

- **\*READ Matthew 7:24-27\*** This closing parable of Jesus's famed Sermon on the Mount is well familiar to us for we have considered it multiple times over the past few months. Therefore, our focus isn't on its message, but instead what I would like to draw your attention to, as we begin this evening, is the teaching method that Jesus is employing as He shares this parable. The teaching tool of comparison and contrast can be so effective because the listener is able to easily spot the strengths and failures of those being used as examples by putting the examples side by side and seeing what has been done well and what has been done poorly and what will be the consequences of their actions. This is exactly what Jesus is doing as He concludes this sermon on the mount. Jesus is showing the different ways in which people can respond to His message. Some can listen and be blessed, or they can ignore the message and suffer.
- Jesus isn't the only Bible character to use such an effective teaching method. Paul would often compare the ways of the flesh with the ways of the spirit. John gave examples of successful churches and struggling churches in the Revelation that we could compare to one another. Comparing and contrasting is simply a well used and effective tool to help us learn.
- With that in mind, we are going to do a little comparing and contrasting tonight with two men that can be found in **Luke 18 & 19**. In **Luke 18**, we are introduced to a rich man who comes to Jesus, and then in the following chapter we are introduced to a small man named Zaccheus who finds himself in the presence of the almighty Son of God. We will find some similarities between these two men, but we will also find some glaring differences that led to their very different outcomes. We'll conclude by considering two lessons that we can learn and take away by means of application.

## I. Similarities:

### A. Both sought Jesus.

1. As Jesus was going about from city to city, it was not uncommon for the masses to gather around where He was. With these great audiences, Jesus would teach concerning the coming Kingdom and the will of God concerning His people. There were also opportunities for people within the crowds to converse with Jesus and ask him questions. This was exactly what we see this ruler doing in **Luke 18:18**. The text tells us that it was the ruler that approached Jesus and asked him *"What shall I do to inherit eternal life."* It is believed by some that this man being referred to as a ruler was actually a way of stating that he was a local leader within a synagogue. If this is true then we can confirm that this man was a religious man, and thus we can understand why it was that he desired to ask Jesus such a question as he did.
2. As for Zaccheus, we find him seeking to see Jesus while our Lord was making His way through Jericho. The text tells us that is aware of a crowd gathering, and he sought to see who Jesus was, but was unable because of the crowd that was already present. Luke further tells us that Zaccheus was a small man, so if he really wanted to see Jesus then he had to climb up into the sycamore tree in order to see Jesus as He was passing by. Let's also note that Zaccheus was a tax collector, and to the normal Jew he would've been seen as a traitor in many respects. It is not out of the question to believe that his fellow countrymen wouldn't have been so quick to show kindness by allowing him a spot in the front in order to see Jesus. Yet, he was not deterred and instead climbed up a tree in order to see Jesus. That was the great lengths he was willing to go to in order to see this famed Teacher. For a man of his position to climb a tree like a child would've been very taboo, but that was just how bad this man wanted to see Jesus. Both men recognized that Jesus was special and wanted to be sure they were able to see and even speak with Him.

## B. Both were rich.

1. The text makes it abundantly clear that this ruler was rich. After speaking with Jesus, Luke records that this man not just rich, but that he was extremely rich. The common every day Jew normally did not have much to his name, but for one to be called a ruler was more than likely a symbol that he was one who enjoyed immense blessings and material wealth. If this man was truly a leader of a synagogue then he would've been one who enjoyed a good life, but he would've been well respected among his peers, and well versed in the Scriptures.
2. Zaccheus was also a man who enjoyed his share of material wealth. Luke tells us that this man was not just a tax collector, but he was a chief tax collector. This could very well mean that he was one who managed the tax collectors. It could also be that he was one who judged over cases of tax collection. Regardless of what his job actually entailed, it is noted that he was a rich man. This is evidenced by the fact that he had a home that was able to accommodate Jesus and His travel companions. The text tells us that he even had wealth enough to make donations to the poor of his city. Both of these men were abundantly blessed.

