**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**TWO MODELS OF FAITH AND REPENTANCE**

**Luke 18:35-19:10**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we continue our series in the Gospel of Luke. It’s hard to believe that it’s been over a year and a half since we first began. When we first started this series, I had only been your pastor for about four months, and now we are a month away from my two year anniversary. Since then, I’ve preached a little over 60 sermons, and 48 of those sermons have been from Luke’s Gospel. I think it’s safe to say that the overwhelming majority of the sermons I’ve preached in my lifetime have come from Luke.

One of the reasons why I find myself reflecting back on our journey through Luke so far is that we are about to enter the final section of this precious book of the Bible. Remember that there are three main sections in this book that function like Acts in a play, and each of these Acts revolves around Jerusalem. The first Act was about Jesus’ birth and early ministry in the towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem. We saw that Luke’s focus in the first Act was on Jesus’ miraculous power. The second Act, which began in Chapter 9, focused on Jesus’ journey towards Jerusalem and his teaching on what it means to follow him. And now, here in Chapter 19, Jesus will finally reach Jerusalem, where the focus will be on his rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection.

That’s where we’re headed in the next couple weeks. Act Two is coming to a close, and Act Three – the Grand Finale – is about to begin. We’re heading into the stretch run now, and the finish line is in sight.

I must confess that this has made me a little nostalgic. I have seen so much fruit from Luke’s Gospel in my own life and subsequently in the way that I care for all of you as your pastor that it will be hard to say goodbye. I was telling someone earlier this week that, now that we’re near the end, I almost want to start all over again! The reason why I feel this way is that I don’t want to forget the powerful truths that God has given us through this incredible book. I want to review. I want to meditate. I want to remember.

It just so happens that, in God’s providence, Luke felt the same way. As this first century doctor prepared to turn the corner to his third and final Act about the life of Jesus, he thought it would be important to review some of the most important lessons he has recorded for us in the last few chapters. And so, Luke carefully selected two narratives that do precisely that. One is an interaction that Jesus had with a blind man that seems rather insignificant at first, but I guarantee to you that, after this sermon, you will never forget him. The second is the more well-known interaction that Jesus had with Zacchaeus, the short tax collector who climbed a tree so that he could see Jesus. Together, these two narratives focus on the two most important elements of what it means to follow Jesus: faith, and repentance.

The title of this message is **Two Models of Faith and Repentance.** My aim today is to show you that **God Chooses Unexpected People to Model the Christian Life.**

(1) **THE BLIND MAN’S FAITH**

Our text begins in 18:35 with Luke telling us that Jesus “drew near to Jericho”. Jericho was a city and a tax collection center that was situated off the major highway to Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the Capital City of Judea and Jesus’ ultimate destination, was about eighteen miles away. When we keep in mind the three part structure of Luke’s Gospel, you see that verse 35 is Luke’s way of telling us that Act 2 of his gospel (Jesus’ journey towards Jerusalem) is about to close, and Act 3 (Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem) is about to begin.

We also see in Chapter 19:1 that the narrative about Zacchaeus took place as Jesus “entered Jericho and was passing through.” Once again, what happens there takes place in and around Jericho. Luke doesn’t always tell us where Jesus is, so the fact that he does so in both of these narratives tells us that he intends for them to be considered as a unit.

As Jesus drew near to Jericho, Luke tells us that “a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.” This man was not only blind, but poor. He couldn’t work, and he couldn’t provide for himself. The only thing he could do to make it through each day was to beg and hope that people would show him kindness.

While he’s sitting there begging by the roadside, Luke tells us in verse 36 that he heard a crowd going by. Curious as to what the commotion was, he asks some people nearby what was going on. And they told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”

Now, we need to remember that these events are taking place at a time when news spread in a much different way. There was no Twitter or Facebook to inform your social media network about the next big thing. There weren’t even newspapers to spread the latest headlines. The only way that news would pass from place to place was by word of mouth. So when the blind man heard that the crowd was gathering because “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by”, we might expect him to say, “Jesus who? Never heard of him.”

But that’s not what he says. Instead, he immediately cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The blind man knew who Jesus was, because all that Jesus had done – his miracles, his teachings, and the following he had attracted – hadn’t taken place in some remote corner of the world. All of it happened where everyone could see him and hear him. Word about Jesus had spread throughout the region so that no one could miss him. Not even a blind man.

The blind man knew what this meant. He knew that, if Jesus was actually here on the road to Jericho where he sat day after day begging for food and money, then his life could be completely changed. Jesus could heal him. He would finally be able to see again, which meant that he could work again, which meant that his days of begging by the roadside would be over.

