

Lent 4 2010

THE SCRIPTURE READINGS

The Old Testament Lesson (read responsively) **Psalm**
49:5-15

5 Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me--

6 those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches?

7 No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him--

8 the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough--

9 that he should live on forever and not see decay.

10 For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others.

11 Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves.

12 But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

13 This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. Selah

14 Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions.

15 But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself. Selah

The Gospel Lesson

Luke 19:1-10

1 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."

What is on your “To Do List” for tomorrow? I’m sure it is important. It could be work, or it could be chores around the house, or other errands you have planned. This is Spring Break, it could be a family time. So, I have a question for you. Where does God fit in tomorrow for you?

Zacchaeus was, if anything, a busy man. He wasn’t just the tax collector for Jericho, one of the main gateways to Judea’s largest city of Jerusalem. Zacchaeus was chief tax collector. He had important jobs to attend to. He had important people to see. He had money to make. It’s just that tax collectors took from the Jews and gave to the Romans, or the king. To accomplish these important things they often had to forget about other people.

Where do you think God was on Zacchaeus’ “To do list?” We don’t know that Zacchaeus was a total unbeliever. In fact, that wouldn’t make sense if he was so interested in Jesus that this important man was willing to do the undignified act of climbing a tree to see this prophet, this man of God, this person people were saying might be the Messiah. It’s just that other more important and urgent things usually came first.

But, deep down, Zacchaeus knew it. He knew God had a claim on him. He knew he had not always served God or loved others. When could he find time? But, deep in his soul Zacchaeus knew he was neglecting the eternal things of the Lord of the universe for the important and urgent things of today.

In fact, not only did Zacchaeus know his eternal neglect, others knew it too.

Did you see Sam in our skit for tonight? He could be a modern day Zacchaeus. In fact, he could be any one of us. How often do we neglect the eternal things of God for the important things of this life? Perhaps Americans have more opportunity to neglect the eternal things of God, because we have more THINGS in this life to take our attention and time. And we know it, don’t we. If we are honest we regret our neglect of God.

For Zacchaeus, in spite of his failings, he couldn’t help but be interested in this prophet, this possible Messiah. He had to see him. But, for Jesus to walk right up to his tree, for Jesus to look him in the eye and call him by name, for Jesus the prophet, the Messiah, to come to his house, that was overwhelming. Zacchaeus may have neglected God, but God did not forget Zacchaeus. Surprisingly to him (and even more to those around Him), Zacchaeus was important enough for Jesus himself to seek Zacchaeus out. This changed everything! No wonder Zacchaeus was willing to give up so much money he had accumulated, because of the presence of Jesus.

That happens to sinners today. Jesus didn’t just seek out Zacchaeus, he seeks you and me. He comes in spite of the fact we’ve neglected Him. And even though we have neglected Jesus, He sacrifices, He suffers, He dies for us so that our neglect is forgiven. He loves us when we have forgotten Him. He calls us from what we think is important, to what is really important, to our relationship with Him, and to godly love for others.

We don’t deserve such love and forgiveness. It truly is surprising. That surprise can change

our lives.

Greed - Can become so consumed with our consumption that we miss the main thing - the Lord

So consumed can ignore the people God made around us.

It is not the money, or power, or accomplishments that are important, but to God, I'm important.

(Before the Sermon) (Two friends meet by chance.)

Jim: Hi Sam

Sam: Hey, Jim.

Jim: So, are you and Judy and the kids coming to Bible Study tonight?

Sam: I told you I was going to . . . but, I'm too busy. Something came up.

Jim: Hmm. What's that.

Sam: You know I've got this big project at work. Well, the governor's office thinks this will be great for the state. I'm meeting with important people from the governor's office tonight. And Jim, this could be that project that puts Judy and I over the top. If this works out it could be really lucrative and our retirement could *really* be comfortable.

Jim: Sounds, important. But, you've been busy, and time with God and your family is important too.

Sam: I think this other is for the family. Besides, this meeting with the governor's people is too important and that other stuff will have to wait. And, to be honest, Jim, sometimes Bible Study . . . well, you know. I believe in God, but if I really take that seriously I might have to make some major changes. Right when everything is just about to fall together I don't want to ruin the future.

Jim: We'll miss you.

Sam: No time for that now, Jim. This big project, the financial possibilities, the prestige of making this work. . . can't do it now.

(After the sermon)

Jim: Hi Sam

Sam: Hey, Jim.

Jim: So, how did the big meeting go last week?

Sam: Well, it's an opportunity alright. But, I'm not sure if the opportunity for me or others. I'm not sure about the governor, but I think those folks from his office I met with might be wanting me to do the work and take the risks so they can get the credit. I'm a little disappointed and a little overwhelmed. If I keep pursuing this I'm not sure there is an end. What about time for me, or my family, or other important things?

Jim: Well, it is Friday night. There is Bible Study at our house. You and Judy and

the kids are still invited.

Sam: Hmm. I'd love for our family to have time together with you guys. But, you know how I feel about Bible Study.

Jim: Sam, you've explained your concern. Actually what happens at Bible Study is just sort of family time around God's Word. A couple of us families unwind, share, spend time together. The kids can play. We'll eat some, play some, pray some. And, we'll have some Bible Study. God will be there to bind us to one another, and to Himself.

Sam: God, huh?

Jim: Think about it this way, Sam. You know those important people at that big meeting you had last week. Well, it sounds like they had lots of hopes for what you could do for them. Tonight, God comes to us, and He gives us what we need. Sam, you're not important to God because of what you can do for Him. You're important to Him because of who you are, one of His children.

Sam: I hadn't thought of it that way.

Jim: God didn't say, "Sam, if you do this big job for me, you might be important." God sent Jesus to die for us because He loves us and wants what's best for us.

Sam: Hmm. You know, Jim, those folks from the Governor's office are important. But even I know God is so much more important. And, I hadn't ever looked at it that way before. God didn't come looking for me first to do something for me. He came to give Himself for me, and to me. I'm not sure there is anyone else like that in my life.

Jim: God's love is amazing.

Sam: This might just change a lot of things for me. . . (pause) So, what time tonight, Jim? And Jim, . . . God. He'll really be there?

Jim: He's here right now, Sam. And yes, he'll be there tonight.