

The Joy Of Recieving Jesus

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[0 : 00] Gospel passage for tonight, and it's on page 78 in the Pew Bible, and if you would turn to that, I think you'd find it somewhat easier to follow. It was two things I'd like to say.

One is that this is a picture of a man who, in this story, comes to put his faith in Jesus Christ, and you see the beginnings of his discipleship.

And for those who were baptized tonight, they could make Zacchaeus their patron saint, if they like, and study carefully how it was that he came to put his faith in Christ and how he proceeded from there.

During the mission week at King's College and Dalhousie University in Halifax this past week, it was a fascinating experience for me to be there.

And by the second or third night of the mission, people were beginning to ask the question, well, how do you commit your life to Jesus Christ?

[1 : 23] And it's not an easy question to answer, because I think everybody is different, and their experience of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is very different.

And while there are common things that I suppose everybody experiences in some measure, every situation is uniquely different.

And it was very interesting to meet new people and to find the very different ways by which they had come to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

There was one very healthy young man who was apparently a very brilliant student, and he came from the very first night. And he cornered me to question me after the service, after the first session, because in the ten days before the mission began, one of the students of King's College, who was his best friend, was killed in a cycling accident.

And he had a lot of questions to ask about how you cope with that. And then subsequently he came to this service where we talked about how you commit your life to Christ, and he heard from me, the suggestion, obviously, that in order to make a commitment of your life to Christ, you have to be pretty badly beaten up and in pretty serious trouble, or else you wouldn't do it.

[2 : 59] And so I pointed out to him that that wasn't necessarily so, but that we, for the most part, didn't have very good hearing capacity until something had given us a fairly sharp blow between the eyes.

And then I reminded him of the blow he had in order that he was there listening that night. And another person who was there was a very keen student and had come to the place where in the course of their foundation year program at King's, they were studying Nietzsche.

And Nietzsche was regarded as the watershed where these students coming from all over Canada, really, but mainly from Nova Scotia, it was the point at which they either gave up the faith of their childhood, and I guess most of them did at that point, or else they took it on and made it really the commitment of their lives.

So that Nietzsche served that evangelistic purpose of at least bringing to the place where, in the sort of understanding of the modern world, they took hold of their faith in Christ, or they tended to abandon what they had of it.

So it was interesting to see her, who the year before at the Nietzsche lectures, the sort of Nietzsche watershed in the school year, had said, no more.

[4 : 38] And a year later, she was just very interested in reconsidering and recommitting her life to Christ. So these are just two stories, and there was a number of such stories of people who, and this happens all the time, people in the very peculiar circumstances of their own individual lives, come to put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ in quite unique ways.

In the Gospel of St. Luke, there are a number of quite peculiar stories, and Zacchaeus is one of them. Zacchaeus is not known to Matthew or Mark, only to Luke and not to John, as is the story of the prodigal son, and as is the story of the Good Samaritan, as is the story of the rich fool.

So that there is a number of characteristic stories of Luke, and Zacchaeus is certainly one of them. Now, it is said that Luke has been looking for a long time to find a rich man who would become his disciple.

And Luke tries to pick this out of the ministry of Jesus to illustrate it. So he does tell the story of the rich fool, and he does tell the story of the rich young ruler, and he does tell the story of the rich Pharisee, and he does tell the story of the rich woman who came and had that very expensive, vile appointment.

But all the time he's looking for someone who will put their faith and trust in him. And there's two contrasting stories, which I think are meant to be read in parallel.

[6 : 35] And one is of a rich man who came and said, what must I do to enter the kingdom? And Christ said to him, you must keep the law.

And he said, I've done that ever since I was a child. And Jesus said to him, well, go and sell what you have and give to the poor and come and follow me.

And he went away sorrowing because he had a lot of money, a lot of wealth. So that was a rich man who turned away. He turns away in the gospel without comment.

It's just that having come to that point, he said, no. And the gospel is wonderful in that it allows people to say no. And here's the story of another rich man who responds in exactly the opposite way.

