

What a blessing it was to study Chap. 18. It had all the ingredients for a spiritually hungry soul. All of the 6 sections are intertwined as a result of Luke's effort in orderly writing this Gospel. We'll see how beautifully Luke under the inspiration of the Spirit sequences Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus in few moments. This person resembles the characteristics of some people in Chap. 18. It's for a reason that Luke puts this encounter at this place. So let's rewind and refresh our understanding of the Chapter we just finished studying. This will enhance our understanding of the Gospels, the character and mission of Jesus and help us to appreciate the writer's work in bringing to the Gentiles (us) the Good News.

1. Dr. Luke starts with couple of parables, one addressing **the persecuted saints** ("the elect") to build them up and to encourage them to pray and not lose heart in the midst of adversity (**18:1**) - it's one of the misunderstood passages. The context is not praying for our daily needs but for God to bring justice, avenging for the blood of the martyrs, punishing those wicked who persecute His church.
2. The other parable is addressed to **unbelievers characterized by self-righteousness, egocentric (5 "I's") and contemptuous** ("to make no account of", attribute no value to others) attitude to understand their own spiritual condition, human depravity, the wrath of God and the need for the propitiation to atone for the sin (**18:13**). Humility before God is the pre-requisite to recognizing one's need for salvation.
3. Then it's about the characterized teaching to **His disciples** using children and infants on who enters the kingdom of God. Notice the parents who didn't know Jesus the way the disciples knew brought them to be blessed but the disciples who knew the love and compassion of Jesus kept rebuking them to be admonished by Jesus. Even today we find believers who are so impatient and insensitive to children especially when it comes to their spiritual needs contrary to what **Deut 6:6,7** commands to do *"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."* We focus on our own spiritual growth or give many excuses not to be part of the children's ministry but Jesus said *"Let the children come to me and do not hinder them".* *"Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that Sunday school is intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most natural condition of things is for Christian parents to train up their own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* (C.H. Spurgeon). This is the lasting legacy we leave behind as parents and as ministers. **Bring your children to Jesus and lead other children to Jesus, if only you knew who He is!**
4. Luke writes the conversation or teaching of Jesus to the Rich Young Ruler. A well-respected vigorous young man with a solid reputation, enormous wealth and well-versed in the Law came so close yet left so far away. A man who recognized his spiritual poverty and life's emptiness came to the One who could satisfy but went home sad rejecting the Savior, the Christ. Even today we see the similarity. Just because we read the Word of God or pray to Jesus or go to Church or even be involved in the ministry doesn't mean we are saved. As Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3, one must be born again, not physically but spiritually. *"If you are born twice then you die once but if you are born once you'll die twice."* (2nd death mentioned in Rev 21:8). The young man's heart was filled with earthly treasures and didn't have room for the Savior. C. S. Lewis said that *"the unfortunate thing about taking the wrong path is that it not only doesn't take you to your destination, but it takes you farther away from the place you desire."* How true! This man took the wrong way instead of taking "The Way". He desired to inherit the eternal life but the way he took not only deprived him of that but also took him to a place he never desired to go and that was hell. Though it involves the young man and others, primarily and significantly it's about "God". **God is the only being who is good (18:19) – defines the nature of God (there is nothing good apart from Him) and God does the humanly impossible (18:27) - defines the power of God which is the climactic statement in the narrative.** He is El Shaddai (God Almighty)! Though outwardly it seems that the man rejected God but v.27 tells us it was God who rejected him (**Jer 30:21, John 6:44**) and so he left the way he came. **Salvation is a Divine act and no human can contribute to it.** *"If any man ascribes anything of salvation, even the very least thing, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learned Jesus Christ rightly" – Martin Luther*
5. In the midst of addressing the disciples and the self-righteous, "holier than thou" attitude Jews and teaching the Spiritually bankrupt, curiously saddened, eternally condemned Ruler, Jesus calls for a **"special" meeting with the 12** including the one who will eventually betray Him. He foretells or prophecies about His own sufferings, death and resurrection. This is His 6th and the last time telling them what's going to happen during the "Passion" week. The Apostles heard the new revelation about the fulfillment of all the prophecies in the OT and that the Gentiles were active participants or miscreants in the death of the "Son of Man". So

far they thought it was the Jews especially the “religious elite” including the chief priests and scribes will kill Him (**Luke 9:22**) but now for the very first time they came to know that the Gentiles ie Romans during that time will be “partners in crime”. What was their response? Absolutely nothing. Why? What part of the prophecy didn’t they understand? Every part of it because it was divinely hidden from them and so they didn’t grasp it (v.34). God willing, we’ll study on that profound verse next time.

