

**INTRODUCTION:**

This morning, I would like us to take a look at an event that took place just a few days before Christ went to the cross.

- It is a story that we are all familiar with that I believe we can still get some valuable lessons from as adults, even though this is a story that our children learn about at an elementary age.
- Most people do not associate this story with the days immediately prior to Jesus going to the cross, however I think the fact that these are His final days only increases the importance of this story all the more.

If you knew that you only had a few more days to live, what are some of the things that you would try to wrap up in order to prepare for your death?

- I'm sure you would say your last goodbye's to your loved ones.
- You would make sure that they are cared for by someone you trust.
- And most importantly you would make sure that you are in good standing with God the father and would plead for mercy & forgiveness.

Christ was sin free and we all know He was in good standing with the Lord, however He still had some unresolved business that He wanted to take care of.

- He was on His way to Jerusalem to be crucified, but we learn from **Luke 18 & 19** that He decided to visit three different men on three different occasions and to bring us some very valuable lessons in His last days.
- He had a conversation with the Rich young ruler, with a blind man named Bartimaeus and a wee little man, a wee little man was he.

This morning as we study from the forth book of the New Testament in **Luke 19**, I would like us to focus our attention on this third man that we all know as Zaccheus.

- Let's read together, **Luke 19:1-6...**

***1 He entered Jericho and was passing through.***

***2 And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich.***

***3 Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature.***

***4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way.***

***5 When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."***

***6 And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly.***

As we take a look at **Verses 2-3**, we learn a number of things about Zaccheus.

- We all know that Zaccheus was kind of a shrimp...or to be more politically correct, he was vertically challenged.
- We also see in the passage that he not only looked up to other people, but that he was a chief tax gatherer and as a leader of tax gatherers we can assume that he had a group of people who also looked up to him as their chief.

Let's pause on this topic of being a tax gatherer for a moment, while I try to paint a picture of how much of an upstanding citizen Zaccheus, the chief tax gatherer, was in his society.

- The Kings in the Herodian dynasty under the Roman Empire instituted some very heavy taxes for the citizens of Jericho and all of the other cities of that region of the world.
- Some merchandise that was sold in that region was sold for 10 times the original price due to the extremely high taxes on those products.
- There were all kinds of taxes on fishing rights, on port duties, on the purchase of slaves, oil, clothes, hides, and just about any other items that was traded in those days.
- Not only that the citizens were also required to pay 10-20% of their income for religious dues.
- They were probably paying 30-40% of their income on these religious dues and taxes!
- Does this sound a little bit like the taxes we have to pay today?

One major difference though, is their method of collecting the taxes.

- The Roman government would hire local citizens to physically visit people's homes in order to gather up the taxes.
- These tax gatherers would always travel with a group of heavily armed military men, because the Brinks armored trucks were not available in the first century.
- Not only that not everyone wants to part with their money and it always helps to have a big ugly thug standing behind you when you're just a little guy asking for people to hand over their hard earned money.
- These tax collectors were also very well known to take more than their share of taxes and would pocket the difference.
- We see in **verse 2** that Zaccheus was rich, and we see in **verse 8** that he was rich because he had "**defrauded**" the citizens of Jericho.

Anyone who is a victim of fraud, especially when there is nothing they can do about it, learns to despise the one who committing the fraudulent act.

- Tax gatherers were the most despised of people back in Jesus' day.
- And to throw a little gasoline on the fire of hatred, people also hated them because they were basically traitors to the natives of the land in helping out the Roman government.
- Especially in the city of Jericho.

Herod the Great was the Roman ruler over that area from 37BC to the year 4BC. In his early years of his reign, the Romans plundered the city of Jericho.

- These plunderings were probably within about 30 to 50 years of the date that these events with Zaccheus took place.
- The emotional wounds were still fresh on the minds of the crowd of people who Zaccheus had been stealing from.

The Biblical evidences of tax gatherers having a bad reputation are also very clear.

