

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 6 April 2025

Sermon Title : Jesus: The Stories - The Tax Collector

Speaker : Rev Eddie Ho

Text : Luke 19:1-10

INTRODUCTION

Today's passage is a story commonly told in Sunday School about Zacchaeus, a tax collector who was rich and short. One day, Jesus was passing by his town, Jericho. Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus and His miracles and teachings and like many people, he was impressed and would like to see Jesus. However, there was a big crowd surrounding Jesus and Zacchaeus could not see Jesus as he was short. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree hoping to catch a glimpse of Jesus as He passed that way. When Jesus reached that sycamore tree, Jesus raised His head and said to Zacchaeus that He must stay at Zacchaeus' house that day. Zacchaeus was surprised and so excited that he fell from the tree. Many laughed at him and as he picked himself up, someone among the crowd muttered, "Jesus is staying at *that* sinner's (Zacchaeus) house?" When Zacchaeus heard it, he immediately responded that he would donate half of his money to the poor and will pay back 4 times the amount to whom he had cheated. Jesus then said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (vv.9-10)

The moral of this story

No matter what mistakes you have made in your life, God still loves you. God want to seek and save you, to forgive you. And we should be like Zacchaeus - *Do right the thing that we have done wrong, make it right.*

Let us look for patterns of how Luke tells the stories of Jesus in this Gospel

This is the final leg of Jesus' ministry as he was approaching Jerusalem for the Passover which is also the last leg of His life. To reach Jerusalem from Galilee one has to pass through the city of Jericho which is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in human history, as long as from the time of Moses. It was an old and strategic city that many armies had fought over. Jericho was also a wealthy city very rich in resources. Zacchaeus lived in this city when Israel was not self-ruling but was under Roman occupation. The Romans were notorious and brutal. They had a big empire to run and so imposed heavy taxes on their subjects to fund their enterprises such as the army, senate etc. Although Jericho was a good city to 'milk', the Romans who were shrewd knew that collecting taxes from oppressed, disgruntled and resentful subjects would be very tricky, so they implemented the Tax Farming system.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

How Tax Farming works:

Private individuals can bid for the rights to collect tax for the Roman government. These tax collectors are to pay the government the amount designated by the Romans and if he collects less than the designated amount, the tax collector will make a loss. If he collects more than the designated amount, the tax collector can keep the excess amount after paying the designated amount to the government. These tax collectors could also use the Roman army to assist them in enforcing the tax collection. So, this tax collection business is very lucrative and there was a lot of profiteering. Hence, the Jews hated tax collectors for 2 reasons:

- (1) colluding with the Romans in oppressing their own people.
- (2) profiteering and lining their own pockets.

Zacchaeus was not a regular tax collector but a chief tax collector which means he is at the apex of the 'food chain' and so, filthy rich.

Pattern 1: Luke paints the rich negatively.

Being rich is almost always a problem. That is why Jesus spent a lot of time preaching about money:

- 15% of Jesus' teaching is about money and possession.
- 11 out of 39 (> 25%) of Jesus' parables are about money.
- 1 out of 10 verses in the Gospels deals with money.
- Jesus warns us that money can be an idol for many of us. That is why we cannot serve 2 masters – money and God. (Luke 16:13) Worship God or worship money, we have to choose one.

Luke 18 – A young ruler asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. To Jesus' reply that he had to keep all God's commandments, the young man said he had done all that but still felt something was missing. Jesus then told him to sell all that he had and distribute to the poor and he will have treasures in heaven, and he is to come and follow Jesus. The young ruler became very sad as he was extremely wealthy. After seeing him so sad, Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

Pattern 2: Luke paints the tax collectors positively.

Luke always paints the poor and needy in very positive light. Luke also painted the rich people in a very negative light. But strangely, the tax collectors, who are also the rich, are always painted in positive light in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 3 – John the Baptist was urging people to repent and baptising them in the desert. Among those who came to be baptised were tax collectors. (Luke 3:12)

Luke 7 – The tax collectors who came to John in Luke 7:29 had repented and were baptised.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Luke 5 – Jesus saw a tax collector sitting at the tax booth and called the tax collector to follow Him. The tax collector dropped everything and followed Jesus. The name of tax collector is Levi or Matthew, who wrote the Gospel of Matthew.

