**October 31, 2021 Luke 18:35-19:10**

***Different Stories, Same Need***

**Scripture:** *Luke 18:35-19:10 NRSV*

*(35)As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. (36) When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. (37)They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." (38)Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (39)Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (40)Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, (41)"What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." (42)Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." (43)Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God. (19:1)He entered Jericho and was passing through it. (2)A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. (3)He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. (4)So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. (5)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." (6)So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. (7)All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." (8)Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." (9)Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (10)For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*

**Notes:**

1. Many think they’ll make it to heaven if they live a ***decent*** life.
   1. ***Salvation*** means so much more.
   2. ***Salvation*** is being liberated from sin.
      1. Romans 3:23 “*… all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*;”
2. All sins have the same consequence, they all lead to ***death***;
   1. We have all been ***tempted*** by sin, and we have all ***fallen*** victim to sin.
   2. Sin is opting for a life less than what we were ***created*** for.
3. Bartimaeus was ***unhindered*** by the crowd, and expectations.
   1. Your ***faith*** has saved you.
   2. Zaccheus greatest ***challenge*** was his occupation.
   3. All that Zaccheus wanted was a look at ***Jesus***.
4. Jesus loved both Zaccheus and Bartimaeus as a ***child*** of ***God***.
   1. Jesus ***restores*** their relationship with God.
   2. Both are completely ***dependent*** on the grace of Jesus.
5. ***Saving*** grace allows us to see God’s kingdom
   1. Saving grace ***convicts***; yet ***liberates*** the hungry.
   2. Saving grace ***restores*** and ***directs*** us to go in Jesus’ name,
6. We have a ***different*** story; yet our need is very much the ***same***.
   1. Our ***goal*** is to be more like Christ in every way.
   2. ***Demonstrate*** your love for God by your obedience.
   3. ***Become*** the hands and feet of Jesus.
   4. ***Work*** to point the way to Jesus.

**Script:**

Many say we live in a needy society, and I am sure we all have needs, but I am not sure if what some proclaim to be needs are really that important. I am not sure that we really understand what the definition of need is. I remember back to when I taught school and there were so many students that would come to me with a need to go to this room or that room, or maybe they needed more time to complete an assignment that they put off until the last minute and did not get finished. But the truth of the matter is that many times what they claimed to be a need was really a desire to get out of my classroom and go meet up with a friend; not a real need.

We all have real needs. A need for air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat. But we do not need fancy bottles of soda or tea, elegant meals, or whatever else you may think of. A need is something that is essential for our survival, something that will help us to live an acceptable life. We need shelter, a place to live, but not an overly fancy home. We need clothing to keep us covered, but it does not need to be designer clothing and accessories. And we need companionship, We would not survive long on our own without companionship; without a friend to talk to; or a family member to love. Which brings us to the word love; do we need love? My answer at one time would have been, NO! But as time has passed and I have observed in those around me, I have changed my answer and believe that without love we would not be able to live an acceptable life.

Love is the one thing that is embedded into the soul of every human being, that comes from the being of God. When we do not receive love, we become discouraged, and fail to prosper. Now some will argue that if we look into history and look at the many people who have been serial killers and murderers; those who are thieves and liars; we will not find love and I do not have an answer to that. But I will stand by my statement that we need love to live an acceptable life. We may all have different stories but we all have the same need.

Today in our passage we find two stories of different people, with two very different situations, yet both people have the same need, a need for Jesus, a need for forgiveness, a need for salvation; God’s saving grace, redeeming them from the life they have lived and restoring them into a relationship with the living God. Turn with me to Luke 18:35 and read with me to verse 19:10.