He very enthusiastically says, yes. Now, Luke doesn't make the mistake that most of us make, and is certainly a pious way of looking at people, and the church uses it very often, that the poor people are always good and the rich people are always bad.

[7 : 46] Luke, in fact, treats them all as poor. Whether they are economically distressed or whether they are economically on the top of the heap, he regards them all as poor if they have not received the kingdom and shows the problems that they have, that we all have, because of, not because of our economic circumstances, but because of how we respond to the person of Jesus Christ.

This particular story is one in a series that we're dealing with on Sunday night, all of which center around a meal, coming together for a meal.

And you may think that as a church we have too much eating, but it follows a good New Testament precedent, and I hope all of you will come to our next meal.

In fact, I hope some of you are going to make it. But it's going to be on Maundy Thursday evening, when we come together just as families, to have a meal and to have a communion service in the context of that meal, both to commemorate the Last Supper and to show how in the course of a meal, Christ took the bread and the wine and established the sacrament of the Holy Communion, or instituted it.

So that's part of what we're trying to do, is to look at the meals, the meal that Jesus took in the Pharisees' house, and the meal and then hospitality that was shown to the Good Samaritan, when the Good Samaritan took the man to a hotel, and the different meals that occur in the ministry of Christ, and this was a lovely story here, because this tells of a meal taken in the house of Zacchaeus.

[9 : 51] Look at the text again. He entered Jericho, was passing through, and there was a man named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector, and rich.

And Jericho is located in such a place that they could easily tax people for the use of the road, and they could easily tax goods coming into the country, so it was a significant place for Zacchaeus to make a good deal of money.

But having made a good deal of money, Ruth gave me a lovely story this week, which I thought was a beautiful thing. It told the story of a man who won \$6 million in a lottery.

By the way, I discovered the reason that you shouldn't buy lottery tickets. The money goes to very good causes, but the danger is that you might win, and that would wreck your whole life.

Well, that's what happened to this fellow that we got the clipping about this week. He said, I've lived all my life in the hope of winning a lottery, and now I've won one I've got nothing to live for.

[11 : 07] There's great wisdom in that remark, I thought. But this is perhaps part of the story of Zacchaeus, who, having achieved great wealth, got to the place where he was now totally rejected by the society, which he worked over in order to acquire his wealth, and he became interested and

curious about the person of Jesus Christ.

And he couldn't see who Jesus was because of the crowd and because he was short of stature. So we're told that he ran ahead and climbed into a sycamore tree to see him, and a sycamore tree was apparently, it's a tree that's got a short trunk and long branches, so it was easy for a short, statured, rich man to climb up into.

And so he got himself in a position where he could see who this was, around whom the crowd was gathered, and with whom the crowd was moving through the streets of Jericho, which is really a very lush oasis in a very barren and desert part of the world.

Well, they were moving through, and he climbed into the sycamore tree because he wanted to see who Jesus was. And in a lovely kind of throwaway line, when it comes to verse 5, it says, Jesus came to the place and looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, which I think is part of what happens when we encounter the person of Jesus Christ.

We're not sure who he is, but he knows exactly who we are. And that's one of the lovely things about getting involved in reading of the scriptures and even reading about Jesus.

[13:10] As you study to know who he is, you'll find out that he knows exactly who you are long before you have figured out who he is. And so that was the experience of Zacchaeus.

And Jesus addressed him and said, Make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today. And I don't know how you get away with telling people whose place you're going to stay at today.

And, but it's, I really do think that they took hospitality much more seriously. And you could, in fact, decide that.

I would like to chide you gently with the fact that as the rector of the parish, if I'm to come to call at your house, I generally have to make an appointment and be sure that you will let me in.

Because the unscheduled knocks at the door are not particularly welcome. And that's a slight change from the story of Zacchaeus where Jesus could announce, I'm coming to your house.

[14:18] And an even greater change than that comes from the fact that Zacchaeus clambered down out of the tree and in a hurry and received him joyfully.