## C. Both were willing to receive Jesus & His teachings.

1. While the end of his conversation might not have finished as he would've hoped, let's notice that this man initially goes to Jesus hoping to receive teaching that would aid him in his life spiritually. He even refers to Jesus as "Good Teacher" meaning that he was aware of the wisdom of Jesus. He recognizes that Jesus was not just another teacher of the Law, but that He spoke with a special authority which demanded people listen all the more closely.
2. Zaccheus was also a man that must have been familiar with some of Jesus's teachings because he went to such great lengths to even just see this great Teacher. Once Jesus sees him and invites Himself into Zaccheus's home, we don't see this chief tax collector turning Jesus away, but instead Luke records, "*He hurried and came down and received Him gladly.*" Zaccheus saw this as an opportunity of a life time and was not going to let it slip by. Both men invited Jesus to converse with them because they wanted to hear His wise teachings.

## D. Both were seeking eternal life.

1. This is clearly seen with the rich ruler because he asks very bluntly, "*what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" If he was a leader of a synagogue then this man would've been well versed in the Law, and it would make sense why he was able to claim that he had kept all of the commandments that Jesus would come to tell him he needed to keep. He had done much in his life for the sake of God, and he wanted to be sure that he was doing everything he needed to do in order to have eternal life.
2. We don't see Zaccheus coming to Jesus in this sort of way, but we still see this man striving to be faithful to God. As Jesus is going to be with this man in his home, there were some who began to grumble against Jesus that He was going to be in the house of a sinner. Zaccheus doesn't take too kindly to this type of talk about himself and stands up to defend his character and states that he had worked hard to keep his reputation clean by giving to the poor and repaying anyone that he might have defrauded. Jesus seems to believe that Zaccheus was striving to be godly and proclaims that "*Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.*" Yes, Zaccheus was a Jew, but many of his fellow Jews wouldn't have thought of him as such since he had "sided with the enemy in Rome" by becoming a tax collector. Here we see Jesus establishing that he was just as much as son of Abraham as the next Jew who was also faithful to God. Both of these men seemingly wanted to take hold of God's blessings, and they both seemingly realized that Jesus had the ability to give that to them. Thus we see them both going and seeking out our Lord. However, this is where the similarities end. There are some glaring differences between the two men.

## II. Differences:

### A. The rich man was not willing to part with riches while Zaccheus was.

1. Even though this man more than likely thought he would receive good news from Jesus as to what he needed to do in order to inherit eternal life, we see this man receiving a rude awakening once Jesus told him that on top of keeping the commandments, he also needed to sell his riches and share the proceeds with the poor. No doubt this man was getting excited when Jesus was telling him all of these things that he had already been doing, but that excitement was quickly turned to sorrow when Jesus told him what he needed to additionally do. Jesus knew his heart and where his treasure is. He knew exactly what he was doing when He told this man to go and sell his possessions in order to help the poor and also give him ability to come follow him as a disciple where he would have heavenly treasures. Jesus simply gave this man opportunity to realize where his heart truly resided...and that was with his riches.
2. This is strongly contrasted with the mindset of Zaccheus who was very quick to let his detractors know that he was a man of upstanding character. It was often universally perceived that tax collectors were scoundrels who took advantage of their positions in order to shake people down for more taxes than were actually owed so that they might take a little off the top for themselves. Therefore, we see this accusation thrown at Zaccheus by the crowd when Jesus makes the decision to go to his home. Zaccheus wasn't going to have any of it, and wanted to let Jesus know that he loved his fellow man by his giving to the poor. He even went the extra mile by stating that any mistakes made on his part would result in him paying back the wronged party by four times! Zaccheus wasn't your typical tax collector who was only in it for the material wealth, he was a person of integrity who didn't value money above all else. This is where he and the rich ruler really begin to separate themselves from one another. What we see is that they had two different types of hearts.

