

"Four Who Made A Difference:
'Bartimaeus and Zaccheus, 'Beggars in the Morning'"

03/18/12

Luke 18:35-19:10

- I. WHOM DO YOU TRUST? YOUR GOVERNMENT? WE HAVE BEEN CALLED A NAIVE NATION BY EUROPEANS BECAUSE WE EXPECT THAT OUR POLITICIANS AND NATIONAL LEADERS WILL BE HONEST AND GOVERNED BY INTEGRITY AND A ETHICS. YOUR LEADERS IN THE CHURCH? AT TIMES IT CAN BE DISASTROUS!
- A. ***I believe that anyone who has been in a position of power for more than 10 years , and sometimes less, is very vulnerable to corruption because power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*** (I have experienced this in myself-taking advantage of entitlement and privilege as a pastor.)
1. David Bales in his book on sermons for Lent, "To the Cross and Beyond," relates a story about a modern-day variation of the figure of Don Quixote.
 2. The character created by novelist Graham Greene goes by the name of "Monsignor Quixote." The year is 1975; the setting is Spain just after the death of the military dictator Francisco Franco.
 - a. At the end of the novel, and a trip around Spain, Monsignor Quixote, who is a Roman Catholic priest, usually "a mild and kindly man," becomes infuriated to realize that in a popular religious procession, the honor of carrying the venerated statue of the Virgin Mary with money pinned to it, goes to the people who pays the most. The highest bidder gets the prime spot of carrying the statue at the head of the procession.
 - b. Monsignor Quixote begins to stop the procession, he rips money off the statue... while shouting "*our devotion to God alone!*"
 - c. The Monsignor is hit in the head. His friend Sancho comes and drives him away from the front of the church while the Civil Guard shoots at his car. Don Quixote dies the following day.
- B. ***If only we might trust the ones who are closest to us, trust and love the absolutely, one or two people!***
1. I have heard it said if you have one true friend you are blessed. If you have two or three you are wealthy beyond measure!
 - a. Throughout life, for the most part, you and I are like "Beggars in the Morning," , a title of a song of a modern hard rock group from Canada known as the Barr Brothers. They first came out with these lyrics on The David Letterman shown this January.
*"She said, "Hello, I'm a monster too."
"What poisons me is what poisons you.
"Into these animals we grew
(But) When we were young our eyes were blue."
"...I'm a beggar in the morning,
I'm a king at night."* [PAUSE]
 2. Hopefully there is a lesson we learn in Christ's last days as he draws near and enters Jerusalem about those who are closest to each of us
 3. Four individuals run into Jesus, two of them the day before he enters the Holy City the other two in the days following.
 - a. Only 4 who dare to reach out to him, to minister to Jesus in their own way. These four enable him to go on, give him the strength to make it to the cross and to die.
 4. We meet two of these this morning: the blind beggar and Zaccheus.
 - a. In Luke the beggar is unnamed. Mark identifies him as Bartimaeus.

- b. The final two are the woman in Bethany who anoints him with her flask of oil and the unlikely Simon who is drafted to carry the cross.
- II. THE STORY OF THE BLIND BEGGAR IS TOLD AT THE END OF LUKE 18, AND ZACCHEUS' TALE COMES IN THE FIRST PART OF CHAPTER 10.

A. **We will see these two stories are linked together.**

1. Bartimaeus sets up shop by the side of the road outside the city as Jesus comes to Jericho.
 - a. Imagine the spectacle: a short, fat rich man runs and climbs a tree
2. One scholar observes that here "Luke pulls out all the stops."
3. Luke 18 ends the section on Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem. The Zaccheus episode in 19 begins Luke's Passion Narrative.

- III. THE MEETING OF THE BLIND MAN AND ZACCHEUS WITH JESUS ARE LINKED BY A NUMBER OF COMMON THREADS.

A. **The first one is that of Movement. After all, Jesus and those following him are on a journey. People are moving from one place to another.**

1. The Lord did not intend to stop in Jericho. In both encounters Luke says he "was passing through."
 - a. When I was in the last part of long-distance bike rallies, 65, 80 or 100 miles, I always passed up the last rest stop 7-12 miles out. All I wanted to see that finish line.
 1. The exception was when I was dead tired, running on sweat, and I badly needed an energy booster like pickle juice or some ice water or Power-aide. Jericho proved to be that last rest stop which helped him keep on going, re-energized him.
2. Notice all the movement words :
 2. passing by,
 3. he ran ahead
 4. Jesus stood still
 5. ordered to be brought to him.
 6. Hurry and come down!
 7. I must come to your house
 8. he followed him
3. There is always action around Jesus, positioning, things are unsettled, in flux, up for grabs.
 - a. Bartimaeus comes to Jesus, but Jesus comes to Zaccheus and his home!

