

Explore the Bible: Sinners?

March 23, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for April 11 focuses on Luke 19:1-10.*

It's a heart-gripping line in this text. When it became apparent that Jesus was going to spend the night in the home of a man he'd never met, Zacchaeus, the crowd responded with no little spiritual prejudice. "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

The text actually describes their back talk as "muttering." Kind of under the breath. Saying what they believed to everyone else but not loud enough to be held accountable for verbalizing the thought.

Guest of a 'sinner'

Before we rush on by what seem to be more insignificant words in light of the overall conversation, we should take note that the people in the crowd, who didn't think of themselves as sinners, made the point that Jesus was going to be the guest of a sinner.

We believe Jesus was God in the flesh, God incarnate. So, that means God had come to this earth to be our guest. A guest is a patron of an establishment or home. The guest is dependent on the host making available whatever is needed, including the basics of food and shelter.

Jesus, God in the flesh, was putting himself at the mercy of Zacchaeus' hospitality, dependent on his provisions that night. If we decide we want to learn who God is, we'd make a terrible mistake to bypass this text.

In coming to this world, Jesus had put himself at the mercy of mankind. It cost him his life eventually. Nonetheless, it didn't change the trajectory of

God's way of insuring our redemption.

Jesus didn't pass by us in a convertible while standing up and only waving at the crowd. He climbed out of the car, got down off of his perch and warmly, hand to hand, greeted those who had come to see him.

Jesus comes knocking

Zacchaeus wanted to "see who Jesus was." So, he repositioned himself so that, whatever it took, he'd see Jesus for himself. Jesus wanted to know this "chief tax collector," the one who had enriched himself at the expense of the most vulnerable. So, he stopped the parade of praise-givers and spoke directly to Zacchaeus: "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

Again, before Jesus made our redemption possible, he made himself our guest in our world. It will take a lifetime to unpack the meaning in that one thought. Jesus wants to be your guest, in your house, and mine, too. Incredible!

We often ask people to "come to Jesus." The real question is whether we'll welcome Jesus when he knocks on our door.

There is something else here that is so easy to overlook. The people had no respect for this man, a chief tax collector. In fact, when they reported what Jesus was doing, they said Jesus was going "to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

Redeemed sinners, called by name

I once heard of a minister who was applying for a position on the staff of a church. In his job interview, the pastor asked him if there were any moral failures in his life that he should know about. That minister-applicant sat forward in his chair, leaned in the direction of the pastor and said, "I am a

moral failure.”

Perhaps every person in that crowd had been cheated by Zacchaeus. It was so bad, they no longer referred to him by his proper name. They referred to him by what they considered his worst moral failure, a “sinner.”

We will never know or be a meaningful part of a faith community until we stop naming people by their sin instead of calling them by the name given them by their family.

In earlier years, a few people would say of me, “Oh, he’s that divorced preacher.” Finally, I took enough courage to announce from a pulpit that I’m not a divorced preacher. I’m a happily married preacher (24 years now) and the father of two sons and a grateful follower of Jesus trying every day to discover more about who Jesus is and what he would have me do with my life.

Except for Jesus, no one who witnessed this event called Zacchaeus by his name. Jesus was the only one who used Zacchaeus’ name. We should follow Jesus’ example. He saw us sinners as God’s beautiful creation and refused to name us anything but God’s children, name by name. Being Zacchaeus’ guest and Jesus calling him by name transformed Zacchaeus’ soul.

Jesus’ life, death and resurrection has empowered us to accomplish the same in the lives of those others have written off as worthless.

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