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“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 39”

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Luke 19:9-10

**9 And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;
10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

This lesson begins with the episode of a dissatisfied tax collector. **Luke 19:1-2** records:

1 Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

2 Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

Riches, as we have discussed, have the potential to be a problem. We have, for the last two weeks, referred to **1 Timothy 6:6-10**, which reads:

6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Paul, in this passage of Scripture, tells us that we should be content if we have food and clothing. God does not expect us to be penniless or to beg, but to have enough. The Lord tells Israel of the provisions that He made for them in the Promised Land, as He speaks to them in **Deuteronomy 28:9, 11-13**:

9 “The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.

11 And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.

12 The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

13 And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them.

God planned for the Israelites to live in abundance, but God also recognized that the abundant resources would not be equally distributed. He says, in **Deuteronomy 15:1-2**:

1 “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts.

2 And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD’s release.

God defines the conditions of extending credit in Israel in **Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 11**:

7 “If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother,

8 but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.

11 For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’

Although God declares that He is creating a land of great abundance for Israel, God also declares that in this Promised Land, which is flowing with milk and honey, there will always be poor people. There will always be a need for borrowing, for lending, and for giving to the poor. It is interesting that, on the one hand, God creates abundance in the land, but then, on the other hand, He distributes the abundance so that those who lack can be supported by those who have. Of course, it looks to me as though this uneven distribution of income may, to some degree, be a test. **Deuteronomy 15:9-10** says:

9 Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you.

10 You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.

If an Israelite lent to his poor brother in the sixth or seventh year, it was very likely that the poor brother would not have to pay him back because of the release, but God made it clear that the Israelite must lend anyway, because the resources that he was lending were not actually his, but God’s.

You may remember, from our previous study, that Genesis teaches us that we have dominion over the world. These passages of Scripture in Deuteronomy teach us that part of our dominion is to rectify the unequal distribution of resources in the world in order to make sure that everyone has enough and no one starves. One of the temptations and snares of riches of which Paul speaks in **1 Timothy 6** is loving money, which means to hoard resources, not for God’s purpose, but simply to have the resources. This is contrary to the Law of God, and God is not pleased with us when we do that, as Jesus tells us, in **Luke 12:16-21**

16 Then [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

17 And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’

18 So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” ’

20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

21 “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Jesus tells those who are blessed with riches that they are part of God’s plan, and God’s plan is not self-aggrandizement, but service. God does not give us excess resources so that we can hoard them, but so that we can supervise their distribution.

Having made the point, let us return to our discussion about the rich man, Zacchaeus, in **Luke 19:3-4:**

3 And [Zacchaeus] sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.

4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.

One of the more pervasive truths of growing up is that people tend to conform to the norm, and generally speaking, anyone that is different in a material way is ridiculed. The reason that our children want stylish clothes is so that they are not teased for not conforming, or for being different. Conformity is important in the socialization of the immature with one another. Of course, most of us tend not to conform to the norm in one way or another, and receive ridicule for doing so.

According to an article on everystudent.com, Americans spend \$33 billion annually on dietary products, \$20 billion annually on cosmetics and \$300 million annually on cosmetic surgery. I recently watched an interesting television show in which a fellow was undergoing a complex surgery to add three inches of length to each of his legs, a surgery for which he was paying from his own pocket.

Cosmetic leg lengthening surgeries typically cost between \$40,000 and \$70,000 and, of course, are not generally covered by health insurance. The surgery is extremely painful and requires the patient to be in a wheelchair for six months or more. When this particular individual was asked why he was spending the money to undergo such a painful, complex and risky procedure to become just three inches taller, he said that being only five feet tall had become just too painful to endure. He mentioned specifically that he would like to be able to date a woman that he could actually look in the eye without having to look up at her.

This might seem trivial to those of us who are of average height, but we should all recognize that we have some characteristic that we would like to change and, given the financial wherewithal, we might spend the money to do so. As I previously mentioned, Americans spend \$33 billion on weight loss products annually. Last year, I found out that spending money on losing weight is unnecessary. Losing weight is much less expensive than keeping weight on; fruits and vegetables prepared at home cost much less than fast food meals. Of course, it takes some time to prepare the vegetables and some discipline to get used to the taste of them,

especially when you are used to the taste of the high calorie ingredients designed to make fast food taste so good. The reason that Americans spend \$33 billion on weight loss products annually and are generally unsuccessful in losing weight is that the process of weight loss is not, in and of itself, emotionally fulfilling.

The problem that we are addressing is emotional fulfillment. Some people adopt a sedentary lifestyle, generally replete with television, computers and/or video games, combined with overeating, to compensate for a lack of emotional fulfillment. Others become driven in their chosen profession, and become workaholics and largely successful. The fact is that when we lack emotional fulfillment, we have to do something to compensate. The three options that I have mentioned are either surgery or a physical regimen to change our physical structure, overindulgence, or an inappropriate attachment to work.

Changing his physical structure was not an option for Zacchaeus, and so it is likely that he decided on an inappropriate attachment to work, which often allows driven people to join the ranks of those that become rich. They spend their time making money, and little time spending it. Since the real problem is emotional fulfillment, the question then becomes; what is God's plan to give us emotional fulfillment, our non-standard physical characteristics notwithstanding?

God's plan to give us emotional fulfillment is to make us social animals, and give us acceptance of one another to assuage our emotions. That is the meaning of **Genesis 2:18: 18 And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."**

It is obvious, from the characteristics of the woman that God created that man's need for help did not include a need for increased physical strength. The difference between man and woman is emotional; women are designed to help men by giving them emotional acceptance leading to physical pleasure, not physical strength. The contrast between the sexes that leads to the division of labor between them is that man is stronger and more likely to be hurt doing his part, which the woman is able to provide the emotional motivation and support that the man needs as he risks himself tending to and keeping the garden.

