

Impossible Converts

I - Zacchaeus

Following Jesus' Call to Be in the World

Jesus prays for us: 'As you sent me into the world,
so I have sent them into the world' John 17:18

Jesus commissions us: 'As the Father has sent me,
even so I am sending you' John 20:21

Prayer for Us to Be in the World

- Just as the Father sent him
- So he sends us
- Where?
- Into the world – our mission
- Kept in the Father's name in the world
- Not 'of the world' as we are in the world
- Protected from the evil one in the world
- Sanctified in the truth as we are sent into the world
- That we might be one for the world to believe

Into the World Following Jesus

- This at the heart of Jesus' prayer for us
 - Then and now – he always lives to pray for us
 - Is this the heart of our prayers for ourselves?
 - And for our children?
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- An example from Jesus' life

An Unusual Dinner Invitation

Luke 19:1-10

He 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 on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about 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 (Jesus) joyfully.

And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of 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.”

- From St. Silouan of Athos – wall painting on their website stsilouan.org



The Setting

- Jesus' knowledge of Zacchaeus
 - They had never met
 - Zacchaeus' eagerness to see Jesus
 - Why? – knowledge of the healing of the blind man
 - Or of the difference in Jesus?
 - A powerful and wealthy man – up a sycamore fig tree
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- William Hole – early 1600's



How Does Jesus Approach Him?

- An unusual dinner invitation
 - Rudeness? Presumption?
 - Zacchaeus could not invite Jesus or any other devout Jew
 - Jesus invites himself
 - Zacchaeus responds with joy
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- Bernardo Strozzi – early 1600's



Response of Crowd

- Criticism of Zacchaeus and of Jesus
- Hatred of Zacchaeus
- Why?
- Collecting taxes – for himself
- Chief tax collector
- Corruption – very wealthy
- Collaboration with the Roman enemy
- Brutality of Rome

Why the Criticism of Jesus?

- Outrageous social behavior
- Jesus makes himself unclean
- Peter in Cornelius' home
- 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation' (Acts 10:28)
- What Jesus does is much worse

The Flouting of Judaism's Laws

- Jesus ignores social customs and **human religious laws**
- Laws designed to maintain religious and moral purity
- By separation from sinners
- Such laws undermine God's law of mercy
- The very heart of Old Testament Law

Jesus' Response to this Criticism

- 'Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice"' (Matthew 9:13)
- For ourselves
- For our children
- No other Christian life that Jesus desires
- No other way of obeying God's commandments
- Of being righteous
- Of teaching righteousness to our children
- Mercy: the very heart of Biblical message
- Mercy to sinners is the gospel we celebrate

The Climax of the Meal

- Sometime during the meal – hours compressed by Luke
- Grace leads to repentance
- Zacchaeus stands
- Makes his declaration of generosity and reparation
- He sees his greed as the worst kind of theft
- (Exodus 22:1-5; 2 Samuel 12:6; Numbers 5:6-7)
- Seeing our sin in its ugliness – not minimizing it before God

Jesus' Declaration

- Jesus' passion to save the lost
- Jesus did not come into the world to keep himself apart from sinners
- He is the LORD God, the Good Shepherd who would come to seek and save (Ezekiel 34:11-16)
- This is the purpose of the coming of the Son of Man
- Jesus' favorite title for himself
- Jesus puts together two passages
- Daniel 7:14 and the promise of Ezekiel 34:11-16

Jesus - Good Shepherd & Son of Man

- ‘For thus says the LORD God: “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. . . . I will seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them. . . . I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the LORD God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed.”’
- ‘Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.’

Jesus and Sinners

- Jesus has intimate fellowship with sinners
- The meaning of eating together
- Elders eating in the Lord's presence at the ratification of the covenant (Exodus 24)
- Meals of acceptance and reconciliation after sacrifices in tabernacle and temple
- The Lord's Supper
- The Marriage Supper of the Lamb



Listening to Jesus' Prayer

- Following his call into the world
- Taking the initiative with our neighbors
- Dignifying the despised
- Honoring the evil-doer
- Intimate friendships with people
- No matter what their sin
- Jesus delights to bring impossible people into his kingdom
- Stories from the early church tell us that Zacchaeus became one of the first leaders of the church in Caesarea

Friendship & Hospitality

- Eating together
- Welcoming into our homes
- Going gladly to their homes
- Not a compromise of Jesus' holiness - or of ours
- This is holiness!
- Not condoning sin
- Holiness that does not include mercy to sinners is not true holiness, either for ourselves, or for our children
- Simply living grace
- This is the gospel; this is the Christian life