

LUKE 18:31-19.10
Jesus Seeks out and Saves the Lost
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Jericho has been in existence for thousands of years. An oasis city found low down in the Jordan valley. A city with walls which we are told in Joshua 6 collapsed when the Israelites march around it, shouting at the top of their voices and blowing trumpets.

Ten miles from the Dead Sea Jericho is a city surrounded by scorching hot desert but is itself watered by an abundance of freshwater springs.

A lush city, with a name that in Hebrew **means fragrant**. Jericho, today is referred to as the city of Palms. Its located across the route to Jerusalem and brings many travellers and pilgrims.

In the reading from Luke's gospel a large crowd of pilgrims are following Jesus as he journeys through Jericho to Jerusalem.

As he draws nearer Jesus kingly status is ever more apparent and he becomes more and more focused on sharing with his disciples the truth of the terrible things that will happen to him. He tells them, he will be killed but on the third day he will rise again.

Trust and have faith, he says, in what you cannot see or fully understand.

But there is another message alongside this which Jesus highlights using the two stories in our reading.

SEEK OUT AND SAVE THE LOST.

They reveal that the beneficiaries of God's love and saving Grace include those who many consider unworthy or undeserving.

A blind man, who in the Gospel of Mark, is given the name of Bartimaeus, sits at the side of the road, relying on the generosity of the pilgrims passing by.

A good place to beg.

In the eyes of many he is worthless and undeserving.

His curiosity is piqued when he realises that Jesus is passing through.

He could hear the excited chatter from the crowd.

Bartimaeus cries out to make himself heard and appeals to Jesus.

'Son of David, have mercy on me'.

We are told in 2 Samuel of the anointing of David as the faithful King who trusted God's promise set before him.

David, descendent of Jesus, The king who was part of God's plan to bring Jesus, The king elect to the throne.

Bartimaeus acknowledges Jesus kingly status when he calls him, 'Son of David'.

Even so, those around Bartimaeus try to shut him up.

He's the lowest of the low.

But, Bartimaeus persists and Jesus stops when he hears him shouting and asks him to be brought forward.

Jesus asks him what he wants?’

He pleads for his Sight!!!

And His PERSISTENT FAITH WITHOUT SEEING is rewarded.

HIS SIGHT IS RESTORED

The blind beggar seeks Jesus out and is saved by his persistence and faith.

In our second story though salvation happens to a rich tax agent ‘Zacchaeus’ because Jesus seeks -- him out.

Zacchaeus, a name that means pure and Just.

But he’s a tax collector and man of wealth

An unpleasant money grabbing -- cheat.

Zacchaeus then carrying A name that runs in direct conflict with his role of taking money from the children of Abraham for the benefit of Roman Royalty and himself.

He’s heard Jesus was passing and curiosity tempts him to climb a sycamore tree to get a better view.

The solitary sycamore grows fig like fruit called samaras but it attracts parasitic insects that lay their eggs in the fruit.

So it isn’t a pleasant place to sit and wait to see Jesus when the fruit is ripe.

Luke is maybe trying to give us an image of Zacchaeus like that of the nasty wasp like insects, the usual inhabitants of the tree?

In this story the initiative firmly belongs to Jesus, who spots Zacchaeus in the tree and shouts to him to come down. Jesus invites himself to his house and gives our tax collector the chance to offer hospitality.

The kingdom of God has made its approach.

Zacchaeus accepts ----- and Jesus gradually transforms him from within as he spends time with him.

Here we have a story about the coming of salvation.

It is much like Ezekiel 34 where God and David save the lost sheep of Israel:

‘ah you shepherds of Israel, it says, who have been feeding yourselves.

Should not shepherds feed the sheep?’

The focus – seek out and save the lost

Jesus sets out to save the supreme sinner Zacchaeus who has been lining his pockets at the expense of the poor.

Zacchaeus makes a promise to dispose of half his income to those more needy and put right his injustices from his previous life.

But unlike the Rich Ruler we hear of earlier in chapter 18, Jesus here doesn’t ask Zacchaeus to dispose of all his wealth.

Jesus reveals it is possible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.
What's in his hearts seems more important.

JESUS GAVE THE BLIND MAN SIGHT
JESUS NOW GIVES SPIRITUAL SIGHT TO ZACCHAEUS
JESUS SEEKS OUT AND SAVES THE LOST

As it says in Isaiah (1:18),
'come let us argue it out' says Yahweh
'though your sins are like crimson, they shall be like wool'

Much like Jacob who struggles with the Lord, the Lord then injures his hip, but still calls him to his side.

Zacchaeus and the blind beggar have rebutted their today salvation which wrongly limits its saving grace to those who they deem to be worthy.

In our today salvation are we any different as we sometimes wrongly limit our forgiveness and reconciliation to those we deem worthy.
Those convinced of their own uprightness are inclined to judge others not good enough but Jesus counters this in his teaching!!!

As time has gone on what sort of people do we see God use?

God uses the man who got drunk and was sexually abused by one of his own sons.

Noah

The man who gave his wife to another man to sleep with.

Abraham

The man who plotted with his mistress to kill her husband.

King David

A prostitute.

Rahab

A man who murdered an Egyptian but was never brought to account.

Moses

A man who cheated his brother out of his inheritance.

Jacob

And a man who was impetuous and rash and denied Jesus three times

Peter

(psalm 22)

We are all God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus

For the good works that God has prepared for us all in advance

God uses very flawed people indeed.
He uses ALL OF US

The question is when we are really put to the test who do we welcome?
Who do we deem good enough?
Who do we judge as worthy and do we ask ourselves whether God would consider our
judgements to be right?

JESUS BIDS US ALL GIVES SIGHT TO OTHERS
SEEK OUT AND SAVE THE LOST
WHOEVER THEY ARE

Amen