

Fed By Grace | Food in the Gospels

“Tax Man in the Tree (Eating With Wee Man)”

Luke 19.1-10

3.24.13

He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. 3 Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." 6 And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. 7 When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

We're looking at the theme of FOOD in the four Gospels, and this scene from Luke's Gospel involves a hosting...involves hospitality shown to Jesus Christ. He is being offered room and board but...it's not really that He's invited so much as that He invites Himself. “I must stay (or remain or abide) at your house”.

We might respond, “Who do you think you ARE?! Inviting YourSELF into my home? The nerve?!” But this pushy house-guest not only gains admission to this home...Fact is, the host, Zaccheus, (v.6) “received Him gladly”. He seems thrilled to offer hospitality to this famous but controversial figure...even though Zaccheus barely knows Him. And the welcome he extends to this strange rabbi makes great changes in the host. So what's happening here and what does it have to do with us?

This is a story about desire...it's about a great hunger and thirst we all have for acceptance...but more than acceptance (that's a sort of passive way of putting it) we all want recognition and deep affirmation...we want what the Bible calls “glory”. This is about a man who appeared to have it...to have it all but on closer inspection doesn't have it...and then GETS it.

It's a story (like so many episodes in Luke) about a different way of seeing ourselves, others and God and how this new way of seeing is a key to getting this desire for recognition or deep affirmation or glory satisfied...and what happens in a life when that craving IS being satisfied.

Let's look at : 1) On Seeing This Wee Silly Man 2) On Seeing Jesus Christ 3) On Seeing and Being Seen.

This guy is powerful and wealthy and commanding and influential and connected (like the man we met last week who dressed in purple). And Luke is showing us that in the Kingdom Jesus Christ is advancing, people who are obviously weak/broken and outcast may NOT be what they seem (like Lazarus whom we saw last week). In Jesus Christ's administration, people normally excluded and dismissed may be included! AND people who are clearly rich and powerful and blessed and worthy, they too may not BE what you assume them to be.

Every human society has some sort of caste system, some way to determine a hierarchy, but the human social order is often irrelevant and even opposite to the Kingdom of God. And Luke is describing all these scenes to demonstrate our need for a new value system, *a new way of looking at the world.*

In today's text the words "see/look/behold/saw" are repeated in vv. 2-3-4-7-8. Clearly the subtext is - a new way of seeing. When you see Zaccheus, the tax-man, he's obviously wealthy, but on second thought he's really needy, and yet by the end of this episode he's way better-off than we ever thought!

Let's look at the Zaccheus of the first glance-Zaccheus the obviously wealthy influential man. In this one verse we learn a lot.

Luke describes him five ways: in v. 2 – a man (a big advantage in that world) his name Zaccheus means "pure". It's a Jewish name (mentioned in the Jewish history books called Maccabees); he's a tax collector; he's a chief - some sort of superintendent; and (fifth) he's rich. Now the reason for stacking up these descriptors in this verse is to tell us: this guy was very obviously powerful—anyone could see it. It was very apparent to any observer. If that was all there was... we'd be very impressed! But wait...

Not far below the surface there were some real problems with this obviously powerful man. And this really isn't unusual. A lot of people who are obviously wealthy and powerful and famous and happy and secure are *really not what they appear to be.* Luke is telling us take another look, a deeper look.

I have an article about the world of luxury retailing (Mimi Swartz- The New Yorker magazine). It's about some of the customers shopping for clothing and accessories by the world's top designers - customers worth tens of millions/hundreds of millions and the quote that got me was this,

"What many of these customers need appears to be provided more often by the salesperson than by the product. They want someone to affirm their importance, their

fabulous lives and their flawless taste. These customers want ...attention, they want inner peace - all of which are more difficult to deliver than a \$600 sweater."