Luke 18 – Jesus told the parable of ‘The Pharisee and the Tax Collector’ in the Temple. The Pharisee was standing very proud and prayed thanking God that he was not like others who are extortionists, adulterers or even like this man (referring to the tax collector), a tax collector. He fasts twice a week and gives tithes of all that he could get. The tax collector on the other hand, at the far end of the Temple, would not lift his eye up to heaven but beat his chest to say, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus said that this man (tax collector) went home justified before God rather than the Pharisee. “*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*” (Luke 18:14)

Strangely, Luke is sympathetic to tax collectors, or should we say, Jesus has a soft spot for tax collectors. The unscrupulous people who colluded with Roman oppressors and profited from oppressing their own people – Jesus somehow has a soft spot for them. Why?

Pattern 3: Luke lumps the tax collectors together with the widows, children, lepers, beggars.

Referring to the parables in Luke 17 and 18:

Luke 17 – Jesus had compassion on 10 lepers and healed them.

Luke 18 – Jesus told the parable of ‘The Persistent Widow’.

Luke 18 – Parable of ‘The Pharisee and the Tax Collector’ in the Temple.

Luke 18-17 – People were bringing little children to Jesus, but His disciples prevented them from reaching Jesus. But Jesus allowed them to come to Him.

Luke 18 – Jesus met a blind beggar on the street and had compassion on him and healed him.

Luke lumps the lepers, beggar, children and tax collectors together. What do they have in common? They were all people at the fringe of society. People who did not have easy access to public utilities, people who are shunned, ostracised, neglected. In other words, they were all outsiders.

Combining these 3 patterns, Luke shows that:

God cares for people who are outsiders in society such as widows, beggars, children as well as tax collectors. Not because they are poor or rich, but because they are shunned, unloved, unwanted, isolated. It is regardless of their occupation, wealth or social status. Often, people relate to the Gospel of Luke as God is for the poor and needy but that is not the whole picture. God cares for people who are outsiders, including people who made bad choices or bad decisions in their life that cause them to be disliked. Jesus cares for the unwanted and unloved. He is amazingly loving and compassionate and He looks out for the broken and lonely.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

CONCLUSION

Jesus is saying to the unwelcomed that He must stay at his house today. If you have sinned and made bad decisions or choices, been rejected or unloved, open up to Him. Make yourself available to Jesus, and like Zacchaeus, come down from your tree of isolation, from your tree of pride and receive Him with joy. Some people will grumble that you do not deserve it. You deserve what you get. You are not worthy. But this is precisely what Jesus is offering – forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration. The only thing needed from you is repentance. Confess all that you have done wrong and repent to make right what you have done wrong.

A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
 - 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?
-
2. What is the condition of your heart and soul now? Do you feel rejected or dejected? Are you feeling lost and long to fill it with meaning and purpose?

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

3. Luke paints the rich negatively and Jesus said that man cannot serve 2 masters – money and God. (Luke 16:13)
 - a. How is this true for Zacchaeus?
 - b. What does this tell you about the relationship between man and God?
 - c. With reference to Jesus' teachings on money in Luke, share one way He wants us to use our money?

4. Appoint someone to read Luke 19:1-10 slowly. Listen and reflect.
 - a. (i) What do the people's words in verse 7 tell us?
(ii) What does Zacchaeus' response in verse 8 tell us?
 - b. Although Luke paints the rich negatively, he also paints Zacchaeus, the tax collector who is very rich, positively. Why?
 - c. What does this tell you about God's heart?

- 5a. (i) Are there incidents where you are guilty of isolating or ostracising certain people that you would like to make good? OR (ii) Are there people you have taken from that you would like to return to or make restitution for?
- 5b. What is one action step you can take now towards 5a above?
- 5c. How can your group members encourage or help you to achieve 5a and 5b above?

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

6. Share how you have experienced or witnessed God's care for people who are outsiders in society. How has this impacted your understanding of God?

OR

Give thanks to God for offering forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration to you even when you have sinned and made bad decisions or choices, been rejected or unloved, so you can return to Him to follow Him.

7. With a prayer partner, pour out your heart to God if you are feeling rejected or dejected. The Lord hears and cares for you. Seek God's revelation on how you can restore your relationship with Him and obey the Holy Spirit's prompting on what you need to do. Pray for all the people who are outsiders in society to know He cares for them and also for our church to allow the Holy Spirit to lead and use us to reach them with His love.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. Love Of God - Brandon Lake

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nO5kZ4xEmsU&ab_channel=BrandonLake

2. His Glory and My Good – CityAlight https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-EyQVWCEBI&ab_channel=CityAlight

3. Til I See You – Hillsong

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KI2FJfBKgoQ&ab_channel=GinLaurenceLirazan

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7