



# PARABLES TO PEOPLE

Beginnings At The End

February 18, 2024

## [Worship Music Playlist](#)

Prelude – Fill This House by Judah & the Lion

### WELCOME (cards & community) |

Good morning, all! I'm so glad we can gather together this morning as the church. **To come together on this day made for us, a day where we awoke into the light of our Father's completed work.** A day to rest in God with us, God for us. It is a day to set our mind's attention and heart's affection upon Jesus, our Light, and Life so that we might *be the church*, spiritual companions in gospel community, following Jesus together in our ordinary roles and relationships. To be the church, that's the aim of our worship together, remembering whose and who we are in Jesus. So, for those new with us, we are glad you're here, and **we'd like to invite you to church, into the relationships that make the church indeed a faith family through Jesus.**

We'd also like to invite you to boast in the Lord with us, to taste and see that the Lord is good and the blessedness that comes from, as Ari pointed out to us this week in our Monday Psalm, taking refuge in His work, His purpose, His life, His Son. **Will you pray with me?**

### CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 21:1-7

The king rejoices in your strength, Lord. How great is his joy in the victories you give! You have granted him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips. You came to greet him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked you for life, and you gave it to him— length of days, for ever and ever. Through the victories you gave, his glory is great; you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty. Surely you have granted him unending blessings, making him a source of blessing forever, and made him glad with the joy of your presence. For the king trusts in the Lord; through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken.

SONG #1 – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty by Traditional

SONG #2 – Jesus Our King by A Jesus Church

Dismiss Kids

## CALL BACK & ANNOUNCEMENTS | Entering Awareness & The Last Stop Before the Home Stretch

Just a quick reminder: The **Entering Awareness** group starts today! 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm here. Talk to Chaz if you have any questions.

Speaking of today, while the Lenten journey is officially underway for a large portion of the global church, we are going to make one last preparatory stop, actually, a pass-through moving from parables to people, **from stories to relationships**, so that our hearts are readied for the home stretch and, even more so, for being brought home and living there with Christ alive.

In some ways, Jesus' person and purpose have been presumed in the stories He has told, the stories of paradox and preparation that we've spent the first six weeks of our new year entering. Yet the journey of Lent, the chosen pilgrimage of bright sadness, cannot be primarily imaginative, no matter how formative the word pictures thus far have been. The journey of Lent, the movement towards the cross and tomb and the emptied grave, is not first or foremost figurative. It was an actual journey taken by Jesus that is His answer in awesome deed to our most fundamental need...righteousness. Relationship with God, one another, and earth made whole, right. A journey Jesus undertook for our sake and for the joy set before Him, the joy of our communion with Him and one another that, as Luke tells us, passed through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem.

As Jesus drew near to Jericho, [the OT entry into the promised land, though not its final destination. There] a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging [where he would have been every day beseeching local merchants, farmers, and travelers along their way in and out of town]. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. [It wasn't normal for crowds to line the roads in and out of town, so something must be up; someone important must be on their way into town.]

They told him, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' [The citizens were outside the walls waiting for Jesus, looking forward to His arrival. His reputation had preceded Him, and they were ready to welcome Him—but we're not really sure as what. Was he a prophet, a preacher, a storyteller, a miracle worker, a healer, or more? The name the crowd gives Jesus is too vague to know for sure. But one person sees Him differently.]

And the blind man cried out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' [Jesus, King! That's what the title the blind man cries out means. King, like the one from Psalm 21 who, is blessed to be a blessing. Jesus King, who makes right what is wrong, victorious over the enemy, and so too the people's failings, living in the trust of the love of the Most High. The blind man saw better than the crowd...]

And Jesus said to him, 'Recover [receive what was lost] your sight; your faith has made you well. [restored]' And immediately he recovered his sight and followed Jesus, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God. (Luke 18:35-38, 42-43)

Our first two weeks of preparation have, Lord willing, allowed us to see like the blind man, recognizing Jesus as more than a good storyteller, more than a prophet or quick fixer, but as the Son of David, King, who makes right for us, what we cannot make right ourselves, who we need to be made well, restored, whole, and holy With that in mind, pray with me as we see where Jesus goes next.

## PRE-SERMON READING | Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho *and was passing through*. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but could not on account of the crowd, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. 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." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, "He has gone in to spend the night with a man who is a sinner." 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." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

## SERMON |

Jesus is now on his way out of town. The verses immediately following our story have Jesus drawing "near to Jerusalem" (19:11), then His entering Jerusalem to swaying palms and hosanna shouts (19:28-38).

As they heard these things, Jesus proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem... (19:11)

As Jesus was drawing near....the whole multitude...began to rejoice...saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!' .... (19:37-38)

Jesus is, at this point in the story, on a direct route to the Passover activities in Jerusalem. He is on his way to the remembrance of the awesome deed of God to make right, to save, and ultimately, His awesome deed of making right, freeing the bound, and overcoming the enemy.

