

30. Hide and seek with God

February 10, 2008

Playing with grand kids can be fun and at the same time quite exhausting. They can play the same thing non-stop for all day while I can go on for about ten minutes and then gasp for air.

A few times I have played a hid and seek with the little grand kids and it was rather a comical. Before they hide, they tell me, "Grandpa, I am gonna hide in my closet. Come find me." Or they holler from the bathroom they are hiding, "Come and get me, grandpa." Or the little ones stand right next to me and look up while I count. Then I pretend that I have not seen them and I say, "Where are you? I cannot find you." They start to giggle and they yell, "I found you." Obviously, they have no concept of who is supposed to find whom.

Our God wants to be found by us immensely. He makes it so obvious to us, yet as I pretended that I couldn't find my grand kids, many people throughout history choose not to find Him.

2Chronicles 15:2 And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."

In this chapter 19 of the Book of Luke, we find several groups of people who wanted to find God and the other groups who didn't want to find Him at all cost for their selfish motives. At the end they were the ones who were left with nothing.

I hope and pray that the Holy Spirit teaches us about seeking the Lord with our sincere hearts.

A. ZACCHAEUS

Luke 19:1-10 Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. 2 Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. 3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." 6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. 7 But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." 8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Tax collectors in Jesus' day were government-sanctioned Mafia thugs in silk suits with arm-twisting and knee-breaking methods against merchants. They falsified the tax bills and skimmed off the extra for themselves. One of the heads of the Jericho Mafia was Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax-collector and he was loaded with money.

With all the fancy cloths in his closets, big jewelries around his neck and finger and the latest model of BMW twin turbo chariot convertible in his garage, Zacchaeus was lonely and isolated from the people and empty in his heart like many people today.

Perhaps that realization was what drew him to Jesus. Here was a man who owned nothing of this world, yet possessed the love and admiration of thousands. And Zacchaeus had even heard that He was a friend of tax-collectors. Maybe he could see in Jesus what he lacked. Because he was short, he had to get on a tree to see Jesus over everybody's head and shoulder.

Like a little child, he was curious and wanted to know. Curiosity and simplicity are a element of preparation for faith. That is why Jesus taught us that unless we are like a little child, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Even though Zacchaeus was a renegade in the eyes of the Jews, he was a precious lost sinner in the eyes of Jesus. There were other ways to get to Jerusalem, but Jesus chose to go through Jericho to meet with this tax collector whom everyone despised. Zacchaeus had a divine appointment that he didn't know about.

I really like Jesus' style. He invited Himself for a dinner. I think I am gonna use that style, too. Jesus treated Zacchaeus with dignity and friendship and Zacchaeus must have felt ten feet tall as Jesus walked with him to his house.

As I said last week, giving up wealth for the poor does not make us to be saved, but Zacchaeus' action speaks in volume about his salvation. In contrast to the rich young ruler who would not serve God because he didn't want to give up his idol which was his wealth, this chief tax collector was willing to give up his wealth to follow Jesus, his new found Messiah.

We cannot and we should not judge other's salvation, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see whether a person is saved or not by simply observing that person's behavior after his or her declaration as a Christian.

I want y'all to recollect what we've learned from last chapter when Jesus saw the rich young ruler leave sorrowful, He said, "*For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*" Then He added in v27 of chapter 18, "*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*" Now, Zacchaeus' name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life and heading toward heaven. To the Pharisees, that was impossible.

V10 is the theme of Luke's Gospel:

for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

God wants to be found by you. Do you seek Him daily?

B. FAITHFUL SERVANTS AND THE UNFAITHFUL ONE

Luke 19:11-27 Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. 12 Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. 13 So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' 14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation

after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' 15 And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. 16 Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' 17 And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' 18 And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' 19 Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' 20 Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. 21 For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' 22 And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. 23 Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' 24 And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' 25 (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.') 26 For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 27 But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.' "

This particular parable draws such a great picture of Jesus' ascension, the judgment of his believers and the Great White Throne Judgment in concise manner.

To understand this parable, we must understand the typology of this parable: The nobleman was Jesus; the ten of his servants are the believers of Jesus Christ; the citizens of the land who hated him were the non-believers of this world; and the far country is heaven.

Please note what these three out of ten servants said. They all acknowledged that the ten minas belonged to their master. One mina was worth four months wages. This parable is different than the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Here, ten servants are each given an equal amount of money.

The master first wanted to know how faithful his servants had been in his absence. The reward for faithful work is always more work for their master. It is a great compliment to be entrusted with the management of so many cities. How we serve the Lord today will help determine our reward and ministry when He comes to establish His kingdom on earth. Faithfulness now is preparation for blessed service later.

Whatever we do for the Lord is all provided by Him. Some may say, "Oh no, I earn my money with my own hand." Shut up! God gave us life, job, resources and money as I've said before. If it wasn't Him, we wouldn't be existing.