- There are 24 different times that tax gatherers are mentioned in the Bible and 19 of those times they are listed with "**sinners**", "**pagans**", "**prostitutes**", "**robbers**", "**evil doers**", and with "**adulterers**".
- **Matthew 5:46** says, "**For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax gatherers do the same?**"
- In this passage, even Jesus Himself, is implying that tax gatherers tend not to be loving people.

- In the first century, nobody wanted to be visited by a tax gatherer, in much the same way nobody today wants to be visited by the IRS.
- For Zaccheus the initials IRS, stand for “**T’m Rich & Short**”
- And your money made me that way.

We can easily assume that he did not have very many friends.

- We can assume that his kids were teased and disliked by their peers, that his wife was frowned at by the neighbors when she was hanging clothes on the clothes line.
- Over all, we can assume that he had already discovered that his money was not the solution to his happiness.
- He was missing something in his life, and that is why when he heard that there was a man named Jesus coming through Jericho that he got very excited.
- He knew that he was lost, and hoped that Jesus could help.
- We see in **Verse 4** of **Luke 19**, that Zaccheus was anxious for a change.

I. This brings us to the first lesson that we can learn from our text... **WE ALL NEED MORE THAN EARTHLY POSSESSIONS TO BRING US HAPPINESS.**

**Verse 4** tells us that Zaccheus “*ran on ahead*” and climbed up a tree.

- I am trying to picture this rich, dignified, chief tax collector running ahead of the crowd and on top of that, he climbed a tree in order to see Jesus.

When was the last time you saw a picture of Pres Bush running.

- What about Bill Gates or one of the governors or senators.
- Can you picture them running into position at a podium to give an important speech?
- How many times have you ever seen Mayor Ferguson climbing a tree?
- Most adults and especially leaders, do not make a habit of running and climbing trees. It’s not dignified!—These are acts of desperation!
- He had an itch in his heart that all his wealth couldn’t scratch.
- He must have heard that Jesus had healed Bartimaeus of his blindness when He arrived in Jericho and he realized that he needed spiritual healing.

Have you ever been lost?

- As children, have you ever gone one way when your parents went another?
- And next thing you know, your loved ones are nowhere to be found.
- Or as adults, while driving have you ever missed a turn in an area that you are not familiar with and you end up not having any idea how to get back to a familiar road?
- Have you ever been walking in the woods or in a large store and lost your bearings on which way is which?

Being Lost is a helpless feeling.

- Zaccheus knew he was lost. He was lonely, despised, with only a few friends.
- He had money, but it didn’t meet his needs... he was empty!
- He needed more than earthly possessions to bring happiness.
- He must have known that Jesus had the ability to forgive.
- He must have known that Jesus had the ability to bring him happiness.

- He got excited that Jesus was coming through town, he couldn't see over the crowd, so he went against his better judgment and ran ahead of the crowd and did whatever he could to get a view of God's son.

I haven't gotten one of these in a long time now, however, most of us have gotten a Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes letter in the mail.

- They use their sweepstakes to entice consumers to subscribe to magazines they represent.
- They used to write letters making it sound like you were one of the very few finalists eligible to win millions of dollars.
- The letters appeared to be "personal" because they repeated your name several times.
- It may sound as if you are the only one getting the letter when, in fact, millions of people are getting the same "personal letter."

A funny thing happened a few years ago.

- The computer generated a letter to a church in Tampa, Florida.
- The church got a letter that said: **"Dear God of Bushnell Assembly, God, we've been looking for you! You are a finalist to receive our \$11 million sweepstakes! So don't just sit there, God, return your sweepstakes form today!"**
- It's a funny story, but when I read the phrase, **"God, we've been looking for you"** I thought it spoke the truth.
- People today, like Zaccheus, are looking for something.
- They are looking for happiness and purpose—They look for it in money, in human relationships, or in a career.
- When those things don't really satisfy they may get out on a limb and start looking for it in extreme living, which may include drugs, alcohol, sex or anything that gives them a brief high.

Kurt Cobain of the musical group, Nirvana, apparently believed that these things were the solution to happiness in life. He was addicted to Heroin.

