

The Rich Young Ruler and Zacchaeus

Luke 18:18-23; 19:1-10

(Introduction)

What kind of person is a Christian? Wouldn't it be an interesting theme if we conducted a survey in Ginza or Marunouchi? The general image many people have of Christians is that they are serious people, people who live righteous lives, people who believe in God and go to church on Sundays, people with weak hearts who believe in God, just ordinary people, people who are intrusive and self-righteous...etc. If you ask Christians, they will think about their identity.

Since January, we have been focusing on the Gospel of Luke, comparing and contrasting pairs of people who understand the gospel and those who do not (oppose, hinder, and do not understand the gospel). We have been looking at what the gospel is and what it means to walk in the gospel. We will soon be concluding this series. So, I ask you, "What is the gospel?"

Today we will focus on two people who have a great deal of wealth in common. In fact, these two people lived very different lives, and yet they were equally far away from God. Why is that? I think it would be very interesting to compare their similarities and differences.

Luke 18:18-23; 19:1-10

Look at two people who seem to be the same yet different, who seem to be opposites yet united. As we compare and contrast the rich leader and the tax collector, Zacchaeus, let us look at what the gospel of Jesus is from three points of view. First, there are two ways to depart from God: to do right and depart from God, or to do wrong and lose God. Through this we will look at what is the sin that separates us from God.

-Second, I would like to focus on the power of money that took the hearts of these two men. Just as gold took their hearts and ruled their lives, there is a substitute for God (our Savior) that captures and controls our hearts. Shine a light on the idols of the heart that control you and ruin your life. It is something we all have.

And third, we will address the better third way, which is to turn away from sin and turn to God, to be freed from the idols of the heart and experience forgiveness and healing. That is the gospel of Christ who transformed Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who was never saved by those around him and was considered a cursed scoundrel by God, into a new man.

1. Two ways to be separated from God

Ordinarily we think that if we do something bad, a sin, a criminal act, etc., we sin and are far away from God. Zacchaeus, the tax collector in Luke 19, is a prime example. Tax collectors were the scraps of officials employed by the Roman Empire to collect taxes in

various areas under Roman control. They collected tolls and customs duties and paid them to the Roman Empire.

But he was more than just a leader in the tax collection system. He became a very wealthy man because he was protected by the Roman army, which forced him to collect exorbitant taxes above and beyond what the government required of him to make his fortune. He was able to fleece people out of their money and put it in his own pocket. And not secretly, but openly!

In modern parlance, they are gangsters or yakuza. He was a gangster who was into making money by bankrupting people (or sending them to their deaths). Why Zacchaeus chose such a life is not described. But it was the lure of money that made him abandon his family and friends and betray his town's community.

As we have just seen, Zacchaeus is a supremely immoral and wicked man, the head of sinners who torment people and violate God's law. What he does is clearly sinful in everyone's eyes. He is a selfish and self-centered criminal who must be judged.

But compared to this Zacchaeus, what about the rich leader in Luke 18? He seems like a moral, impeccably good man. He is trying to live life righteously. He is a spiritual person seeking eternal life. You could even say that he is a believer who is hungry and thirsty for God.

Moreover, when he was asked by Jesus about the Ten Commandments, he could answer, "I have kept them all since I was a boy." According to the Gospel of Matthew, he is called a "young man. In first century A.D. Palestine, if he was young and rich, he must have been the son of a good family with wealth inherited from his parents. And as "leader," he must have been a member of parliament or some other important social post. He was the envy of all, and at the time, he was considered to be the ideal blessed by God.

What must not be overlooked, however, is that he had no assurance of eternal life, no sense of being blessed. Eternal life does not simply mean the enduring life that continues after death.

"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3)

In other words, an intimate and eternal communion with God in which we are accepted, loved, forgiven, and protected by God. This is where joy and fulfillment come from. Relationships and communities are built of humility, reconciliation, and forgiveness based on trust and love. It is also called the Kingdom of God.

This rich leader was walking in moral righteousness, yet his life was empty and far from God. Why is this? Why is it that we are so blessed and yet we do not feel the touch of blessing?

-We modern people have jobs, money, families, freedom, and a reasonably good life, but we don't really feel happy. We are tired of being lethargic, empty, and just living life, and we realize that we don't have a real life to live, a real life to be passionate about. I am like this rich leader.

It is because we are far from God. We have money, relationships, jobs, and a righteous moral life. But we are deceived by it. We don't have God. In fact, our souls are empty. We try to somehow fill that emptiness with money, jobs, success, family, relationships, and all those good things, but only God can fill the huge spiritual black hole. Without God, it is impossible! Money, work, success, family, relationships, they are the sins that separate us from God.

Therefore, there are two ways to depart from God. One is to separate from God by doing evil, and the other is to separate from God by doing good. Do you get it? Why is it that righteous and moral people are often cold and angry? It is because they accumulate good things and never attain true happiness.

2. Idols of the heart

By the way, even though the leader and Zacchaeus lived opposite lives, they had one thing in common. They were rich. The young leader rejected the invitation of Jesus because of money, even though he could have eternal life, the Kingdom of God that he wanted, if he would share his money with the poor and follow Jesus.

Luke 18:22,23, "When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich."