So the wonder of this is that is that Zacchaeus was not in the least perturbed by this opportunity to share this hospitality with this man, the Lord Jesus.

So he was joyfully receiving Christ into his life and into his heart and into his home, as it turns out. All those things. We had a long discussion in the confirmation class this morning. And somebody, I was talking about the mission at St. Paul's next week. And what do you tell people to do?

And Chris Anglin said to me, well, just tell them that they are to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as their Lord. And that seemed good advice.

[15:25] And I said, but my experience is that they won't thank you for telling them that. And that they won't really understand how that could ever work.

And that they will find in themselves a lot of resistance to that. And here the kind of miracle of who Zacchaeus is, is that he was pleased to receive him.

He joyfully received him. Now, I cannot imagine why anybody wouldn't joyfully receive him. But I am aware that most people won't joyfully receive him.

I mean, it just is alien to who we are. And it's the most surprising thing in the world that that person whose uniqueness of whose life must be known to almost everybody, in our society at least, is one we don't want to publicly associate with.

We don't want to receive him into our hearts and lives. We don't find it easy to talk about him to one another. Well, Zacchaeus was a wonderful exception in that he joyfully received him.

[16:41] And when he did that, of course, there was the public reaction which is set up in verse 7. The crowd started to murmur.

And he's gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. Isn't it wonderful how consistently wrong the crowd is?

And that they don't understand the issue and they don't know how to respond. And their response is altogether wrong.

He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. And I wonder, that would be true if he went to your house too, wouldn't it?

He would have gone to be the guest of a sinner. And if he came to my house, he would have gone to be the guest of a sinner. Well, that isn't recognized here.

[17 : 40] And people thought somewhat better of themselves than they did of this public sinner in that he was rich and he was a tax collector.

And he had in some way betrayed his people as they thought anyway. But Zacchaeus didn't mind having them.

Apparently, it was the custom in those days that you would come in and you would have a banquet for your friends and other people would come and watch you doing it. And they would gather around and see what kind of silver you had and what kind of china and what kind of food you served and various things they would stand around and watch.

It's a lovely thing, isn't it? But totally unthinkable to us that anything like that should happen. And yet, that's apparently what happened.

And so, they came and watched. And they watched Zacchaeus as he and his household welcomed Jesus and shared this meal with him.

[18 : 51] And then it says that Zacchaeus made an after-dinner speech. And in his after-dinner speech, he said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

So this man who joyfully received Christ into his house now joyfully responds because he has found some use for his wealth.

He knows what to do with it at last. He has some idea of how to cope with it. And because you are all extremely wealthy people, I want you to read this carefully.

And you may smile to yourself when I call you extremely wealthy people, but you are. And don't make any mistake about it. Taking the world's population, I remind you that you live in the top 10% of the world's wealthy people.

There you are. And you have that wonderful responsibility that you could now use your wealth for something you really believe in and something you really understand and something that really has meaning for you.

[20 : 10] And so he says, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I've defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. And this establishes a principle which always convicts me very deeply.

But probably there is for someone beginning the Christian life the necessity of going back over some old accounts and seeing if it isn't time to straighten them out and seeing if in response to Jesus' love and forgiveness of you, it's not time for you to go back and look at some old accounts and see whether there isn't something to be sorted out there.

Something that may be standing in your way and you need to deal with. Well, Zacchaeus apparently understood that and not only understood it but was prepared to respond very generously.

And Jesus, in response to his after-dinner speech, said to him, today salvation has come to this house.

And he couldn't have been referring to anything but himself when he said salvation has come to this house to have picked up the picture of the meal that Jesus draws near and makes himself known to us as he did in the breaking of bread with the Emmaus disciples.

[21 : 42] He came and sat with them and broke bread and they knew him. And whenever he sort of, when he came and ate with Martha and Mary and Lazarus, Jesus sits with us and makes himself known to us in this setting.

And that's, I think, why we go on with what you may feel sometimes is the pointless habit of saying grace at meals. The possibility that in some very real way, your expectation and God's promise to us in Christ is that he will come and share our home, share our meal together, and that he will be the unseen guest among us as we are met together in our homes and in our families.

