

**Reformation Sunday
October 30, 2016**

"Jesus Came to Zacchaeus and Martin Luther"

LUKE 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

When Jesus came to Zacchaeus, his life totally changed. He went from a man who was deeply troubled by his sin to someone who found forgiveness and peace in his Savior. The same was true for Martin Luther. When Jesus came to him, his life completely changed. He went from living under fear of not being good enough for God to sheer joy in knowing Jesus had done everything necessary to rescue him and save him.

499 years ago, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 theses or statements calling on the church to change its ways. His first thesis or statement said that the whole life of a Christian was one of daily repentance. Repentance is not something we do for God, it is something the Lord our God works in us. Repentance is the joy of turning away from sin and from thinking we can save ourselves to relying on Jesus for forgiveness and peace with God.

On this Reformation Sunday we want to take a closer look at how Jesus came to this man named Zacchaeus. We also want to take a closer look at how Jesus came to Martin Luther. Then we want to celebrate how Jesus has come to us and rescued us.

The guilty conscience

Both Zacchaeus and Martin Luther suffered from a guilty conscience because of their sin. Jesus was their answer to this problem of guilt and shame. "Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through." Jesus entered Jericho. When he entered towns and villages he was always searching for people to rescue and save. He was the Shepherd always searching for the lost sheep. In John 10 Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, I give my life for the sheep." He wants people to believe that he is the Good Shepherd who died to rescue us and save us. He wants people all over the world to rest in his loving arms and have eternal life through him.

In this town of Jericho there was a man named Zacchaeus who was deeply troubled by the sins in his past life. "A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy." Here was a man who had become rich by collecting taxes for the Roman government. He was rich because he charged high rates for taxes and kept some of the money for himself. It is hard to imagine how much the people living in Jericho must have hated this man Zacchaeus. He probably had very few friends who cared about him.

As sometimes happens with people, the sins of the past life catch up to them. I think of the phone solicitor who called one day to scam me out of money. For some reason I took the time to listen to him. He asked me what I did. I told him I was the pastor of a Lutheran church. He then asked "Is it true that liars will burn forever in a lake of fire?" I said, "Yes, that is what it says in the Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Why do you think he asked that question? Was his conscience not bothering him because of all the lies he had been telling people as he tried to sell his shady product?"

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus because he too was afraid of dying eternally in the lake of fire. "He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way." I don't think he wanted to see Jesus just out of curiosity as people might do with famous people today. He may have heard the stories of Jesus sitting down and eating with tax collectors and sinners. Maybe there was hope for him.

Martin Luther also wanted to see Jesus because he was overwhelmed by the sin in his life and by the fear of dying. As a student at the university he had a near death experience when a dagger he was carrying pierced his leg and he almost bled to death. Then on July 2, 1505, he experienced another near death experience from a lightning strike in a thunderstorm. He cried out in fear, "Help me, Saint Anne, and I will become a monk." Two weeks later he entered a monastery. He hoped his experience in the monastery would bring him peace with God. He did everything possible to drive the sin out of his life. When he saw Jesus hanging on a cross, he feared facing him in the judgment, because he knew he had not done enough good to outweigh the bad he had done. In one of his hymns, he wrote, "Yea deep and deeper still I fell life had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me."

You dear Christian, know what it is like to have a conscience that will lead you to see the guilt and shame of your sin. In Romans 7 Paul says, "For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do no covet." Paul discovered through the law that even the desire to do something wrong was sinful in the eyes of God. You have had secret sins that would shame hell itself. You have agonized over those times when you have been unkind and unloving to people, even the people who are closest to you. You have tried to get rid of certain sinful patterns in your life but you have failed. You know you cannot remove one thing you have done wrong with a life of good deeds. Your only hope is to have Jesus come to you and rescue you.

The loving Savior

What we see next in the life of Zacchaeus is something truly amazing. Jesus comes to

him. "When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly." If you look or search for pictures or images of Zacchaeus with your computer, you will find the face of Zacchaeus portrayed as being full of joy. Jesus wants to come to his house. Jesus wants to spend time with him. In Jesus he finds complete pardon and forgiveness for his sins of stealing and lying. The little man and big liar would not have to die forever in the lake of fire.

Psalm 32 says, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." The psalm ends with the words, "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous: sing, all you who are upright in heart!" There is no greater joy in life and no greater blessing in life than knowing our sin is forgiven and we have peace with God and eternal life. There is no greater joy than knowing I will not have to spend eternity in the lake of fire for those times when I have been less than truthful and honest with myself and with others and even with God.

Jesus came to Martin Luther in the lonely confines of that Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg. It was there in the monastery that Martin Luther started reading and studying the Bible. Jesus came to him when he was led to see that the righteous live by faith in Christ, not by trying to keep the law but by what a righteous and holy and perfect Savior has done for them.

Reflecting on his past life he wrote, "The expression 'the righteousness of God' used to hit me as a thunderbolt. For when under the papacy I read: 'Deliver me in thy righteousness...'" I immediately thought righteousness was the grim wrath of God, with which he punished sin. I hated St. Paul with all my heart when I read: 'the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.' But afterward, when I saw how it went on, that it is written, "The just shall live by faith,'then I became glad, for I learned and saw that the righteousness of God is His mercy, through which he regards and keeps us just. Thus was I comforted."

In his sermon on John 1:29 about Jesus as the Lamb of God you can almost see a big smile on his face as he is preaching with these words, "Anyone who wishes to be saved must know that all his sins have been placed on the back of this Lamb!" "For there is no other comfort either in heaven or on earth to fortify us against all attacks and temptations, especially in the agony of death." Then later in this sermon about the Lamb, Luther says, "Don't you hear? There is nothing missing from the Lamb. He bears all the sins of the world from its inception; this implies that He also bears yours, and offers you Christ."

This joy of being safe in the arms of the Shepherd and having Jesus as the Lamb of God is reflected in Luther's hymn "Dear Christians One and All Rejoice: "But God beheld my wretched state Before the world's foundation, And, mindful of his mercies great, He planned my soul's salvation. A Father's heart he turned to me, Sought my redemption fervently; He gave his dearest treasure."

Zacchaeus is so happy with this forgiveness he has in Christ that he joyfully stands up and promises to repay those people from whom he has stolen money. "But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to

the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay him back four times the amount." Zacchaeus is not offering to pay for his forgiveness. He is not thinking that there is something he has to contribute to make his salvation and peace with God real. Because Jesus came to him with his forgiveness, he comes to Jesus and offers to be generous with others out of love for what Jesus has given to him.

So it was with Martin Luther. When Jesus came to him through the pages of the Bible, he wanted other people to have this same blessing in their lives. That is why he translated the Bible into the German language in a style the people could easily understand. He preached sermons. He taught classes. He wrote and composed hymns. He did everything he could to take what had been given to him and bring it to others. He incurred the wrath of the pope in Rome and risked his life to bring the good news of the gospel to others.

Jesus has come to you with forgiveness and peace with your God. Now you come to Jesus out of love for him and offer your life to him. You stand up with Zacchaeus and say, "That sin of anger. That sin of pride. The selfishness. Those bad thoughts. I want to get rid of them because Jesus came to me with his blessings." With the Apostle Paul we say, "For me to live is Christ." And with Martin Luther we can devote ourselves to bringing God's Word to people in these last days so Jesus comes to them just as he came to us. What Jesus told Zacchaeus is just as true for us today as it was for Jesus "The Son of Man has come to seek and save what was lost."