*Luke 18:35-19:10 NRSV (36)As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. (36) When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. (37)They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." (38)Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (39)Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (40)Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, (41)"What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." (42)Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." (43)Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God. (19:1)He entered Jericho and was passing through it. (2)A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. (3)He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. (4)So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. (5)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." (6)So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. (7)All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." (8)Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." (9)Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (10)For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*

So many times, people have this idea that they are going to make it to heaven as long as they live a decent life, as long as they do good deeds for others; as long as they give to charity, as long as they are nice to others; and as long as they do not commit any bad sins like murder. But I do not think that is so, it takes more than living a good honest life to live in heaven with JESUS for eternity. Though we will never deny the work of Jesus on the cross for the sins of the world or the eternity of life with Christ, we must understand that salvation means so much more. Salvation is about being liberated from sin and making us whole.

Paul writes in Romans 3:23 that “… all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;” some sins seem much bigger than others because their consequences are much more serious. The truth is, all sins have the same consequence, they all lead to death; no matter if your sin is murder, or your sin is pride. All sins from the biggies to the most discreet, lead to death because they all separate us from a holy God, disqualifying us from an eternity in heaven. So we must not minimize the “little sins” and we should not overate the “big sins”. Let us not be fooled though, all sins can be forgiven.

The trouble in our world is that sin is a reminder that in our brokenness, no matter what is our material condition, we are all one. Sin levels the playing field. There is not one person in this room who has not sinned. There is not one person in this room who is any better than anybody else here this morning. We have all been tempted by sin, and we have all fallen victim to sin.

Sin is destructive. Sin is choosing to follow the desires of humanity in a fallen world, verses the desires of God in our life. Sin is opting for a life less than what we were created for. Sin is choosing our self over God. Sin destroys the relationship that God desires to have with every human. Sin is rebelliousness on the part of the sinner. Sin is a breach of trust and as I said earlier a break in relationship.

We recognize many sins; sins like murder, rape, thievery those are the easiest. But what about sins like gossip, the act of saying things about people to others, that you would not usually say with the subject present. Many times, gossip is tearing down the character of another, in many ways stealing from them their dignity, and killing their character. Gossip is a sin that is just as bad as all of the others. What about greed, greed is a desire that some have that drives them to accumulate or amass wealth, many times at the expense of another. Many times, deceit is central in achieving the desires of greed. I was watching the history channel this past week and the series called, “The Men Who Built America.” Many of the men spoken of during this series, were ruthless and many times they achieved their goals on the hard work and broken backs of the people who worked for them. Some would say survival of the fittest, I would say they were deceitful, selfish, and had little or no regard for their workers.

I am able to see this attitude and behavior in many people as they strive to get ahead. I can see it in my own life as I took what I wanted and did many things that I am not proud of, looking back. So we look at the characters in the two stories from scripture today and we see two very different stories.

The first, of a blind man sitting along the road begging. This was a very common thing to see, disabled persons sitting along the road, begging for whatever they could use to meet their physical needs. Along the road was where the people traveled so this is where they would have the most exposure and possibly receive the greatest gifts. Obviously Bartimaeus heard of Jesus before sitting along the road this day. Yes this is most likely the same story found in Mark, where Bartimaeus is given his sight. Perhaps Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was traveling this way so he was prepared. When he heard the crowds saying that Jesus was near, unhindered by the crowd, and expectations, Bartimaeus left out a shout, “Jesus, Son of David, Have mercy on me!” He was obviously very loud, and possibly embarrassing those standing near him, because they tried to shush him. But he was not about to be shushed. He shouted again, “Son of David, Have mercy on me.” I am guessing it was hard to ignore the cries of this desperate man and so Jesus had him brought over. “What do you want from me”, Jesus asked him, and Bartimaeus replied, “Lord, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.” And with that Bartimaeus received his eyesight back.

