

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, March 15, 2009

Radical Renovation (*Week 3 of 7*)

Surrender: Nothing Short of Everything

Luke 18:18-34

A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.'"

He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth."

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "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." But when he heard this he became sad; for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, 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."

Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"

He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

Then Peter said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you."

And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again."

But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

The Word from the Bible, Revised Standard Version

The Rich Man and the Kingdom — Luke 18:18-30

Again and again in the gospels Jesus is asked questions about the requirements of the Kingdom of God. In this instance, it is a rich young ruler (probably a high official in the Temple courts) who approaches Jesus with the question, "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life.**" At first there is an exchange about following and keeping the law. The "ruler" has been faithful to the law. But Jesus goes a step further, by offering him a place among his followers only if he will sell everything and give his wealth to the poor. The response of the "ruler" is one of grief and remorse.

Jesus makes the point that entering the kingdom demands more than obedience to the law. It requires a willingness to surrender possessions and home. The one who makes this decision receives **in this time** spiritual blessings and in the age to come eternal life.

The disciples show confusion concerning Jesus words, "**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.**" In the first century, wealth was a sign of God's favor and

blessing. It was thought to be the result of faithfulness to God. Jesus is not condemning wealth; he is pointing out that the responsibilities and ease of wealth can be a stumbling block to our total commitment to God. Jesus points out in verses 29 and 30 that those who do surrender everything for the Kingdom of God will **“get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”**

The Fate of the Son of Man — Luke 18:31-34

Jesus stresses that the rejection of the Son of man is fulfillment of prophetic prediction (See Psalm 22). These words remind us that the destiny of Jesus is according to the purposes of God. The failure of the disciples to understand is emphasized by repeating the remark three different ways. Their lack of understanding is not due to a lack of clarity in Jesus’ words, but to the inadequacy of their own faith.

Salvation to Zacchaeus — Luke 19:1-10

This narrative is found only in Luke. Because of the children’s song about Zacchaeus as a “wee little man,” the story is one of the most well known stories in the gospels. The blind man and Zacchaeus present a double witness to Jesus as the bringer of salvation. Zacchaeus is described as a rich man who has made his wealth through the despicable practice of collecting taxes.

The word translated chief tax collector has been found nowhere else in Greek literature, but it no doubt describes one who supervised tax collecting. Jericho, situated on an important commercial route, was a center of taxation.

Jesus, displaying prophetic power, addresses Zacchaeus by name. The tax collector receives the Lord into his house as guest. Again the typical murmuring of the crowd occurs, for Jesus enters the home of **a sinner**. The pledge to **restore...fourfold** is reminiscent of the Old Testament requirement to return four sheep for one which was stolen (Exodus 22:1). The focus of the story is salvation. The moment of encounter with Jesus is the time of redemption. The tax collector, though viewed as an outcast, is restored to the people of God; **he also is a son of Abraham**. It is to just such sinners that the Messiah is sent.

The crowd’s negative reaction to Jesus eating with Zacchaeus was probably nothing compared to the shock that Zacchaeus (a rich man) is willing to surrender everything to Jesus.

It is probably no accident that Luke has placed these two stories about rich men next to each other. The comparison is obvious. The ruler in chapter 18, highly respected in the Jewish community, fails to follow the call of Jesus. The tax collector, despised by the Jewish community, has succeeded in his willingness to sacrifice everything to Jesus.

These two stories about rich men are separated by the prediction of the suffering of Jesus, the recognition of the disciple’s sacrifice, and the healing of a blind man. In these three short narratives Luke is reminding us that salvation comes not through the law, but through a willingness to surrender through faith. Even a blind beggar can see who Jesus is.

Discussion Questions

1. Use a hymnal or some other source to locate the words to the hymn “Amazing Grace.” Read the words carefully and reflect upon them. How does God’s gift of amazing grace touch you personally?

2. Describe the rich young ruler as you picture him. In what ways can you identify with him?
3. In what ways are you like Zacchaeus? How do you picture him?
4. What is the “one thing” that stands in the way of your obedience to Christ?
5. What would it mean for you to hear Jesus say, “Today salvation has come to this house?”

Daily Readings

Please note. We began the year by focusing our attention on the gospel of Mark. We are now at the very end of Mark's gospel. This week's readings are from the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. It is recommended to read all of Mark 14:66-15:47 each day. Then go back and read the selected passage for the day. This will allow you to focus on the entire crucifixion each day reflecting on the love of God and the sacrifice of Jesus.

Monday, March 16 – Read Mark 14:66-72. Peter denies he knows Jesus, just as Jesus predicted. To Peter's credit, he is the only disciple that come out of hiding, following Jesus and his accusers to the Temple court. It is here that the direct inquiry into Peter's connection is addressed with Peter taking the easy way out in his three denials. As you reflect on your life, can you remember the times you have denied Christ by direct word, lack of word, or action?

Tuesday, March 17 – Read Mark 15:1-15. Mark wants us to understand that the crucifixion of Jesus should not be blamed on the Romans. We see Pilot struggling with what to do with Jesus, not wanting to follow the recommendations of the Sanhedrin. It must be noted that crucifixion was a Roman form of execution. The Jewish form of execution was stoning, but during the Roman occupation of Judea, the Jews could enforce all their laws and punishments except execution. They needed Pilot to condemn Jesus to death. Are there times when you have struggled with pressure from others to compromise your faith?

Wednesday, March 18 – Read Mark 15:16-32. The mocking, scourging and crucifixion of Jesus were severe. Each of the gospels gives us part of the picture of his humiliation. It is impossible in our culture to fully understand the brutality of this punishment. The scourging alone was enough to kill a person. Typically, the soldiers would bring the accused to the point of death and then back off, extending the suffering and pain. Mark chooses to focus on the mocking of Jesus as “King of the Jews.” Not unlike much of the final few chapters of Mark, these passages are full of irony – in a few days we will see that Jesus is, in fact, not just the king of the Jews, but the King of all Kings and Kingdoms.

Thursday, March 19 – Read Mark 15:33-41. Again each of the gospels gives us a part of the last words of Jesus. Mark records Jesus quoting Psalm 22, which begins, ***“My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?”*** Psalm 22 begins with a cry to God for help. It describes suffering similar to one being crucified. But it ends with these triumphant words, ***“Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, say that he has done it.”*** Read Palm 22 and ask yourself if Jesus is Lord of your house.

Friday, March 20 – Read Mark 15:42-47. What part of your life has died and been laid to rest? Can you offer it to Christ this day?