The article was about a young woman, Victoria, one of the top salespeople for a top clothing line at the Manhattan store and she tells her secrets. She's basically a very skillful affirmer. She doesn't ask, "May I help you?" No, she says, "Wow! Great scarf!" She affirms them on their way in, while they're in the store and on their way out-and they pay her big money. She has tapped into a reality that even the wealthiest, most envied, beautiful, successful, powerful people are deeply starving for glory, they crave someone to tell them, "You are alright - you are worthwhile - you have good taste - I notice you, you are significant!"

Ya just have to look a little below the surface.

And Luke is showing us here - even people with the right heritage/connections/jobs/money are as needy as drug addicts, lepers, powerless widows, little children and outcasts.

So Luke goes on to look a little below the surface of Zaccheus' life-the rich man is really needy.

For one thing - he's so obviously powerful but he can't make visual contact with Jesus - can't see. Now you may know the children's song, "Zaccheus was a wee little man-a wee little man was he'. But this word "stature" is used 8 times in the NT and every other time it refers to age or maturity.

And there's at least a possibility that Zacchaeus wasn't a small guy - just a young guy - and the reason he couldn't get to the front of the crowd was because no one respected him.

And even if he was "a wee little man"- the point is: the crowd is against him. He may be a powerful "chief tax collector" but no one likes him or respects/loves him.

And this is pretty clear by the way the crowd evaluates him in v. 7, "a man who is a sinner". "He may have it all together but he is all alone - people avoid him...We obey him...but we don't LIKE him!"

And he's a silly little man (assuming that he is little). He has no dignity. He climbs up in a tree like a ...monkey...like a child...so immature ("chief-tax collector—my eye!!")

And lastly - this powerful man (who's really silly and lonely) he KNOWS why he doesn't have any friends — he's dishonest. He's swindled people—tax collecting was a franchise - some charged more than the Roman government required them to charge. And Zacchaeus lived in Jericho, a pretty wealthy suburb of Jerusalem; it was a sweet assignment for a taxman...lots of money there! And Zacchaeus had apparently helped himself to more than his share.

But of course the beauty and hope of this story is that the rich man—who below the surface is really a needy man, ends up rich beyond what we could ever imagine.

If all people, lepers and wealthy people alike, are all looking for glory, if we were all made for glory, if we crave attention, if we all thirst to be noticed and seen and acknowledged and affirmed by a powerful voice that says “You’re alright, you’re significant ...worthwhile!” If that’s what we all want most and if having that affirmation is what really makes a person rich—well then Zaccheus has just become rich beyond measure.

The most powerful voice that ever spoke, the Voice that spoke the worlds into being has just affirmed Zaccheus. Jesus Christ sees Zaccheus—the silly man, scurrying down the dusty road, up in that silly tree. “And Jesus when He came to the place looked up and said, ‘Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at YOUR house.’”

Jesus is saying, “I want to have a true and intimate friendship with you - to dine with you at table - to abide with you.”

And this is much more than the salesperson saying, “Wow! Great Scarf!” – a flattery with strings attached.

This is the Voice that every soul longs to hear but which very few find. Most settle for some counterfeit voice which may be good (like the voice of a spouse or a boyfriend/girlfriend, coworker, or a peer group or parent...audience).

But some find that none of these voices will ultimately satisfy—only one voice will do—and Zaccheus heard that voice. And the voice filled Zaccheus up! Zaccheus received joy—“He received him gladly”—that’s Luke’s way of saying, “The joy of the Kingdom came to Zaccheus and in that joy Zaccheus was truly rich!” That voice acknowledges him, defends him and recognizes him as a child of Abraham...a receiver of grace (like Abraham!).

Now this passage is about seeing. The whole BOOK is about a new way of seeing, lepers and Samaritans and tax collectors/thieves and pesky children. Look again! *THEY* may be a lot closer to the Kingdom than you think. Look at Zaccheus in a new way.

But ultimately, Luke wants us to see Jesus Christ in a new way. In this passage, Jesus looks at first like a spectacle - people are crowding in just to gawk at Him - they want to see stuff happen - they've heard about miracles and cool stuff and they're all spectators.

But look again—see? That’s what Zaccheus did—looked again! You could miss it, but Luke’s very intentional in v. 3 “And he (Zaccheus) was seeking to see who Jesus was.”