But before we get there, Jesus passes through Jericho. On the road in, he healed the blind man. Presumably, he enters the town for a bit, but not for too long; for now, he is passing through (v.1). Jesus is on his way somewhere. He has set his attention on what's next for Him, and for us. While we may pass quickly over the fact that Jesus' stop in Jericho was brief, the crowd that had shown up to honor him would not have been too impressed with Jesus' refusal of their hospitality.

To line the road of entry was a communal acknowledgment of someone's greatness, though, as we saw, why they thought Jesus was so great wasn't quite as clear to them as they thought. Nevertheless, they joined in with the blind man in praising God because of Jesus' actions and undoubtedly, as is the custom, would have prepared for Jesus a feast along with a place to stay equal to his honorability. Yet, Jesus kept walking right on through the town, and that's where the story picks up.

Word passed quickly that Jesus of Nazareth wasn't hanging around. There would be no sermons, no miracles (other than the one on the way in, which would have got every expectant of more), not even a good if confusing story. If Jesus had stopped, Zacchaeus would have had no chance to see him. Crowds were dangerous for guys like Zacchaeus, especially since he could not stand at the back and see over them. He'd have to get in the middle of the crowd and make his way towards the front. Not only would no one make way for him, despite his wealth, which normally would have afforded him some civil honors, but even worse, in a crowd like this, an extortioner and traitor like this had to watch his back, or his life would be at an end. "The quick flash of a knife, a stifled cry, and it would all

be over. Only after the crowd moved on would his body be found, and by then, the perpetrators would have disappeared.”<sup>1</sup>

No, if Zacchaeus was to *see Jesus who Jesus was (v. 3)*, to see for himself if Jesus is of Nazareth or something more (perhaps the blind man’s proclamation had made its way ahead to Z.?), he’ll have to get out in front of the crowd and into a place advantageous for his height and his well-being. And the only way to see who Jesus was was to humble himself or do the humiliating thing of running and climbing a tree. Both were no-nos for persons of dignity in the first century (and still today).

Ideally, Z would have hoped his humiliating acts would be short-lived and unnoticed. Quickly, he’d disappear up the tree (trees being allowed only outside the city walls) and into the sycamore’s dense foliage. Unfortunately for Z., his plans for a semi-incognito humiliation go awfully awry. We know this because when Jesus finally makes his way to the place, the crowd is less focused on Jesus and more so on wee-little man (certainly a man wishing he was smaller than he was) up in the tree. After all, if Jesus can see Z, so can the crowd. And the fact that Jesus knew his name when Jesus was not from Jericho implies that Jesus learned the name of the treed publican “from the crowd that is insulting the humiliated collaborator...the crowd [flinging] at him all the choice insults they have wanted to use for years in his office, but could not...using any four-letter word (as the Pharisee nearly did) that comes to mind. One insult stimulates others, quickly darkening the atmosphere and likely producing a whiff of anticipated violence.”<sup>2</sup> After all, Passover, the remembrance of liberation and the defeat of the oppressor, is just down the road and on their minds. Could this be their chance to be freed?

Apparently, Z’s fear of the crowd was not overblown nor avoided. Like the prodigal, the need driving Z required him to face the consequences of his choices, but was he really ready to bear it?

Jesus sizes up the situation and, though on his way to the cross, unwilling to stop for the usual and expected acts of ministry, nevertheless, Jesus stops under the tree and does something unexpected.

What would have been expected of Jesus is two things. First, he would have been expected to accept the town’s prepared and certainly offered hospitality and homage. He didn’t. But perhaps they could dismiss the seeming slight since he was, perhaps, the Son of David, on a mission they could only somewhat understand and surely would take him back to the place of the throne, to where he could be called “King” in Jerusalem.

Second, Jesus would have been expected to join the accusations against Z, even if they were for the purpose of bringing greater civility to the situation. Mercy would still be in the form of rebuke. One middle-eastern scholar notes that the crowd would have expected from any good Rabbi, much less Messiah-King, something like this:

‘Zacchaeus, you are a collaborator! You are an oppressor of these people. You have drained the economic lifeblood of your people and given it to the imperialists. You have betrayed your country and your God. This community’s hatred of you is fully justified. You must quit your job, repent, journey to Jerusalem for ceremonial purification, return to Jericho, and apply yourself to keeping the law. If you are willing to do these things, on my next trip to Jericho I will enter your newly purified house and offer my congratulations.’<sup>3</sup>

But that is not what Jesus does. Jesus offers no rebuke, no stipulation for mercy or justice. Instead, Jesus invites himself to stay the night at Z’s house. Remember, Jesus had rejected the offered hospitality of the people who kind

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 177.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-180.

of knew about Jesus, enough to respect him, but were blind to who he really was. And now, Jesus chooses his own form of hospitality (a cultural no-no) and, on top of that, chooses the welcome, the hospitality, the curiosity of Z., a traitor, exploiter, a sinner perhaps about to die for his sins.