The next story is of Zaccheus. Zaccheus was short man who worked as a tax collector. Being short in nature was probably a hindrance for Zaccheus, but his greatest challenge in life was his occupation. As a tax collector, he was probably the most hated Jew in town. The general population considered tax collectors to be criminals who stole from their own people to benefit the oppression of their enemies, the Romans. So, when Jesus was entering town and the people began to spread the word that Jesus was there, everybody was gathering to see him. As the crowd grew, I am sure that Zaccheus, because of his short stature, was being pushed back away from the road and out of a line of sight to the road where Jesus would pass. And because of him being a tax collector, the people would intentionally keep him from squeezing through, keeping him from seeing. But Zaccheus must have had a little smarts, There was a tall Sycamore tree close by so he chose to climb the tree to get a look at Jesus. That is all it says that he wanted, to get a look at Jesus. As Jesus walked under the tree, he looked up and said, “Zacheus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house.” Imagine you in his shoes. Imagine you trying to get a look at a modern day celebrity that you never met before and when he gets close to you, he calls you by name. Even greater is the fact that he not only knew him by name but that he was planning to stay at his house that evening.

Despite the fact that Zaccheus was considered a traitor, cheater, a sinner; Jesus loved him just the same as if he was of great importance. Jesus loved him, not for what he did but for who he was. Jesus knew him as a child of God. Likewise, Jesus knew Bartimaeus as a child of God as well. In their brokenness; Bartimaeus’ darkness, and Zaccheus’ loneliness, they were left alone and forgotten. They were left to fend for themselves without the support of friends and family. They were left with broken self-identities, broken relationships, and a broken perception of others; yet Jesus enters into their lives and not only does he accept them, not only does he love them; he restores them back into a relationship with Father God.

One man throws off his cloak the other is found hiding up in a tree. They come from very different backgrounds. They have very different lifestyles. The have very different stories. Yet, they have the very same need; the need for God’s grace. Jesus makes time for both of these men, and they hear the very same word of salvation.

Both of these men are completely dependent on the grace of Jesus. They were alone, he welcomed them in. They were hungry for something more, and Jesus gave them food for their spirit. They were lost, and Jesus showed them the way, the truth, and the life. Saving grace lifts us from our misery; it opens our eyes from where we thought we were, and allows us to see his kingdom not only all around us, but welcoming us in. Saving grace restores us back into a community, the community of believers, a community of saints. Saving grace calls us out of hiding, out of the darkness and into the light of his goodness and grace, and it is that grace that slips into our homes where all are accepted and welcome. Saving grace convicts and yet liberates those who are hungry and seeking. Saving grace restores us to the person God wants us to be and commissions us to go in Jesus’ name, sharing the light of Jesus Christ to a world lost in darkness, demonstrating Jesus’ love for all of mankind, and pointing to the way to salvation, pointing life eternal, pointing to the savior of the world, Jesus.

We all have a different story; yet our need is very much the same. We have a need for Jesus; for his love to enter into our life. We have a need for his saving grace, to redeem us of the sinful life we have lived and empower us to live the life He has called us to live.

Our goal is to be more like Christ in every way. How do we become more like Christ? We become more like Christ as we strive for spiritual perfection. Get up every morning determined to live a life without sin, and when you stumble and fall, when you fail; get back up and start again. As long as you do not stop trying, you are moving in the right direction. you become more like Christ when you love the Lord above all else You also must love your neighbors as you love yourselves. You must be obedient to Gods commands. This is how you demonstrate your love for God by your obedience. You become more like Christ when you maintain a close bond with the Lord. You do this by speaking with him daily, if not constantly; by reading his word and digesting what it is telling you, and don’t think it tells us all the same thing, many times we can read the same passage and get completely different messages. You become more like Christ when you take the time to be still and listen to what the Lord is telling you. But you become the most like Christ when you go out into your communities and become Jesus’ hands and feet.

We must work to point the way to Jesus. We must intercede for those around us who are in need. We must help those around us who are struggling with the events of their life. And we do this by becoming more like Christ in everyway.

If you haven’t committed your entire life to Jesus, you can do this today. I invite each of you to say a prayer; perhaps you want to be saved from your sins; perhaps you need strength for a struggle you are dealing with; perhaps you just need to refresh the relationship that you have with our Lord. If you would like to have somebody pray with you, ask them or ask me. If you are hungry for what the Lord has in store for you today, please do not hesitate.