- In his own words, **"I'm an alcoholic, self-destructive, yet overtly sensitive, frail, fragile, soft spoken, narcoleptic, neurotic, who at any minute is going to O.D., jump off a roof, wig out, blow my head off or all 3 at once. Oh please God, I can't handle the success!"**
- Everything about this pop icon was lost and in the end on April 5, 1994 he committed suicide after writing a long letter to his wife and daughter.
- Part of what he wrote is as follows... **"I'm sorry, sorry, sorry. I'll be there. I'll protect you. I don't know where I'm going. I just can't be here anymore."**
- His life is testimony of life without the hope of Jesus Christ.

It takes more than popularity or human relationships or money to be happy.

- Jesus said, ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."*** (Matthew 5.6)
- I believe that Zaccheus was desperately seeking righteousness.
- Jesus, on the other hand was desperately seeking and saving the lost.

II. This brings us to the second lesson we can learn here today... **CHRIST WANTS ALL TO BE SAVED.**

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus had a conversation with the rich young ruler in **Luke 18**.

- Jesus told him that there was one thing he was still lacking and He said to him, “***Sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me.***”
- As we know in that story, he became very sad because following Jesus would have been too much of a sacrifice for him.
- He would have treasures beyond his imagination for all eternity, but he didn’t have enough faith and he chose to have riches for only a few decades on earth that are like the withering grass and are gone after a little while.
- Jesus offered... Because of lack of faith, the rich young ruler declined.

The next man that the Bible records Jesus talking to was Bartimaeus.

- As far as social status is concerned, Bartimaeus is exactly the opposite
- He was a blind beggar who heard that Jesus was coming through Jericho and he called out, “***Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!***”
- He asked Jesus to give him back his sight, and we see that Jesus showed him mercy with these words, “***Receive your sight, your faith has made you well.***”
- When he regained his sight, he and the people who saw these things happen, followed Jesus and praised God.
- Jesus offered mercy. By faith, Bartimaeus accepted it.

Jesus, a short time later, calls out to another rich man.

- He was probably dressed nicely, and it must have been obvious that he was desperate to see Jesus, because this man was up in a Sycamore tree.
- In the song that we all learned about Zaccheus, we would point our finger and shake it like an angry schoolteacher and say, “***Zaccheus, you come down!***”

I don’t believe that Christ spoke to him as if He was reprimanding him.

- I picture Him speaking to him with love and compassion.
- I am certain that many of the citizens of Jericho expected Jesus to deliver a rigorous rebuke to the little tax collector.
- They probably whispered to each other, “***Oh boy, Zaccheus is finally going to get what he deserves! This righteous teacher will let him have it with both barrels!***”
- Jesus would have been telling the truth if He had said, “***Zaccheus, you are a dirty, rotten sinner! You’d better pay back all the money you’ve stolen from these people. If you don’t, God’s gonna getcha’ good!***”
- But... We know that Jesus’ journey on earth was not to condemn sinners, but it was to seek and save the lost.
- When He dealt with sinners, he was usually very gentle in His approach.

It is unfortunate, but often times, we act like the crowd that grumbled in the streets of Jericho.

- We say and do things out of judgment instead of looking at the motives and the heart of the person that offends us.
- Jesus was surrounded by a huge crowd of people, and yet in the chaos of it all, he paused and asked a sinner of sinners to come to Him.
- Zaccheus in **Verse 6**, “***hurried and came down, and received Him gladly.***”

Jesus wants all to be saved.

- He reached out to the rich man who lacks faith.
- He reached out to the poor beggar, whose faith made him well.
- And he reached out to the rich tax gatherer, who was desperate for a change.

In **verse 8** we see how Zaccheus changed.

- He didn't just wipe slate clean in order to start over, but he also made an effort to make right the wrongs he had done...
- He went from one obsessed with great wealth, with power and a position of authority and earthly comfort and when he saw the hope that Christ offered, he was willing to sacrifice all of that in order to begin making the right decisions.
- His current lifestyle offered him no hope.
- We can learn from Zaccheus, that even worldly people can be saved.

The apostle Paul considered himself to be a sinner of all sinners and yet we know that the Lord, touched his heart and he became a great Christian leader.