So he cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Does that sound familiar? It sounds just like one of the prayers in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector earlier in Chapter 18, doesn’t it? Remember that the Pharisee prayed,

“God, I thank you that I’m not like other men (who are sinners), I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get .”

That law-abiding, self-righteous man went home condemned by God. But the sinful tax collector, who had failed to keep the Law, prayed:

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13)

Jesus tells us that he was the one who went home justified, righteous before God.

What Luke is doing is he’s bringing the parable to life. He’s giving us real life examples of both of the parable’s characters. The rich young ruler, whom we studied last week, was a real life example of the self-righteous Pharisee, and now, here in the blind man, we have a real-life example of the humble, justified tax collector.

There’s clearly more to this blind man than meets the eye. Let’s look at the text and see what else he can teach us.

Luke tells us in verse 39 that “those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent.” This should sound familiar to us as well. It should remind us of what Luke said about the little children, which happened to be immediately after the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector earlier in Chapter 18. People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to bless them. And what did the disciples do when they saw this happening? They rebuked them. They rebuked those parents and those little children, only to be rebuked by Jesus, because the Kingdom of God belongs to little children. Whoever does not receive the Kingdom like a child shall not enter it.”

The disciples didn’t understand this. They thought that the Kingdom of God was for the rich and famous, for the high and exalted. They didn’t think that little children were worth Jesus’ time.

That’s what’s happening here in verse 39. The crowds rebuked the blind man for calling out to Jesus, because they didn’t think he was worth Jesus’ time. Jesus obviously felt otherwise. As the blind man kept crying out, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Luke tells us in verse 40 that “Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ He said, ‘Lord, let me recover my sight.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.’”

This phrase “your faith has made you well” is literally “your faith has *saved* you.” Jesus isn’t just talking about physical well-being. He’s talking about spiritual well-being. The blind man’s faith in Jesus had justified him before God.

In other words, the blind man isn’t only a real-life example of the humble, justified tax collector. He’s also a real-life example of a man who received the Kingdom like a child! He came to Jesus like a little child crying out for help again and again, because like a child, he knew he was completely helpless. He knew he couldn’t save himself. That’s why Jesus saved him. He saved him because the blind man knew he couldn’t save himself.

This nameless blind man is proving to be an extraordinary individual. When we want to know what it means to have a child-like faith, we’re meant to think of him. When we want to know what it looks like to cry out to God for mercy so that he might justify us by grace, we’re meant to think of him. This poor, begging, blind man is truly worthy of imitation. If we are to follow Jesus, we must be like this blind man.

There’s more. Luke tells us in verse 43 that, after the blind man was healed, he “followed [Jesus], glorifying God.” Does that sound familiar? Do you remember the ten lepers? In Luke 17:13, ten lepers cry out to Jesus just like the blind man did, saying

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

In response, Jesus healed them all. But then remember what happens next? Only one of them responds by praising God. Only one of them goes back to find Jesus so that he can thank him. He was a Samaritan, an outcast. The other nine were miraculously healed just like the Samaritan was, but they didn’t praise God. They didn’t thank Jesus. Instead, they carried on with their lives living for themselves rather than God.

That’s not what the blind man did. He didn’t respond like the nine lepers who left. He responded like the one who returned. He *followed* Jesus. He *glorified* God. The thankfulness and joy that characterizes true faith was bubbling out of him as he not only saw Jesus for the first time with his physical eyes, but saw him with the eyes of his heart. He saw Jesus as he truly was – the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world.

One last thing about this blind man, and it’s the most important thing about him. Did you notice what he said when he cried out to Jesus? “Jesus, *Son of David*, have mercy on me!” Son of David. Messiah. The promised Saviour of the world. The promised King who would reign forever. This blind man knew who Jesus was, and here, in verses 38-39, he makes the first public declaration in Luke’s Gospel that Jesus is the Messiah.

For those of us who have been reading Luke’s gospel, we know that Jesus has been announced as the Messiah before. The angel declared this to Mary the mother of Jesus in Luke 1:32:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And then later in Luke 9:18 Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is. In response, Peter said,

“The Christ of God.”

Jesus then strictly tells him and the disciples to tell this to no one, because the world wasn’t ready to know that he was the Christ. Peter knew, because God revealed it to him, and Mary knew, because God sent the angel Gabriel to tell her. But no one else knew. People suspected it. People asked about it. But no one else *knew* that Jesus was the Christ. Except this blind man.

God revealed Jesus’ true, Messianic identity to this poor, blind man, and he chose him to be the one to make the first public declaration that Jesus is indeed the Christ. Every other declaration happened in private. The angel Gabriel told Mary in private, and Peter made his confession of faith to Jesus and the disciples in private. But the blind man’s declaration was made here, on this dusty road to Jerusalem, with a massive crowd of people gathering to see Jesus: “Jesus, *Son of David*, have mercy on me!”