6. Finally, Luke writes about the divinely orchestrated encounter of Jesus with a blind man named **“Bartimaeus”** which means son of Timaeus (Mark 10:46), who was considered so insignificantly by the society that they never referred to him with his name. He didn’t even have his own identity. He didn’t have a choice. He was not only blind but his physical infirmity forced him to beg to survive. He had to depend on others for everything, considered to be a burden for the family and society, a man believed to be punished by God for his sin – the prevalent belief then and now (John 9). Such a man rejected by people was accepted by the Lord Jesus. It was not coincidence that Jesus went through Jericho or took the road where this blind beggar was sitting. He knew in His omniscience. True to His character of being a compassionate Savior, though suffering and death awaits Him in the hands of merciless sinners in the near future, He accommodated not just the physical but the spiritual healing of a man who was rebuked. Our Lord and our God said **“See”** (a single word in Greek). He was blind but now he sees by the power and grace of our Lord. *v.42 literally in Greek is “you faith has saved you”* as in Eph 2:8. The word sózó (sode'-zo) can be translated as “be made whole”. This word is the root for soter (Savior) and soteria (Salvation) and in NT is used for saving from sin which suggests that this man’s faith in Jesus has saved him from sin, satan and death. **Oh! The Blessed Savior touched this sinner whose soul was flooded with joy as he was made whole!** Is that your testimony too? Contrast that to the ruler – a rich, renowned and religious man who could physically see was spiritually blind but Bartimaeus – a blind, a beggar, a burden (to the society) was physically blind but could now spiritually (and physically) see.

Clara Brooks who wrote hymns like “There is a Balm in Gilead” and “What a Mighty God we serve!” wrote “Arise, He Calleth thee” in 1911 on this passage that goes like this -

Weary, lonely, sad, forsaken,
Humbled to a station low,
Sat a hopeless blind man begging,
By the road to Jericho.
Soon he heard the noise of footsteps,
As of waters rolling nigh;
For the Galilean Prophet
With the throng was passing by.

When he heard that it was Jesus,
Who had healed the sin-sick soul,
Then he called aloud for mercy,
That he, too, might be made whole.
But the multitude rebuked him,
Saying he should silent be;
Yet he only called more loudly,
“Have compassion, Lord, on me!”

Paused the Master for a moment—
“Bring him hither unto Me.”
Someone ran to bear the message:
“Come, arise, He calleth thee!”
Oh, what words of cheer and comfort!
What today could sweeter be
To the weary, sick, and suffering—
“Come, arise, He calleth thee”?

Then as he approached the Master,
Healing virtue to receive,
Jesus said, “Thy faith hath saved thee,
Be it as thou dost believe.”
And the blind man’s eyes were opened,
He had proved the promise true;
Ye, who still in sickness languish,
Lo, the Master calls for you.

If you are here wondering if Jesus loves you like He loved the beggar, please remember God loves and cares for every soul (**John 3:16**). Don't leave this place dejectedly like the Rich Ruler but be like the blind beggar. Spring to Him, throw away the self-righteousness and come to Him. Put your faith in the Lord Jesus and as **Rom 10:13** says **"Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."**

Chapter 19 starts with the story of the "wee little man" Zacchaeus found only in this Gospel. Many of us are familiar with this story and the song based on this but let's dig a little deeper. Let's mature by having solid food, enough of milk.