Zacchaeus, on the other hand, did many evil things and sacrificed many things in order to become rich. He has forsaken a life of moral righteousness and lost his good reputation that people recognize. He is a hated man throughout the city of Jericho. His family and relatives would have disassociated with him as an unclean sinner and hated him.

Luke 19:3, "And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on the account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature."

The usual interpretation is that he was too short to be seen, but some biblical scholars point out that "short" can be interpreted as "young in years". In other words, he was a young man who became the leader of the tax collectors, a pawn in the Roman Empire, and a tormentor to the people of the city.

So both sides are obsessed with gold. Gold is also a divine invention, and gold in itself is a good thing. It makes life convenient, helps people and contributes to society. Unfortunately, both the young leader and Zacchaeus have lost the most important God

and have become slaves to gold. I know you may not agree that the young leader is a slave to money, let alone Zacchaeus. Look at the introduction to this episode.

Luke 18:18, 19, "And a ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.'"

This leader called Jesus "the Good Teacher," but Jesus refused to be called that, saying, "There is no one good but God alone." This exchange implies that Jesus is not the good teacher that the leader thinks he is.

In other words, a good teacher, in the mind of the young ruler, represents the values of this world. He is someone who skillfully teaches the lifestyle, social customs, and moral teachings that are honored in this world. The rich man is a supporter of the legalistic teaching that God has blessed us and that we can obtain eternal life through good moral conduct.

As a result, the poor are looked down upon and the weak are not helped. The leaders clearly refused to spend money on the poor. They have no compassion, are selfish, and are cold toward the poor. What would have happened if they had accepted Jesus' message?

Acts 4:34-37, "There was not a needy person among them, for as many who were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Brothers and sisters, money can be a representative idol (a powerful substitute for God) that dominates our minds and lives and enslaves us. We try to gain security and satisfaction by saving and spending money instead of God. We try to appear better than others and more important to society. They seek to seize and control people's hearts and minds by using money. Money will make them gain power and make them better than others.

But it makes you not need a Savior. You think you can wield God-like power, and you don't even think of people as people. On the other hand, you are always afraid of losing money, frustrated, full of anxiety, and nervous that you can never fail. This is the typical idol of the heart. That is why leaders could not spend money generously for the poor. It is not because they are stingy. It was because they were afraid of losing their God-like power. How about you?

3. A Better Third Way: The Gospel of Christ

But Zacchaeus' story beautifully illustrates how a man who had left God and was clinging to the idols of his heart can be remade anew through Christ. It is difficult for us to

let go of the precious things that make us happy (the idols of our hearts), but what in the world happened to him?

Luke 19:5, "And 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.'"

This is a totally unexpected and pleasant word. This is good news (gospel). Gospel: it is a word of love from God, a reversal of judgment, a message of salvation brought by Jesus. Zacchaeus, in the eyes of those around him, is a man who needs neither God nor religion. He is a worldly scoundrel who seeks money and success and torments people. But Jesus took notice of Zacchaeus. Yes, he did. God calls us to this.

"Let me fulfill your request. You are exhausted. You have struggled for money, for success, for recognition. You may have even committed evil for the sake of it. You have sinned. I know you struggle, you are conflicted, you are troubled. You need to do something about it, but you don't know what to do. Let me help you solve it."

Jesus was able to judge Zacchaeus because He is righteous and holy. He could judge you for your sins, self-centeredness and greed. The people of Jericho then, as well as everyone today, generally think this way. They think that because they are living righteously and modestly, they are entitled to a blessed life. But people like Zacchaeus are the ones who should be judged by God.

Jesus does not. He loved even this evil one and had mercy on the unbeliever. This was radically different from the thinking of ordinary people and religious leaders in the town of Jericho. Jesus is here calling for a serious correction in our view of God. God is not the God of the successful, the rich, the powerful or the rulers. He loves the failed, the poor, the weak, and the ruled.

Luke 19:8, "And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.'"

This is amazing! Someone who thought life depended on money can let go of it. "I thought that social success was the blessed and wonderful life, but now I am free from the curse of money (the idol of the heart)." Not only do he want to pay back what he cheated, he wants to pay it back fourfold and give half of his wealth to the poor.

Once again, I would like to ask you all a question. How did this change occur in Zacchaeus? Let's take a closer look at verse 7.

"And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'"

The murmuring, grumbling, and complaining of the townspeople of Jericho is the key to unlocking this. Jesus was accused by the people of Jericho. The townspeople

complained about Jesus' acceptance of Zacchaeus. Hearing that murmuring and complaining brought about a definite change in Zacchaeus' life.

In other words, Jesus made the "sacrifice" of being hated and reviled by the people of Jericho. Jesus loved Zacchaeus, even though the whole town hated him. He declared him his friend. When Zacchaeus was touched by the sacrificial love of Jesus, he no longer felt that he needed the wealth he had amassed. Not only that, he wanted to make amends.

Brothers and sisters, the gospel is the love of forgiveness that comes through the sacrifice of Jesus. Our lives are transformed according to the degree to which we know the sacrificial love of Christ. The deeper we know the gospel of Christ, the more we humble ourselves and repent, acknowledging our sins and idols. At the same time, our hearts are broken by Christ's selfless love to the point of giving his life on the cross, and we are filled with joy and gratitude that we are loved and forgiven more than we could ever expect. This is the life-changing power of the Gospel!