God truly chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chooses blind men to see! In fact, he chooses blind men to help others to see! So much of what God has taught us about faith in Luke’s Gospel is found in this one man. He was the humble tax collector who was justified because he cried out for God’s mercy. He was a citizen of God’s Kingdom because he received the Kingdom with child-like faith. He was the thankful Samaritan leper who responded to God’s work in his life with gratitude and joy. And he was the recipient of God’s divine revelation so that he knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of David, the Son of God.

The Bible gives us many heroes to look up to, heroes of the faith who did big things for God. But for every one of these heroes, we have people with no names like our blind man. These men and women didn’t save God’s people or win big military victories or build impressive cities, and yet, God holds them up as examples for us to follow.

Why does God do that? Because he is a God who exalts the humble. God doesn’t lift up the high and mighty. He doesn’t exalt those who have done great things in their own strength. Instead, He lifts up those who have humbled themselves before God, those who cry out to him for mercy, those who trust him as a child trusts his father.

Perhaps today, you feel like you’re a nobody. When you compare the accomplishments of your family and friends with your own, perhaps you feel like you’re not worth much. Perhaps you feel that you’re such an insignificant part of this world because, in a world where everyone knows so much about everything and everyone, people don’t know who you are. So you feel lost. Lonely. Unknown.

God wants to remind you today that he knows you. He is the God of nobodys, like this poor, begging, blind man. He sees you, and in seeing you, he’s not looking for the amount of money you’ve earned, or the number of degrees you have, or the people you have on your twitter feed. The only thing he’s looking for is faith. If you don’t have faith, then no amount of accomplishments and possessions could ever please God. You could own the entire world and offer it to God, but God would still reject you. But if you have faith, faith like this blind man who humbly cried out to Jesus for mercy, then God will save you and exalt you forever.

(2) **THE RICH MAN’S REPENTANCE**

God looks for faith in those who would follow Jesus, but he also looks for something else. Repentance. That’s what the second half of our text is about as we turn to our second point: The Rich Man’s Repentance.

Luke tells us in verses 1-2 that, as Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through, “there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.” Zacchaeus had two things going against him. The first is that he was a tax collector. By now we’re quite familiar with tax collectors. They were extortioners. They were greedy. They were well-known sinners. And this man, Zacchaeus, was a chief tax collector. We don’t know if this made him a worse sinner than normal tax collectors, but at the very least, we know from verse 8 that he was just as involved in defrauding people as the rest of them.

The second thing is that he was rich. His fraud was so extensive that he had made himself rich off the hard work of others, and because of that, he was not only hated and despised by the people of his city, but he had no hope for salvation. As Jesus said in 18:25:

“For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

Despite these barriers to faith, Luke tells us in verse 3 that Zacchaeus “was seeking to see who Jesus was”. Unlike the blind man, Zacchaeus was ignorant as to Jesus’ identity. He didn’t know that he was the Messiah. He didn’t know what he had come to do. But he was curious, and he wanted to find out more.

The crowds were so thick, however, that he didn’t have a chance to catch a glimpse of Jesus, let alone speak to him, so he did the only thing a reasonable short man could do in the circumstances. He “ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.”

You need to try to imagine the scene. Zacchaeus was a man of great dignity. He was the chief tax collector of the town, meaning that he was a person of influence. It may have been bad influence, but it was influence nonetheless. In addition, he was rich. He would have been wearing expensive clothing and fancy jewelry. He was a short man who was nevertheless used to people looking up to him, but now he would have to suffer the embarrassment of people looking up at him at the top of this tree.

This shows us how desperate he was. He may not have known who Jesus was, but he was desperate to find out. We don’t know exactly why. He may have been tired of living corruptly. He may have been lonely from having no friends. He may have been convicted of his sinful lifestyle. Whatever it was, he was so desperate to see Jesus that he was willing to shed his dignity as a rich person of influence just to catch a glimpse of him.

He was in for a surprise. Verse 5 says that “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 incredible! Jesus knows his name! Zacchaeus may not have known Jesus, but Jesus certainly knew him! Out of all the people in the crowd, Jesus not only singled out Zacchaeus, but called him by name and invited himself over to his house.

Jesus actually makes it a matter of necessity. He doesn’t ask, “Can I stay at your house?” or say “I’m willing to come to your house if you’d let me.” No, he says, “I *must* stay at your house today.” Jesus knows something that Zacchaeus doesn’t. He knows God’s will, and God’s will compels Jesus to stay at his house.