B. **A second common thread which is always present with those following Jesus is that of seeing and not seeing.**

1. The beggar wants to see again but he is blocked by blindness.
 2. Zaccheus was to see Jesus, but he is short, everyone in town hates him and would not let him get through the crowd, so he looks down from a tall sycamore tree.
 3. He sees from above the crowd;
 - a. maybe there is a theological implication here about a certain kind of spiritual seeing that is coming.
 - b. The beggar looked up to see; Zaccheus looks down to see.
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4. Implicit also is the blindness of the disciples to see Jesus' mission, their inability to see and to understand. Neither the beggar nor Zaccheus hesitate once Jesus' had healed their blindness.
 5. And here it is not solely God's power to give sight, but to save those who call out for mercy.
 - a. Zaccheus' call for mercy, his unbelievable repentance comes in the privacy of his home.
- B. ***A third common theme here is interference with Jesus and those who want to come to him as Lord and Savior.***
1. Here we are not talking about the religious authorities, we are not talking about the crooked politicians or the Roman soldiers.
 2. It is the disciples, Jesus' inner circle, who would chase the children away from Jesus,
 - a. and keep the beggars and the blind, and the repentant.
 3. Both those at the front of the crowd sternly ordered the beggar to be quiet.
 4. But it is the disciples who act to stop the powerless and marginalized from getting close to Jesus. They want to keep it for themselves.
 5. The crowd grumble at Zaccheus to whose home Jesus invites himself.
 - a. Here is the wealthy tax collector who has bought the tax contract for this part of Judea, he is the butt of all their jokes, they hate him and talk behind his back, yes—he is even crooked, but I am sure he is invited to all the important social events. Yes Luke pulls out all the stops here for every kind of unethical, power-grabbing, oppressive, entitlement activity as portrayed in one person—Zaccheus.
 - b. Unlike the rich young man or Zaccheus, the blind beggar is at the very other end—he has nothing but his faith and love.
 - c. But both give to Jesus, both convert on the spot, both follow out of nothing other than their "blind" or their spiritual eyesight of faith.
 6. Jesus says, God's holy ones cry out day and night for justice, a quote from his favorite Old Testament prophet, Isaiah.
- C. ***Fourth, there is the thread of immediacy, now, Today!***
1. It is as if from the beginning of these two passages, there is a sense of urgency, of a moment and an opportunity which will not ever be repeated.
 2. It is now or never!
 3. Only the blind man and the tax collector sensed this. And so they acted.
 - a. The beggar sat at the side of the road and shouted at the top of his lungs like a fool. He would not be quieted.
 - b. Zaccheus with his short fat little body ran and climbed a tree; what respectable businessman would do this!
 4. Do you ever act immediately, to do it now on the spur of the moment?
 - a. Or do you say, we never do it that way in our home.
 - b. How many times has the decisive moment passed you by because you were afraid, you hesitated, you played it safe.
 - c. You will not find Jesus that way, my friend.
 - d. Faith has to be the senseless, spontaneous, risky act!
 5. Jesus ends up saying two important things to Zaccheus,
 - a. "Today salvation has come to this house..."
 - b. and, "he is also a son of Abraham." (page 3)

6. In Jericho there were two beggars in the morning, but they became kings in the evening, members of God's new Kingdom.

C. ***A final question I want to ask you: "Would it make a difference if you and I know we are about to die? Would our response be the same or otherwise?"***

[PAUSE]

IV. I BEGAN BY MENTIONING A TITLE OF A HARD ROCK SONG CALLED "BEGGARS IN THE MORNING." NOW I CLOSE WITH THE LYRICS FROM 3 VERSES OF ANOTHER SONG, "WE ARE BEGGARS ALL," BY THE PERFORMING GROUP KNOWN AS "THRICE" FROM IRVINE, CALIFORNIA, 20 YEARS AGO. THEY ARE AN ALTERNATIVE, POST-HARDROCK BAND (WHATEVER THAT MEANS!) THEIR SPECIALTY HAS BEEN TO HIGHLIGHT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONS AND THE CREATIVE MUSIC. A PORTION OF EACH ALBUM THEY HAVE SOLD IS GIVEN TO A NEW CHARITY.

A. ***Each verse ends with these words,***

"If there is one thing I know in this life, we are beggars all."

1. (I invite you to listen intently to all the words. Thank you.)
"All you great men of power, you who boast of your feats
Politicians and entrepreneurs
Can you safe guard your breath in the night while you sleep
As you lie in your bed does the thought haunt your heard
That you're really rather small?

If there's one thing I know in this life, we are beggars all
2. "All you champions of science and rulers of men
Can you summon the sun from its sleep?
Does the earth seek your council on how fast to spin?
Can you shut up the gates of the deep?
Don't you know that all things hang
as if on a string over darkness, poised to fall?
If there's one thing I know in this life, we are beggars all
3. "All you big shots who swagger and stride with conceit
Did you devise how your frame would be formed?
If you'd be raised in a palace or left out on the streets?
Or choose the place or the hour you'd be born?
Tell me what can you claim - not a thing, not your name
Tell me if you can recall - just one thing, not a gift, in this life
4. "Can you hear what's been said, can you see now
that everything's grace after all
If there's one thing I know in this life, we are beggars all"

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And may all of God's children respond by saying, "Amen!"