

**GLADNESS & GENEROSITY:** Zacchaeus the Tax Collector Luke 19:1-11(NIV)

19 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 because he was short he could not see over 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 the lost".

(Expressions are mine)

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to the Passover Festival, and His final weeks before His crucifixion, and He stops off in Jericho. Zacchaeus hears about it...he must have been so excited, he'll have heard that this Jesus accepts Tax Collectors and prostitutes, maybe just ...maybe ...He might accept me (he might have thought to himself).

He so wanted to see Jesus so much that he climbed a sycamore tree!

It must have knocked him for six when Jesus called him by name to come out of the tree...and the eyes of all those watching too.

Most of you will be here today because Jesus has called YOU by name, or He's calling you right now...don't miss the opportunity He is giving us to welcome Him gladly...at once...just like Zacchaeus.

Our discipleship study on Holy Habits has brought us to a place of realizing that we too can see our churches grow (as in Acts 2) as we follow the life of Jesus today...We've been studying the habits so that we can see how they all flow together and go with us wherever we are...just as Christ is with us always.

Wherever we go, we take the gospel too...when we believe it, live it, eat it, & breathe it. Like Zacchaeus we can die to our old life and begin a new life with the power of the Holy Spirit working through us.

We see in this scripture that Zacchaeus must have been so touched by all that he had heard about Jesus, that he ran ahead of Him...(for surely God had been preparing him)...for Zacchaeus wanted to SEE Jesus.

Once Zacchaeus had heard Jesus call his name he gladly welcomed Him into his home...to a meal...into his work life...nowhere was unavailable to Jesus... from this moment on his life was changed...Jesus accepted him...and he has accepted us too...which invited a response from Zacchaeus, and it invites a response from us...we too need to invite Jesus into every area of our lives, like Zacchaeus did...

We too need to let that excitement and gladness overflow into us by living generous lives... because Jesus has gone out of His way to seek and save those who are lost.

It was an encounter with Jesus that changed Zacchaeus instantly...that changed everything. Generosity overflowed from him...not just a little...a lot...he gave half his wealth away...admitted that he would put things right from his swindling days...with extra on top.

We see this time and time again in scripture, as people have an encounter with Jesus, they readily respond like Zacchaeus did; the blind can see, outcast's are welcomed, and the broken are healed; all margins of society get drawn into this amazing life changing relationship with God. We love because He first loved us.

Tax Collectors were not popular in those days...they were linked frequently in scripture to prostitutes, they were swindlers, cheats...they often added an extra cut for themselves whenever they thought they could. And Zacchaeus was the Chief tax collector...and very rich...hence the reaction of the observing crowd when Jesus chooses Zacchaeus out of all the people in Jericho to visit and eat with.

Maybe we need to observe some notable facts from the scripture:

- Jesus was passing through...but He made time to seek the sinner...
- There were many people there...crowds...but Jesus speaks to this sinner...
- Jesus stopped at 'the spot'...He knew where Zacchaeus would be...
- Jesus knew Zacchaeus' name...
- Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' life...(ponder this)
- Jesus was prepared to eat at the house of a sinner...
- Jesus is a 'NOW MAN'...twice He tells us that something was happening TODAY..
- He knew Zacchaeus heart and repentance were genuine because of his change...Salvation had come to his house that day...
- Remember Zacchaeus was a JEW, but TODAY he got SAVED...
- And then Jesus tells everyone why He's come...to seek and save those who are lost...

Have you ever experienced that wonderful excitement that Zacchaeus experienced? If so...we need to practise remembering it...let it well up the gladness within us so that it flows out into generosity.

The disciples in Acts experienced something so amazing at Pentecost; barriers were broken down between the people, and they started to work together as God's community...Acts 2 tells us they were together as ONE...and they were GLAD...the final climatic event that had been promised had occurred...Jesus' Helper, the Holy Spirit had come...just as He said He would, and He was poured out...and it changed their perception...it made them glad...and they recognised that for things to change within themselves, they were compelled to seek the Holy Spirit's help and guidance to walk the way with Jesus in generosity to others.

Zacchaeus recognises in his encounter with Jesus that he has received undeserved grace; he's been a rogue, an unpleasant character for most of his life. Yet this undeserved

acceptance offered from Jesus changed him forever, he had all he needed...wealth didn't matter anymore.

We need to keep focusing on God, keep reminding ourselves that He is the one who sent His only Son to die for our sins, to make the way for our salvation...and that He conquered death, and rose again...He sent His Holy Spirit to help us live out our life here on earth until He comes again.

We need to encourage each other regularly of the GLADNESS within us... Celebrating gladly for all that God has done...be joyful together...enjoy serving each other...

Do not let our service become a chore...God loves cheerful givers...

Let our generosity speak for itself... 2 Cor 9:11 '...says it will result in thanksgiving to God...'

Gladness leads to Generosity...blessings follow generosity.

The Generosity could be different to each one of us, but we are ALL called to give as we live. We cannot out-give God.

For REFLECTION and RESPONSE:

- Where does this promises and prompting find you today?
- Have you been nudged to generously do something to bless someone else?
- Do you struggle to share things, both tangible and intangible?
- Maybe the thing you need to give is forgiveness to someone or to yourself – or encouragement – or kindness?
- Have you got a family member, neighbour, or friend in need?
- What will your response be?

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