Location:

Jesus has now crossed the Jordan River and has arrived at Jericho, "the City of Palm Trees". Jericho was about 15 miles north-east of Jerusalem and the road to Jerusalem passes thru Bethany which was about 2 miles from Jerusalem— made famous by our Savior thru the "Parable of the Good Samaritan". 6 days before the Passover, Jesus indeed stopped and stayed at the house of Lazarus who lived in this village called Bethany (**John 12**)

Josephus describes Jericho as the richest part of the country, and calls it a little Paradise. Here grew palm-trees of various kinds, sycamores, the cypress-flower, the myrobalsamum, which yielded precious oil, but especially the balsam-plant. If to these advantages of climate, soil, and productions we add, that it was, so to speak, the key of Judea towards the east, that it lay on the caravan-road from Damascus and Arabia, that it was a great commercial and military centre, and lastly, its nearness to Jerusalem, to which it formed the last 'station' on the road of the festive pilgrims from Galilee and Perea - it will not be difficult to understand either its importance or its prosperity.

And in the streets of Jericho were the pilgrims from Galilee and Perea, priests who have a 'station' here, traders from all lands, who have come to purchase or to sell, or are on the great caravan-road from Arabia and Damascus - robbers and anchorites, wild fanatics (extremist), soldiers, courtiers, and busy publicans (tax collectors) - for Jericho was the central station for the collection of tax and custom, both on native produce and on that brought from across Jordan. It's a busy, multi-cultural, prosperous and prominent city. (When a place is famous for "goods or produce", it attracts 2 kinds of people – robbers and tax collectors, not much different in those days except officially one is legal and other is illegal)

Setting:

Remember this is His final journey to Jerusalem where He'll be crucified. After all, Jesus had just said *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (**Mark 10:45**) He had just instructed the His disciples that if they want to be great then they have to be a servant. A paradoxical statement but nevertheless true. He insisted them to follow His own example. He showed them by serving a blind beggar and here's yet another opportunity for them (and us) to learn. Before heading to the cross He needed to meet with a man who was insignificant to those around him but was significant in the eyes of God. The Divine plan and purpose had to be accomplished in spite of knowing that all of these beneficiaries will desert Him soon, in less than couple of weeks.

Jesus would have been very popular by now as He has just healed a blind man. It's not an every day event to ignore. The miracle was huge. The occasion (Passover) was huge. Bartimaeus and the people who saw the miracle and praised God would have followed Jesus into the city. They would have been anxious to know what's going to happen next. They even though that Jesus is going to Jerusalem to establish the physical kingdom of God by overthrowing the Romans (**19:11**) Also many of the Jews would have started arriving at Jericho to go to Jerusalem for the Passover would have heard and followed this *"Prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee"* (**Matt 21:11**) as well. The entire city would have been excited and exuberant. If we would have been there, we would be in the city gate to welcome this Prophet.

Introduction:

In this setting, Jesus entered Jericho as He had to pass through to reach Jerusalem (**v.1**). Right away Luke introduces this Jewish man named Zacchaeus which means "just" or "righteous" or "pure", very contrary to his nature. You and I know of some people like that. Sometimes that person could be "us". **Luke says this man was a chief tax collector (v.2)**. That was his occupation. Since Jericho is a commercial city, there were a lot of tax collectors, about 10,000 during that time. There were 2 kinds of tax collectors during the Roman times. One kind is called **"gabbai"**. These people are responsible for collecting general taxes on income, real estate, poll etc. There was another kind of tax collectors called **"mokhes"**. These people collected duty on everything. They could be seen where the roads crossed, export/import, tolls on road, harbors, bridges, etc. Zacchaeus was one of these and these **"mokhes"** usually contract it to others because of the volume of work involved. These contractors were called as **"little mokhes"** - Matthew had such an occupation (Matt 9).

The general Jewish public hated these tax collectors. Not only these people were working for the Romans, they also exploited their fellow Jews. They were famous to put a fictitious value on property or income. They

advanced the tax to those who were unable to pay and then charge enormous interest on what had thereby become a private debt. They extorted more than what was due and Jesus even told a tax collector in **Luke 3:13**, *"Collect no more than you are authorized to do"*.

