

“Living in Response”
Luke 19:1-10
10.31.21

Journey to Jerusalem

Beginning in Luke chapter 9, Jesus is portrayed as being on a journey to Jerusalem. This long journey culminates in our Scripture lesson today when Jesus arrives in Jericho on the eve of his arrival to the holy city.

Along the way, Jesus encounters a number of people—two of whom are wealthy, powerful men. The first we know simply as the “rich young ruler.” He approaches Jesus and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” It is unlikely that the man is asking questions about the afterlife; instead, we should probably understand this as a paraphrase of, “What must I do to enter the kingdom of God?”

Jesus begins reciting commandments from the Hebrew Bible. More specifically, he recites from the Ten Commandments.

We might imagine the “rich young ruler” as smiling with satisfaction as he checks each of the commandments off of his list. After Jesus names several commands, the young man says, “I have kept all of these since I was young.”

Then, Jesus says, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Luke 18:22 NRSV).

Luke tells us that the rich, powerful young man walks away devastated because he had great wealth. Then Jesus looks to his disciples and says, “...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:25 NRSV). Jesus continues on his journey, and just a few verses later, he enters Jericho.

Apparently there was a “Jesus network” in Jericho that was anticipating his arrival. As he entered the city, people were lining the streets so that they could see him. Jericho was in close proximity to Jerusalem, but it must have been near the end of the day; it was expected that Jesus and his entourage would spend the night in Jericho and make the last leg of the journey the following day. Undoubtedly, everyone would have wanted to host Jesus as their guest and put on an elaborate banquet in his honor.

As Jesus approached, there was a man in Jericho who wanted to see Jesus, but he could not because he was short in stature, and the crowds were blocking his view. This man’s name was Zacchaeus, and he was a “chief tax-collector.”

Because Zacchaeus could not see Jesus, he climbed a Sycamore-fig tree to get a better view. When Jesus passed by, he commanded for Zacchaeus to come down, and he said, “I’m coming to your house today.”

Of all the people in Jericho, Jesus chose to be the guest of Zacchaeus—the chief tax-collector. Tax collectors were despised in general, but Zacchaeus was at the top of the pyramid scheme. He collected taxes from the tax collectors beneath him, and as a result, he was filthy rich.

The people in Jericho were shocked that Jesus chose to be his guest. They grumbled among themselves saying, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner” (Luke 19:7 NIV).

Zacchaeus appears to be equally shocked. He responds to Jesus’ generous invitation by making things right. He pays restitution to those whom he has cheated by giving them four times the amount that they paid. And he claims that he is going to give half of his wealth to the poor.

If we were to see Zacchaeus’ business propositions on a pie chart, it wouldn’t look good. By the end of the day, he might be in the red.

The Essence of Discipleship

This is our last week to intentionally focus on stewardship, and you might be saying to yourself, “Here we go again. The preacher is talking about money!” After all, the obvious conclusion seems to be that the rich young ruler is the negative example because he holds onto his wealth, and Zacchaeus is the positive example because he is generous. However, this story is fundamentally about Christian discipleship, and financial stewardship is only one of many components of discipleship.

It seems apparent that the stories of these two men are in such close proximity because they are intended to be compared and contrasted. I think a lot of us are like the rich young ruler—we just want Jesus to give us a list of rules to follow. We want him to draw a line in the sand so that we can step just far enough in so that we are “safe.”

Zacchaeus, on the other hand, lives in response to the grace he has received. He’s not looking for a compulsory amount to give, and he’s not looking for rules to follow. He has encountered Christ and it has changed his life forever.

That is precisely what discipleship is all about—Christ wants to change your life. This might be a bit confusing, especially if you think of yourself as a “good person”; but we must remember that the rich young ruler is a “good person”—he’s kept the Ten Commandments all of his life. The problem is that he is unwilling to change who is calling the shots. At the end of the day, he wants to be making all of his life decisions.

The rich young ruler wants to follow Jesus on his own terms. He wants to draw up the terms and conditions. But notice that Zacchaeus calls Jesus “Lord” multiple times, which means that Zacchaeus is no longer the master of his own life. He has surrendered to God and is now living out of the generosity he has received.

Discipleship is about change. Jesus wants to change your life and he wants to change mine, too. Not just once. Not just today; but the day after that and the day after that and the day after that. Jesus wants to call the shots. He wants to be Lord.

When we are disciples of Christ it impacts our lives on a daily basis. It impacts the way we treat our family and the people we work with, from the CEO to the lowest paid employees. Discipleship impacts how we spend our time, how we prioritize things in our lives, and how we spend our money. When Jesus is Lord of our lives, he's the one who calls the shots.

So, as we close out this sermon series, the most important question I can ask is, "Have you made Christ the Lord of your life?" Are you living in response to the grace you have received? Have you surrendered every single part of your life to Christ?

I'm not talking about church membership or how long you have been going to church. I am asking about who is calling the shots. I once heard someone say, "If Christ is not Lord of all, then he is not Lord *at all*."

If you've never personally made that decision in your life, I want to invite you to bow your head and simply surrender your life to Christ. There is no magic formula. There are not specific words that you need to say—just open your heart and let him come in to be your Lord and Savior.

If you make that decision, I hope you will contact me and let me know. There's nothing that I would love to discuss with you more than helping you grow in your discipleship. Will you pray with me?

Reference Tools

Green, Joel. *The Gospel of Luke*. 1997. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Marshall, I. Howard. *Commentary on Luke*. 1978. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Nolland, John. *Luke 18:35-24:53*. 1993. Dallas: Word Books.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What is your earliest pleasant ministry?
2. As you reflect on this week's message, what one thought stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?
3. What stands out to you when you compare and contrast the "rich younger ruler" with Zacchaeus? How does this message impact your understanding of discipleship? What questions does it raise for you about discipleship?

4. What will it look like for you to live in response to the grace you have received from knowing Christ?

5. How have you witnessed God's grace recently?

6. How can we pray for you?