### B. Only Zaccheus was poor in spirit to the point of repentance.

1. This rich ruler came to Jesus probably thinking that he had things all figured out. He had kept all of the commandments that Jesus had mentioned from the Law. He himself was probably a pretty religious person. However, when it came to truly testing his love for the things of God, the rich ruler faltered and wasn't willing to give up his love for his wealth in order to become a full-fledged disciple of Jesus. **(Luke 18:23)** Thus we see Jesus's response that it is hard for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of heaven. **(Luke 18:24)**
2. Comparing this man's heart to the heart of Zaccheus shows us just how different the two were. It would've been very easy for Zaccheus to use his position of authority to shake down his fellow man for whatever he desired. It would've been easy for him to fall right into the commonly understood mold of what a tax collector was supposed to be like, but it seems Zaccheus wasn't willing to do that. He instead decided to be a man of character and sought to be a man of humility who cared for his fellow man and didn't seek to gain the whole world for himself. It is no wonder then that Jesus meets this man, sees his heart and character, and declares that salvation had come to this man's house. Truly the words of Jesus from **Matthew 5:3** are understood to be at play within this story, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."*

### III. Lessons:

#### A. Money itself is not a problem.

1. Both of these men were rich and extremely blessed, and yet they reacted to that wealth in different ways. This shows us that it isn't money within itself that causes problems, but it is the way our heart views money that can cause the difficulties. Paul states plainly in **I Timothy 6:10**, *"For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."* Paul's warnings are that we not allow for our hearts to become enthralled with money and the gaining of it. It isn't that we can't have wealth or material blessings, but it is that we keep things in the proper perspective.
2. This is exactly what we see in the verses at the end of this letter to Timothy. In **I Timothy 6:17-19**, Paul gives instructions as to how those disciples who are wealthy are to approach their wealth. Notice that he doesn't tell them that they have to sell it all and live destitute lives, instead he says that they simply need to make sure that their love isn't in their money but that it is reserved only for the Lord and their fellow man. They were *"not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."* The rich rule completely missed the point of how he was to approach his riches. He saw them as everything in life, and Zaccheus instead saw his riches as being a blessing from God and a tool to help others.

#### B. Humility of spirit and character will save.

1. Zaccheus had many opportunities to allow for his feelings or pride to get hurt and return to his home without sticking it out and seeing the Lord Jesus as he passed by. He could've gotten all upset at the crowd for keeping him from seeing Jesus. He could've gotten all upset and mad at God for him being a short person to begin with. He could've stood up and gone off on all of the people who were speaking ill of him to Jesus when He was in his home. He could've been mad or prideful in any number of different ways, but instead he simply went with what he had and did the best he could regardless of the circumstances or what other people thought of him. His character was shining through in difficult circumstances.
2. This man knew who he was, and he was only concerned with being the best that he could be for the Lord. Was Zaccheus a perfect man? We know that certainly wasn't the case, but he still was humble in spirit to the point that Jesus was willing to pronounce him as a son of Abraham who had salvation come into his house on that day. He was exactly the type of person that Jesus had come to seek and save, and that seemed to be just fine with Zaccheus, and we would do well to strive to be that type of humble person before our Lord.

So which man will we choose to be like within our own lives? Will we be the one who has his or her heart set in the wrong place? Will we be the one who goes away sorrowful when we come across some teaching of Jesus that demands the we change? Or will we be the one who is willing to do whatever it takes to see Jesus and is willing to be humble in spirit to the point of doing whatever Jesus might ask of us? It is the Lord's desire that we be much more like the small man in this story. The small man Zaccheus who seemingly possessed a big faith that led him to be a true son of Abraham. May our Lord bless us as we go throughout this week to display this same faith within our own lives so that we too might experience the salvation offered by our Lord Jesus Christ.