pharaoh and lead the Jews' Promised Land exodus (Exodus 2-14); Israel's successful assault upon Jericho, employing only marching and trumpets on the seventh day to topple the city's walls (Joshua 6); Balaam's donkey speaking saving truth to him (Numbers 22); and the cross's shame and torment—the violent sacrifice of history's sole perfect and innocent Man, God's Son—providing the only Way for salvation.

There are other “foolish” things God uses for His glory: you and me. Though we “are dust” (Genesis 3:19), concurrently we are “created ... in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). Although broken vessels, we are the crowning achievement of His creation. While God was complete in the eternal communion of His triunity, He generously created everything to enable human life as expressions of His love, goodness and creativity. Moreover, all-powerful God could get His Gospel to a desperately needy world through innumerable means, yet He works with and through us.

Like King David (2 Samuel 6:21-22), the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 4:10), the prophets and other believers, will you be a “fool for the LORD”? “For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:25). What “foolish” things will you do for God’s glory and kingdom purposes?

QUESTIONS

How would Jesus’ ministering to Zacchaeus—the latter coming to Christ—be so unexpected among most ancient Jews? What are some biblical examples of God using “foolish” means for His kingdom purposes? Why do you believe God often uses such means?

PRAYERS

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray for the continued development of our “preservation” training and strategy so that the thousands of people who accept Christ will be effectively disciplined.

THURSDAY

Read **Luke 19:5-6; John 8:3-11; Revelation 3:19-21**

Jesus' first recorded miracle was at a wedding—He rescued the reception by turning water into wine (John 2). He partied with Matthew and his publican friends (Matthew 9:10). There are numerous other biblical examples of the Lord socializing and dining. Thus, some enemies labeled Him “*a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!*” (Luke 7:34).

When Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' place—“*Zacchaeus ... come down, for I must stay at your house today*” (Luke 19:5)—critics might have challenged, “Well, the homeless, impoverished ‘rabbi’ was eager for a meal and shelter wherever He could find it!” Why was the “*Man of sorrows*” (Isaiah 53:3) so available, ready to join parties? To forget His troubles, aiming to repress the stressful crux of His mission? Jesus Himself explained: “*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10).

Consider the biblical record of those to whom Jesus personally ministered, evidently prompting their spiritual rebirth. Several had meeting encounters with the Lord, starting with Simeon and Anna in the temple at newborn Jesus' dedication. The Messiah also met Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the adulterous woman, Zacchaeus, and His half-brothers, James and Jude (post-resurrection). Those openly called by Christ include His disciples and Saul of Tarsus (Paul).

Jesus healed many per the Gospels, albeit in varying ways, including some explicitly referenced: six demon-possessed people, eleven lepers, four blind men, seven with physical disabilities, and seven others with various illnesses.

Jesus met people where they were, His methods varying by their circumstances and needs. Common among all of them, however, is their desperate need for a Savior and His readiness to redeem lost people. If that meant partygoing and/or befriending prostitutes or other outcasts, the Redeemer cared only that all should have opportunity for reconciliation with God through Him.

We need hearts more like Jesus'—hearts aching for the lost, willing do whatever it takes to enable their encounters with the risen Christ regardless of potential rejection and/or criticism. Will you sacrifice your personal comfort, perhaps even some popularity, to meet a “pre-Christian” where they are?

QUESTIONS

Why did some ancient Jews consider Jesus “*a glutton and a drunkard*” (Luke 7:34)? Why do you believe Jesus used such diverse ways to connect with and save so many different types of people? What does “meet people where they are” mean?

PRAYERS

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray for Emmanuel Kwizera, AE International Missions Director who oversees mission planning and training. Pray for his diligence in helping others focus on the true Gospel. Also pray for his new wife Coco and their kids. (Emmanuel and Coco were just married after his first wife died of cancer several years ago.)

FRIDAY

Read **Luke 19:8-10; Romans 9:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:15-20**

Upon His life-changing encounter with Zacchaeus, Jesus declared, “*Today salvation has come to this house, since [Zacchaeus] also is a son of Abraham*” (Luke 19:9). Such a statement seems to hint that Zacchaeus’ heritage changed that day—as an ethnic Jew, however, wasn’t he already a “son of Abraham” by pedigree?

Some maintain that the Abrahamic covenant—whereby God promised the patriarch, “*I will make of you a great nation, and ... make your name great*” (Genesis 12:2), and which God solely executed and ratified (Genesis 15:17-21)—applies perpetually and exclusively to the Hebrews. Others assert that the Abrahamic covenant now pertains to the “true Church,” the Body of Christ (“true Israel”)—which they believe has supplanted national Israel—comprised of Christ-following former Jews and Gentiles.

The Apostle Paul wrote much about this, including, “*You are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or [have been circumcised, thus] ... a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God*” (Romans 2:28-29, NLT). Paul also declared, “*Those of faith ... are the children of Abraham*” (Galatians 3:7). Jesus Himself fanned flames here in asserting to Jewish officials, “*If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing [his] works, ... but [instead] you seek to kill Me. ... If God were your Father, you would love Me*” (John 8:39-42).

Regardless of where a believer lands in the Abrahamic covenant debate, all can agree that “*the LORD looks on the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7). Following his meeting with Jesus, Zacchaeus’ testimony revealed him as a newly minted child of God and, accordingly, Abraham. He displayed a grateful, generous heart and God-honoring, changed life.

Perhaps you’ve heard, “God has no grandchildren, only children”—we are saved neither by our parents’ nor grandparents’ faith. Equally, however, one can follow Jesus despite our ancestors’ hardheartedness. Salvation is personal, receivable only via a repentant, Christ-surrendered heart. God’s kingdom is open to all sincerely seeking forgiveness, making Jesus their personal Savior and Lord. Those who deny Jesus as Redeemer make Him their Judge—an eternally regrettable course. Do you know any—like pre-Christian Zacchaeus—for whom Jesus’ status remains only as a Judge rather than a Redeemer? Share the Savior with them!

QUESTIONS

What did Jesus mean in calling Zacchaeus a “son of Abraham”?

What does “God has no grandchildren, only children” mean to you?

What does “If Jesus is not your Savior, He’ll be your Judge” mean?

PRAYERS

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray for the follow-up of all past missions in Kenya in Malindi, Mombasa, Eldoret, and so many more communities. Pray that churches will be strengthened in purpose and congregational unity as even more people join their communities.

Sources

- James Rochford's quote is from <https://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/historical-theology/tax-collectors/>.