All of us have received gifts from the Lord to serve Him and His church. Some people say, "I don't know what kind of gifts I have. That is why I am not serving in the church." That is nothing more than a lame excuse like the unfaithful servant. You know what they say about excuse? Excuse is like an arm pit. Everyone has it and it stinks. Use your God-given gift, otherwise it will be taken from you.

Then there are people who completely reject the Master of the universe. Somehow they think that if they ignore God long enough, He would disappear. Fat chance.

They are the ones who would disappear to hell after the Great White Throne Judgement by the One whom they despised.

C. THE WELCOMING CROWD AND ANGRY PHARISEES

Luke 19:28-40 When He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 And it came to pass, when He came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, that He sent two of His disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village opposite you, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring it here. 31 And if anyone asks you, 'Why are you loosing it?' thus you shall say to him, 'Because the Lord has need of it.'" 32 So those who were sent went their way and found it just as He had said to them. 33 But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the colt?" 34 And they said, "The Lord has need of him." 35 Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him. 36 And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road. 37 Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, 38 saying: "'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

Bethphage and Bethany are two villages along the Jericho road, located about two miles from Jerusalem. The mount called "Olivet," more often called the Mount of Olives, is a mile-long ridge that overlooks the city from the east.

Jesus has entered Jerusalem before-as a boy, as a worshiper and as a teacher. But never as a king... until now. So far Jesus kept His disciples quiet about His true identity even though they really didn't understand it. But here, Jesus goes out of His way to invite public praise and adoration to Him as Messiah.

We have to ask: Why did Jesus want to receive such praise? It was not for His sake. It wasn't that Jesus had a self-esteem problem and needed affirmation. Jesus wants to be praised because we need to praise Him. God will get His praise, and He invites us to be a part of it.

A great problem against much of our praise is that it is mindless. We do not have anything specific in our minds that we sing praise songs to God. In other words, we often just sing songs, not making each song as our praise and adoration to the Lord. That needs to be changed.

The crowd was seeking the Messiah in a wrong and earthly reason. They wanted Jesus to set them free from the bondage of Rome and make them wealthy and happy. The Pharisees chose not to seek the identity of Jesus. To them, He was just another worthless rabbi from Galilee.

Riding a colt on this road toward Jerusalem on this day fulfilled two great prophecies regarding the Messiah:

1) Zechariah foretold this moment almost five hundred years earlier.

Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

2) Daniel prophesied that the Messiah would come into the picture.

According to Daniel 9, we can add 173,380 days or 483 Jewish years to the date when Artaxerxes made a decree to rebuilt Jerusalem, we come to the exact date when Jesus entered Jerusalem through the Palm Sunday road from the Mount Olive and was welcomed by the people of Jerusalem.

D. THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM AND THE PHARISEES DIDN'T SEEK HIM

Luke 19:41-48 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." 45 Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, 46 saying to them, "It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" 47 And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, 48 and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

While the crowd was rejoicing, Jesus was weeping! This is the second occasion on which our Lord wept openly, the first being at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11. There He wept quietly, but here He uttered a loud wailing like one mourning over the dead.

By His foreknowledge, Jesus knew that because of the rejection of the Messiah by the people of Jerusalem, the city was invaded by the Romans after 143 days of siege in A.D. 70. 600,000 were killed, thousands more were taken as captives and the city was completely leveled. I am sure that this reminds you the people in v14 who rejected the master?

Jesus spent a night in Bethany according to Matthew 21 and came into the city early and visited the temple. Rather than finding a place of worship for the Father in heaven, the high priest and his family turned the temple to their money making flea market. Merchants hawked priest-certified animals for Passover sacrifice. Moneychangers milked foreign visitors with their exorbitant exchange rates. Instead of whispered prayers, Jesus heard clinking coins. Instead of incense, He smelled the dung of sheep and cattle.

The hurricane of Jesus was going through the outer court of the temple and cleansed it with His righteous indignation. This was not the first time He was doing it. While Jesus was overturning the tables and throw out the merchants, Peter asked John, "What is the matter with Jesus? Is He having a bad halo day?"

So far, Jesus insulted the Pharisees' theologies and attacked their social positions, but now this was different. He just touched their pocket books. This was going to make some marks. They decided that Jesus had to die. They not only chose not to seek Him, but they also altogether rejected Him.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) The Lord seeks us far more intensely than we seek Him.

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

We respond by saying 'Yes' to Him, but He is the initiator. He calls our name, like He called Zacchaeus. He offers the invitation. Our part is to welcome and receive.

2) The important thing is not how much ability you have but how faithful you are to use what you have for the Lord.

The person with the least ability, if he or she is faithful, will receive the same reward as the most gifted church leader.

3) Courage can be demonstrated as much in our anger as in our compassion.

Edmund Burke stated wisely, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."