The mokhes made the life of the people miserable. They can stop anyone on the road, open all the bags and letters. (You think it's painful at the airports). They had no compassion at all. They were considered to be traitors. They had no respect in the society and so they were always associated with "sinners", those who were Gentiles, who were not Abraham's descendants. They were not allowed in the synagogues. They didn't have any friends except the "sinners" and was even referred insultingly as a "sinner" (v.7)

And so because of the growth and export of the balsam alone which was used to make perfumes, Zacchaeus would have collected a lot of money as taxes and accumulated lot of wealth. So it's not surprising at all to know that **this man was rich (v.2)**. Luke didn't focus on any other details about this man primarily to show that the life of this man was immensely sinful. It was characterized by sin. If there was a man you don't want to live like or your children to live like, it was Zacchaeus. **It was filled with greed, dishonesty, pride, violence, exploitation, hatred, selfishness** far from what the Law has commanded ie *"Take no interest from him (another Jew) or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you."* (Lev 25:36) or *"you shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Lev 19:18) or what **Micah 6:8** says *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* Being a Jew he would have been aware of it but now defiantly he's living a wretched life. Such was his lifestyle. In fact, many would have mocked at his name. "Pure" for an impure person. The parents had good intention but would have now been disappointed. Jesus had an encounter with such a person. Didn't Jesus say in Luke 5:31 *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."*? This sick man needed to be healed. God knew it. He willed it. He accomplished it.

We'll look at the 7 "C's" in this story. 10 verses and 7 C's.

1. **Curiosity (v.3)**. This man of prominence and power, a chief tax collector heard about this Prophet Jesus who had entered his home-town Jericho. Zacchaeus knew the city like the back of his hand, had to be because of his profession. After all, he won't allow even a fly to escape without paying the taxes. He knew his territory very well, every nook and corner. He must have heard the miracles esp. about Bartimaeus, some of the teachings of Jesus, obviously about His prophecies. May be he heard about Jesus associating with "Tax collectors and sinners" and that one of His disciple was a tax-collector. The crowd was thronging to see this "celebrity" called Jesus. This would have generated an interest and so now Zacchaeus seeks to see who Jesus was. He wished to see Him up close. It might be the only opportunity to see Jesus and he didn't want to miss it for the world, even if it means that there'll be a "loss of revenue". But there was a problem. He was a **short man** and as a result Luke says "he could not see" as the crowd were surrounding Jesus. Who wouldn't want to be next to a Divine healer, a Prophet? All his life, Zacchaeus would have wished that he was taller especially as to intimidate people to pay the taxes. He would have felt bad or inferior about his height. On that day too he would have thought about it. That which was considered a short-coming became a Great blessing in disguise in the end. "Curiosity and simplicity are a sort of preparation for faith" said Calvin.

2. **Conduct (v.4)** – So how did he behave in this occasion? He came up with a smart plan. If he were to see Jesus he should climb a tree which was on the way that Jesus had to pass. The people are not going to let him go to the front. They would despise him. But he was determined and so he runs ahead, farther than the place where Jesus was at that moment and climbed up into a sycamore tree. Jericho was filled with palm and sycamore trees. He found his "perfect" spot. No one will obstruct his view (just like those who watched World Cup to get the glimpse of action). He was curiously waiting to watch Jesus pass by. So unusual, an adult governing official acting like a child, a tax collector who generally avoids the crowd. There was no human reason for a tax collector to seek the Prophet. He wasn't interested in the teaching nor did he need a miracle or money as he was rich. This is clearly the work of God. It's God who made this sinner meet the Savior. This is the whole purpose of Jesus entering Jericho.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (Matt 10:29). God is sovereign. Every single thing that happened or happens or going to happen is orchestrated by God. God is in the intricacies of life. If God works in the life of unbelievers *(And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: [9] concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; [10] concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; [11] concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:8-11))* how much more in the lives of believers for we have become the temple of God. Paul says in **Phil 2:13**, *"for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."* Even the desire ("to will") to do what is good comes from God; but he also works in

the believer to generate actual choices of the good, so that the desires result in actions. Nothing takes God by surprise. Every smallest, insignificant detail of your life is ordained by God. *"All events whatsoever are governed by the secret counsel of God" said John Calvin.* God is in total control! Trust in Him!