And Jesus affirms this wonderfully for Zacchaeus when he says, today salvation has come to this house. And says, since he also is a son of Abraham.

And I, I cannot think, but that Jesus deliberately arouses the indignation of the good people of the community when he says, he also is a son of Abraham.

And that, you know, that they would tear their hair in their garments and say, him, he has so defiled the children of Abraham that he doesn't deserve the name any longer.

[23 : 21] And that, that he doesn't really belong. But then, if you look at the context of this statement in the whole of the, the New Testament, you also are a son of Abraham when you come to put your faith in Jesus Christ.

People thought being the children of Abraham was a great honor and distinction which they inherited with their blood. But it wasn't that.

And Jesus made it very clear that the children of Abraham are those who exercise the faith of Abraham. It doesn't matter what blood is coursing through your veins.

If you share the faith of Abraham, you are a child of Abraham. And that's the basis of the whole of the declaration of the gospel to the whole of the world.

that it doesn't matter what your color or what your ethnic origin is or anything like that. You become a child of Abraham by sharing the faith of Abraham.

[24 : 31] And what had happened that day was that Zacchaeus, in receiving the Lord Jesus Christ into his home and welcoming him as a guest and sharing this meal with him and welcoming him into his family was showing the faith of Abraham.

And so Jesus conferred on him in the presence of all those who must from their hearts have heartily disagreed with him. He said about Zacchaeus, he also is a son of Abraham.

and that little section of the scriptures concludes with the son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

And he fulfilled that mission in coming that day to the house of Zacchaeus. It's a picture, you see, of something that we have difficulty with nowadays.

It's a picture of Jesus coming to an individual person. You know, somebody with a particular name, with a particular job.

[25 : 50] And of course, there's a lot of stories like that in the New Testament, of how Jesus made himself known to particular people in honor of and respect for the peculiarities of their own person.

and Zacchaeus is a prime example of that. And those who were baptized tonight, each one of them has outwardly and visibly received Christ into their homes and into their hearts and into their lives. Perhaps anew, perhaps in some measure for the first time in a real way. But that's what's involved is entering into that personal relationship to Jesus Christ or acknowledging that personal relationship to Jesus Christ.

Christ. That that's what's at the heart of our faith is that we know God in the person of Jesus Christ. One last thing I want to tell you because this meant quite a lot to me. I got into one of those great big fat books that tells you all about everything and I was reading there a statement which just came out and punched me right between the eyes.

[27 : 34] And it said something like this that if you have an experience which is not capable of theological interpretation you lose it.

now a lot of people I think come to church for a religious experience a warm glow perhaps a little affirmation a little affection a little sense of the joy of singing together a quiet moment of meditation an experience of that kind.

and I you know I think that we all look for that but this statement that struck me so hard is that that experience needs to be theologically interpretable people and when I talk to you about receiving Jesus Christ into your heart that may in fact be I mean what I think it is is the theological interpretation of what you may experience the experience that you have tonight will evaporate relatively quickly there may be some more memorable than others but for the most part your experiences will evaporate quite quickly and that's why you need to know what it means theologically you need to understand that in your baptism in the moment of your baptism or in the particular moment in which perhaps this service meant most to you that that moment will rapidly fade but the reality of

Jesus Christ as Lord is the eternal reality in your life I went to visit an elderly lady this afternoon who will be gone I think by midnight tonight and had prayers with her and with her family and assured her her sister that we would pray for her tonight but the fact is that the thing that she was experiencing was death and it's encroaching upon her and that experience is very much a passing experience but to put that experience in its theological context where you understand who God is and how he meets us in all the circumstances of our lives and how we can continue in our faith in him despite whatever experience we are undergoing that's what we need to know and that's what we need to in a sense grasp so that we know not only that we have hold of what God has made known to us of himself but that we are aware that he has in his grace taken hold of us as well Amen person as well as well as well for he would make a■