Z. joyfully jumps at the offer of salvation, at being found through this unexpected demonstration of costly love. He leaves the tree, receives Jesus into his home, and comes to see Jesus for who he really is, “Lord” (v. 8). But notice why Z. can do this.

And when they [the crowd] saw it, they all grumbled, ‘He has gone in to spend the night with a man who is a sinner.’ (19:7)

Z. can come down from the tree and live because Jesus stops, sees him, speaks his name, calls him into a relationship, shows him honor, and, don’t miss this, redirects the crowd's hostility toward himself. The hostility of the crowd is turned from Z to Jesus. Jesus stands in Z’s place, takes on his sins, ritually and physically, and is willing to pay the price for Z’s life now...and, as we’ll see...forever.

What happens next is often misconstrued in our retellings, usually because we read it too quickly and with little appreciation for the details of the account. Z’s repentance, his turning, and supposed giving are not the prerequisite for Jesus’ final proclamation; they are a response in kind to what Z. has already received at the tree.

Jesus has “found lodging” with Z., which is the literal meaning of “stay at your house today” (v. 5). And, as would be the custom for a person of honor, the same custom that would have been extended to Jesus by the town but which Jesus passed by, a banquet would have been offered. A guy like Z. would have no problem rolling out the red carpet at a simple command to his servants. It’s here, reclining at the table with Z., unprompted by Jesus, but undoubtedly sensing an internal pressure to respond to what has been done for him, the sacrifice made for him, the courage compassion, and honor Jesus showed him, Z., offers a demonstrative demonstration of what Jesus has really done...made him right.

Verse 8 reads,

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.’ (19:8)

“In traditional Middle Eastern style,” says one author, “Zacchaeus exaggerates in order to demonstrate his sincerity...pledging to give away 50 percent of his assets...and pay back fourfold anyone he has cheated. [Yet] If all the money he has ever collected unjustly from the community over the years amounts to 13 percent of his remaining assets, he cannot fulfill his pledge.” The math doesn’t add up. “No one expects Z. to do so.” But “a measured, realistic promise would be understood to mean ‘He is not going to give us anything.’ In good village fashion, however, Zacchaeus affirms his sincerity [his change of heart and actions, his new life] by exaggeration. If he does not exaggerate, the [guests, the disciples, Jesus, the community] will think he means the opposite.”<sup>4</sup>

We don’t know how the prodigal responded to the father character's humility, costly actions, and affection, nor do we know if the older son came into the party after the father character again humbled himself to beseech and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 181.

remind him of his affection and possession. “But here, [we] are given a rare glimpse of the world of a recipient of costly love [of awesome deeds done to make right], and his response is profoundly instructive. [Z]” as one commentator notes, “starts from where he is not from where others may be [no ritual cleansing, no checklist of faith, no overtly religious/pious acts], and publicly commits himself to begin showing costly love [deeds done to make right] to the community he has harmed.”<sup>5</sup> Z, in other words, reflects back to others what has been done for him by Jesus; what he has received from Jesus is what he offers to others. And that, says Jesus in verse 9,

And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.’ (19:9-10)

...is salvation’s arrival, the restoration of communion (righteousness in community and with God), the lost, sought, and saved.

Ironically, what the crowd wanted at the tree is something they will now receive, the oppressor freed not to oppress, a traitor no longer working against them, but for them, all because of Jesus’ actions and a sinner’s response.

## REFLECTION |

In preparation for the lengthening light of Jesus’ death and resurrection, to which we will be exposed over the coming days of Lent’s journey, we’ve been asked three questions by parables and persons. When the light hits and our deepest, most fundamental human need is exposed...

- 1) Do we know where we are and what’s being done for us? (Lk. 18:9-14)
- 2) Will we plan, pout, or recognize what’s being/been given for us? (Lk. 15:11-32)
- 3) Will we give what’s expected, or in kind? (Lk. 19:1-10)

Prayerfully consider these questions for a few moments. Then we’ll share what’s come to light through Spirit and in scripture for you as we have been preparing for Lent.

## SONG #3 – How Majestic by Citizens

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 182.

## COMMUNION |

All this comes from God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you. How? You ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

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Christ's body and blood: for us,  
they were given.

This bread and this cup tell us  
we're forgiven.

Once blind, now we see.

Once lost, now we are found.

What is His, now ours,  
to give.

Amen

## SONG #4 – I Don't Have Much by Mission House

## BENEDICTION | 1 John 2:28-3:3

As we rest in the day made for us, we prepare to enter into the work for which we are made [**LIGHT THE CANDLE**], remembering:

And now, children, stay with Christ. Live deeply in Christ. Then we'll be ready for him when he appears, ready to receive him with open arms, with no cause for red-faced guilt or lame excuses when he arrives. Once you're convinced that he is right and righteous, you'll recognize that all who practice righteousness are God's true children. What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are. But that's also why the world doesn't recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he's up to. But friends, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And that's only the beginning. Who knows how we'll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus' life as a model for our own.