In response, verse 6 tells us that Zacchaeus “hurried and came down and received him joyfully.” Jesus has already made a powerful impression on him. This rich, lonely man probably hadn’t been treated with kindness in years! He was used to being rejected and hated. And for years and years he was willing to pay the price of rejection and hatred for the sake of becoming rich. But something was changing in his heart. Jesus had shown him kindness, and he found himself reacting not with cold indifference but with heart-warming joy.

Luke tells us in verse 7 that, when the crowds saw it, they grumbled and said, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” The rich man may not have had much in common with the poor blind man, but at least they shared this. Both were seen as unworthy of Jesus’ time and attention, but both received it from Jesus anyways.

Sometime after Jesus goes to Zacchaeus’ house, verse 8 tells us that “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.’” In response, Jesus makes this declaration: “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.”

The man had been saved, not from physical blindness or worldly poverty, but from eternal judgment. It may be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter God’s Kingdom, but this rich man had done it. How? Because God had made the impossible possible. God had saved him, and his salvation was confirmed by the key feature of these verses: his repentance. Verse 8 shows us his repentance.

Remember that repentance isn’t just a change in behaviour. It’s a change in worship. When you repent, there’s a fundamental shift in what you value most, and what you love most. There’s a transformation of what you worship. For Zacchaeus, what he worshipped was money. He was willing to sacrifice his integrity, his reputation, even his relationships at the altar of his money god. But Jesus changed him. He changed him so that he no longer loved money most. He loved God most. He no longer found joy in having the biggest bank account. He found joy in knowing Jesus.

That’s why he doesn’t just say, “I’m sorry I defrauded people. I won’t do it again.” That’s how a lot of us treat repentance. We think we’ve repented if we say we’re sorry and we resolve to not do it again. That may be part of repentance, but it’s not the essence of repentance. Repentance isn’t repentance unless the change in our behaviour comes out of a change in our worship.

That’s what happened to Zacchaeus. He had been so completely changed in what he worshipped and valued most that he no longer needed to hold on to his money. He was no longer enslaved to the addiction of hoarding more and more wealth regardless of the cost. Jesus freed him from that, so that he could say in verse 8, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.” Just like that, he took half of all his wealth, and gave it away.

His repentance continues: “And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” Zacchaeus finally realized that he had hurt a lot of people. He had cheated them. Lied to them. Defrauded them. He never used to care that he was ruining people’s lives, but his encounter with Jesus changed his heart. It made him see how sinful and selfish he had been. And so, he resolves to not only restore what he had defrauded from people, but to pay it back four times.

Zacchaeus had become a new man. He was once a greedy, selfish crook, but now he was a humble, generous follower of Christ. And just in case we miss the point here and think that Zacchaeus had somehow changed himself, Jesus ends our text today in verse 10 by telling us that “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Jesus sought Zacchaeus out, telling him, “I must stay at your house today!” And in that house, as they talked, Jesus saved him. Jesus led Zacchaeus to take the trust that he had in money, and to put it in him instead.

Zacchaeus reminds us today that it’s not just the poor who are lost. It’s the rich as well. People who live in mansions and drive luxury cars may seem like they have everything in the world but the reality is that they have nothing. Spiritually, they are poor, blind, and begging on the side of the road. But Jesus has come to save them too. He has come to die on the cross for their sins, and to raise them up to new life through his resurrection, so that the way they live and the things they worship are completely changed.

**CONCLUSION**

So when you think about what Luke has taught us about true faith and you’re tempted to think, “I could never have that kind of faith”, remember the blind man. He’s not a hero. He wasn’t a gifted man. He was a beggar whose survival was completely dependent on the kindness of others. But he had true faith in spades, because God gave it to him, and that means God can give it to you as well. He can give you the kind of faith that is characterized by humility and gratitude. He can give you the kind of faith that trusts in him with child-like dependence. And he can give you the kind of faith that believes that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Saviour of the world who has come to restore all that is broken in our world and in our lives.

And when you sin, and you realize that you need to repent, don’t just settle for a superficial change in behaviour, the kind of repentance that say, “I’m sorry, I won’t do it again.” Be like Zacchaeus. Be desperate for Jesus. Spend time with him in his Word and in prayer. Have him in your home, as it were, because the more you know Jesus, the more you will love him, and the more you love him, the less you will love everything else. That’s the true heart of repentance. Repentance involves a lot of things. It involves willpower. It involves accountability. It involves wisdom. It involves cutting things out of your life. But if you do these things and make these changes without loving Jesus most of all, none of the changes will last. Our only hope for true, lasting repentance is a change in our worship. So come to Jesus and make him your greatest treasure, and he will save you.