God's plan for man's emotional security is, as **Genesis 2:24** tells us:
24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The Scripture says nothing about Zacchaeus' marital status, but it allows us to infer some things about Zacchaeus' emotional status. First of all, the mention of Zacchaeus lack of height leads us to infer that he has a deficiency in his emotional state. Secondly, the fact that Zacchaeus is a rich tax collector allows us to infer that being emotionally abused about his height may have made him more tenacious as a tax collector against those who taunted him, even to the point of collection with no mercy, which might have accounted for his status as a rich man. Finally, the Bible shows us the disdain in which Zacchaeus' peers held him. **Luke 19:5-7** says:

5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house."

6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.

7 But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."

Zacchaeus is a short sinner who is hated because he collects taxes, but he knows with whom he needs to meet to relieve his emotional trauma. He climbs the tree to get the attention of Jesus and Jesus acknowledges Zacchaeus, because Jesus has come as a healer, to heal all things. Zacchaeus is short, but he knows the healing power that Jesus has, and seeks Jesus out to heal his emotional pain.

But Zacchaeus knew that even though we may have circumstances that lead us to emotional pain, we cannot wallow in our emotional pain, but we have to do something about it on our own. Jesus told the parable of the rich person that did not use his riches well, in **Luke 16:19-25**:

19 “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 “Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’

25 But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.

The question is: is it better to be rich or poor?

It depends on your focus.

If you have a short term focus, I suppose that it is better to be rich, because you have nice clothing and good food every day that you are alive on this earth. Looking at it from the long term point of view, however, the poor man received evil things in this life, but died went to heaven while the rich man received good things in this life, but died and went to hell. And it is true that we are all going to die, so, ultimately, which is better, to be rich or to be poor?

Well, as I mentioned earlier, riches lead to responsibility. The rich man acted as though he believed in the adage that he who dies with the most money wins. He found out, to his sorrow, that this adage is not true. The rich man enjoyed his riches, but didn’t care for the poor beggar at his door; as a matter of fact, the rich man sent his dog out to lick the beggar’s sores. The result? When the rich man died, he went to Hades to be tormented because of his lack of care for Lazarus. Zacchaeus has heard the parable and is not about to make that mistake. In **Luke 19:8: 8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”**

It may be that Lazarus can give us half of his fortune and still be rich, but the fact that he is willing to give away that which he has acquired means that he has developed the mind of Christ, as Jesus discussed in **Matthew 20:25-28**:

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.

26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—

28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Zacchaeus, the short, driven, emotionally challenged tax collector, has been converted by the attention of Jesus into a man that is willing to give, rather than just take. Zacchaeus needed a healing; not a physical healing, but an emotional one, and the interaction and acceptance of Jesus Christ was sufficient to heal the hurt in Zacchaeus, which we know because Zacchaeus was ready to give, to part with his riches and to become Christ-like.

Is it better to be rich or poor?

The answer is: it is better to be changed. Although Lazarus was rich before he met Jesus, he did not feel very kindly disposed towards those that ridiculed him because of his lack of stature, nor did he cherish his relationship with those from whom he collected taxes. I don't know whether Lazarus had a wife to accept him and make him feel better, but I do know that when Lazarus experienced the acceptance of Jesus Christ, his perspective changed and he developed the love of God for his fellow man. Lazarus avoided the fate of the rich man that failed to tend to the beggar at his door, as Jesus tells us in **Luke 19:9-10**:

9 And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;

10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

The issue is not the amount of money that you have. Rich people and poor people alike can go to heaven. But our focus on the riches that we possess and the fact that we see them as “ours” has the tendency to change us emotionally into people that judge other people harshly and feel it necessary to evaluate their worthiness to decide whether or not we will help them. Riches tend to change us into people who forget that God created the world, and gave us the dominion over the resources of the world that we control by His grace rather than because of our abilities or worthiness, even as He gave the man and the woman in the Garden control over the fruit of the trees, although they ultimately proved to be sinners.

The Holy Spirit teaches us through the administration of the Apostle John, in **1John 3:17**:

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

But suppose your brother in need doesn't deserve your help? Well, is that your call to make? Paul describes our interdependence with one another, in **Romans 12:3-8**:

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

**7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;
8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence;
he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.**

The snare of riches is that we tend to administer them emotionally, rather than according to the principles of God. We are willing to share with those who meet our emotional need for admiration and attention, while we reject those who do not measure up to our standards or give us that which we want emotionally. But how can we have such standards, especially when we recognize that we are not the owners of that which we have, but have received the things of this world as a gift from God? Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 5:43-48**:

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

It may be that you are wasting your substance by giving it to someone that is not going to use it well. Jesus points out that God wastes substance every day; He wastes sunshine on the evil and rain on the unjust. The crop of the sinner grows by God’s grace just as does the crop of the saint. Although the rich man died and went to hell, God gave him riches before he went.

To be saved requires a change of perspective. Consider that everything that you know about the acquisition and administration of resources is wrong, and everything that the Bible teaches us about the acquisition and administration of resources is correct. Jesus came to the earth bringing us a new perspective; one in which giving, rather than receiving, became the sign of the greatest good. **Matthew 20:28** tells us:

28 The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

In the final analysis, your financial status in this world is irrelevant. Be rich or poor as you choose, but the Bible teaches that it is better to be godly and content. **1 Timothy 6:6-10** says:

6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Ultimately, whether rich or poor, it is better to be giving. **John 3:16-17** says:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world

through Him might be saved.

We have our marching orders. Let us emulate Zacchaeus, and use the resources that God gives us as God instructs us.

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