- I believe wholeheartedly that Jesus is still actively seeking and saving the lost today.
- He's not walking down the streets of Salem healing people and inviting himself to our homes in the flesh, but He does stand at the door knocking.

When I think of someone today who is detestable and way up there on the scale of the world's worst sinners, I think of one who has no regard for the life or the well-being of another.

- I think of one who forcefully molests another—I think of a murderer.
- We would consider a cannibal to be the lowest of the low!
- Someone like the serial killer, Jeffery Dahmer!
- Most of this country knows him to be one of the worst of the worst!!

I'm not sure how many of you know this, but Jeffery Dahmer went completely through a Bible Correspondence Course that a lady from the Lord's church in Virginia had offered to him.

- He took this course and learned step by step the plan of salvation, and do you know that this modern day sinner of all sinners, was washed clean of all of his sins, when he was baptized by Roy Ratcliff, minister of the Mandrake Road church of Christ.
- Ray Exum, of the Crystal Lake congregation, where we used to attend, wrote a letter to him saying congratulations on his decision to turn his life over to Christ.

I hold in my hand, a photocopy of the hand written card that Jeffery Dahmer sent to the church in Crystal Lake and it reads as follows...

- ***“Dear Brothers & Sisters, I want to thank you all so much for your kind letter and encouragement, that really meant a lot to me! May God bless you all! Sincerely, Jeff Dahmer”***
- Who would have known that Jeff Dahmer's parents had been members of the church of Christ when he was younger.
- God chooses to save even the foremost of sinners!

In the final verse of our text, Jesus says that he, ***“has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”***

- Christ's blood covers the sins of beggars, of rich tax collectors, of murdering church persecutors like Paul, and even the heinous sins of a serial killing cannibal.

Even in the Old Testament, it was clear that God wants for every living soul to be saved. *“For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.” (Ezekiel 34:11)*

- He continues on a few verses later to say, *“I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick...”*

Bartimaeus the blind beggar, was equally as subject to that judgment as Zaccheus and Jeffery Dahmer.

- Jesus Christ wanted all three of them to follow Him, and they did.

### III. There is a third lesson that we can take home from this passage today... **GOD SEES YOU NOT AS YOU ARE, BUT HE SEES YOU FOR WHAT YOU CAN BECOME.**

Everyone else saw a mean, little, dirty rotten scoundrel, but when Jesus looked at Zaccheus in that tree, He saw his potential.

- Did you notice in the story that Jesus called him by name?
- Do you know what the word Zaccheus means? **“Pure”**
- A tax collector with the name meaning **“Pure”** was a contradiction in terms.
- But Jesus didn’t see a crooked tax collector, he saw a man who could become pure.
- He saw a man who could be so generous that he would give half of his money away.
- Jesus didn’t say, **“I’ll come dine with you if you repent of your sins and repay all these people that you stole from.”**
- Instead, he recognized that even a tax collector has the potential to change and to do what is right.

It’s kind of like the picture of a kitten that is looking in the mirror and sees a lion.

- Christ views us from a different perspective and knows that we all have the potential to be good!
  - He wasn’t afraid to reach out to the Samaritan woman at the well even though Samaritans were despised by the Jews.
  - He even chose Matthew, another tax collector as one of the 12 apostles.
  - He wasn’t afraid to dine with sinners in hopes He could reach them.
  - His grace extends to every man, woman and child because He sees our potential.

When Jesus asked Zaccheus to come down from the tree, Zaccheus then had a choice to make.

- He could have stayed in the tree or he could come down. He came to Jesus.
- Today you also have the option of coming to Jesus.
- He calls for you and wants you to come and to be obedient to Him.

If you truly believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, then you will keep His commandments.

- He has promised the reward of heaven, which far surpasses any earthly wealth.
- He is seeking for you like a sheep that has gone astray and He longs for you to come to Him.

### **INVITATION:**

If you believe that Jesus is the Christ—the Son of God—then you need to respond today.

- If you have never trusted in Him and followed Him by being baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, then we invite you to do so today. Please come forward as we stand and sing...

If you have questions about salvation, please visit the following web page... <http://saalemcoc.com/salvation.aspx>