Not just trying to see Jesus but “*seeking*” to really see who He was. It wasn’t a curiosity quest or a desire for entertainment that drove this dignified powerful rich man to run down the road and climb a tree. He was “*seeking to see*” who Jesus was.

This is what Jesus Christ honors—He honors it today. If you really want to see who Jesus Christ is—He will show you. If you’re just a curiosity seeker or if you dismiss Him as just another religious leader, then you’ll remain a *member of the nameless/faceless crowd*.

Let’s consider also Jesus Christ (in this episode) as One who is both in need and in charge. He is the God-Man and in His human-ness, He needs a place to stay. He’s the only God who humbles Himself and becomes needy. He’s not the way religions present their gods. He comes in humility. He rides an unbroken donkey and rather than buck and bite, it submits to His humility as if to say, “Ah! Here is the one Son of Adam who can be trusted!” He says to the promiscuous Samaritan woman (John 4) “Give me a drink”. He puts Himself in a subordinate position.

Being willing to receive from someone is very, very difficult for a proud person. It keeps a lot of people from becoming Christians (and from becoming spiritually rich): they won’t admit that they have need. Jesus Christ, though, is not a proud person. He can receive—He says, “I must stay at your house.”

And this is actually more-than-meets-the-eye too! He’s in need *but also in charge!* The taxman calls Him “Lord” (8).

Jesus says, “For today, I must stay at your house.” And when Jesus Christ says that, He’s telling Zaccheus, “This is my mission! I must carry it out! I have come to enter into the lives of people—to abide with them in their homes. I’ve not come simply to tell people how to live and what to do to be saved—I’ve come to seek and save, to enter in... I must!”

The use of the word “*today*” is also important for Luke. It signifies crisis, THE moment when things happen: “Today in the city of David is born a Savior”; “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”; “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”. And here Jesus says, “Today I must stay at your house” and “Today salvation has come to this house.”

Zaccheus is almost like the world in miniature. Jesus Christ is saying to the whole world, “Today, I must stay in your house...I must take on flesh today and dwell among you...I must live IN YOUR PLACE today...I must obey for you and then take your penalty TODAY...I am come to seek and save the lost...TODAY ... and I must move IN with you, abide with YOU. I want to give you a new identity...will YOU entertain Me?”

It’s Jesus Christ asserting His authority. He’s calling Zaccheus and calling US to see Him. He’s saying, “Will YOU receive Me gladly?” “Will YOU put Me in charge?” “Will YOU receive My grace, My Lordship, My whole person...TODAY?”

Now a few final words on seeing and being seen: We all want to be seen. We want to be noticed. It starts with “look Mom...no hands!” We want it from our parents and peers and teachers and later from our coworkers and spouses. We even want it from ourselves! But only one Voice will give you what you really want. It’s the Voice of God...and only Jesus Christ can secure that evaluation you crave.

The Father says of Him, “THIS is My beloved Son; in Him I am well pleased” and only by being “In Christ” can that evaluation be yours. As He claimed Zaccheus and even defended Him against his accusers, Jesus says to all who believe, “I have lived and died and risen for YOU – abide in Me and I in YOU... MY life, death and resurrection are credited to YOU and that makes YOU the apple of the Father’s eye. Rest in that! The applause of heaven is YOURS because of Me!”

I love how Paul puts it, “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God...” (Gal. 4.9) God knows me. He sees everything about me even the worst...and yet because of Jesus Christ, He knows me and loves me.

That truth, as I enjoy it and receive it daily, THAT BECOMES MY MOTIVATION FOR LIFE, for obedience for resisting sin...That voice is what I really crave.

When Zaccheus got it...and received it...when he trusted...it liberated him to give his money away...to face his faults and crimes and to seek reconciliation with people who hated him and whom he had mistreated.

And in the same way, to the degree that I am living out of this new identity, I can be liberated for radical generosity and a security not slavishly dependent on how others like me or even how I like myself. Because I hear the Voice and it matters more than anything else!