

## Lent “Grow Pray Serve” (GPS) Week of March 26, 2023

SUNDAY March 26, 2023 A Friend of Tax Collectors and Sinners

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10 (CEB)

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When Jesus came to that spot, he looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today.” So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus. Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much.” Jesus said to him, “Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. The Human One came to seek and save the lost.”

MONDAY 3.27.23 Thank people and God

Humility and gratitude Luke 17:1-19

Jesus told his disciples they must forgive “even if someone sins against you seven times in one day” (Verse 4; Matthew 18:21-22 said either “seventy-seven times” or “seventy times seven”). In any form, that's a lot more forgiving than we do innately! “Increase our faith!” the disciples gasped. Jesus said faith isn't a matter of quantity. He healed ten men of skin diseases when they showed just a little faith.

- Do you ever fear that Jesus' words about forgiveness meant you should be a docile “door mat”? They didn't. The gospels show Jesus firmly confronting his foes (e.g., driving money changers from the Temple—Luke 19:45-46). How can God (and wise human therapists) help us deal with hurt or betrayal in healthier ways than refusing to forgive (which harms us more than others)?
- On his way to Jerusalem, somewhere near the border between Galilee and Samaria, Jesus met the ten outcasts with skin diseases. Jesus healed and delivered them all, yet only one of those, a “bad” Samaritan, praised God. What experiences or inner obstacles make it harder for you to feel gratitude? Are there things you have forgotten or neglected to thank God for?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive me for times when I hurt you, or another person, without knowing what I was doing. And forgive me for the times when I've defied you, or hurt someone else, knowing exactly what I was doing. By your grace keep me forgiven and forgiving. Amen.

TUESDAY 3.28.23 Pray for the persecuted

God's kingdom: here, and still to fully arrive Luke 17:20 – 18:8

When some Pharisees asked a speculative question about when (in the future) God's Kingdom would come, Jesus instead spoke of the need to trust God now to be ready for any trial that might come. Then he told a parable that contrasted God with an unjust human judge. The issue, he said, was not if we can trust God, but whether God can trust us (18:8).

- In 17:21, Luke used the Greek words *entōs humōn*, which could mean either that God's kingdom is “among you” or “within you” (or, perhaps, both). What different significance do you find in the two possible meanings? To what extent does each of them ring true to your experience of living in the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached?

• In 18:1-8 Jesus used a “how much more” question, as rabbis often did. In effect he asked, “If even an unjust judge will do justice if pressed, how much more can we trust God to do justice?” But, he asked, will I find faithfulness on earth? Can you keep faithfully trusting God to do justice even when there seem to be letdowns or delays? How do you answer Jesus' question about faith?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I have questions about the future in your kingdom. Help me focus on your presence right now among us, and within me, and trust you to take care of the future. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 3.29.23 Take the “Jesus prayer” with you

Confounding human expectations Luke 18:9-34

“We are going up to Jerusalem,” Jesus said in 18:31, and he was nearly there. His culture didn’t value tax collectors or children. Jesus said those “nobodies” were more apt to receive God’s favor than an arrogant Pharisee or a ruler who loved his wealth more than God. “Then who can be saved?” his startled hearers asked. Anyone, Jesus implied. “What is impossible for humans is possible for God.”

• When the young ruler whose riches “owned” him turned away, Jesus said it was very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom. Yet most people in Jesus' day equated wealth with God’s favor, so they asked, “Then who can be saved?” Do you trust that whether you are a “somebody” or a “nobody,” your salvation is “possible for God”? How does that shape the way you live each day?

• Luke 18:34 said after three years the disciples still didn’t “get” what Jesus meant about dying and rising. Yet there were other moments when meeting Jesus seemed to reorient a person’s values or thinking quickly and radically. Has God ever changed any part of your life quickly or dramatically? In what areas are you still patiently struggling to grow, even with God’s help?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, preserve me from trusting in my own righteousness or in my bank and retirement accounts. Be the center and source of my life, now and forever. Amen.

THURSDAY 3.30.23 Connect with someone you’ve been missing

More “unworthy” people accepted and changed Luke 18:35 – 19:10

Jericho was the last stop before Jesus reached Jerusalem. “The Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37–93) explained that the first-century [Jericho to Jerusalem] road was...about eighteen miles long.”<sup>17</sup> In the ancient city of Jericho, Jesus met two men, one physically blind and the other spiritually sightless. At Jesus’ touch on their lives, both men began to see in the way they most needed to.

• Jesus asked the blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” (18:41). The man clearly stated the need he felt. If Jesus had asked wealthy, healthy Zacchaeus the same question as he sat in that sycamore tree, do you think he could have answered as clearly? Imagine Jesus asking you that question. What need(s) do you sense most clearly?

• Jesus’ mission was “to seek and save the lost.” Scholar William Barclay said, “ ‘Lost’ does not mean damned or doomed. It just means in the wrong place....A lost [person]...has wandered away from God; and is found when once again in the rightful place as an obedient child in the Father’s...family.”<sup>18</sup> In

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<sup>17</sup> From <https://www.israelandyou.com/jericho-to-jerusalem/>

<sup>18</sup> William Barclay, Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke (Revised Edition). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, page 257.

what ways has God given you your rightful place in God's family? When have you been able to help God "find" someone else?

Prayer: Loving Lord, when the grit and dust of this world blinds me to your kingdom values, please restore my inner vision. Let me see you and your purposes in my life more clearly. Amen.

FRIDAY 3.31.23 Put your God-given gifts to work

The final approach to Jerusalem Luke 19:11-28

Jesus' bold story of a king and his servants taught a lesson about faithful service. This story (Matthew 25 told it a bit differently) showed the master praising and rewarding servants who went all out to serve him. But it warned against playing it too safe—the king chided the "worthless servant" who was too fearful to risk anything. (NOTE: The story's violent end matched real events. "Archelaus's [son of Herod the Great] subjects (cf. 19:12) in fact sent a delegation after him asking that he not be allowed to rule....Herod, Archelaus, and other rulers often dealt harshly with their political opponents."<sup>19</sup>)

- Jesus' hearers would have seen God as the king in Jesus' story and Israel as the servants. God gave Israel a task—to show God's glory and love to all nations (Genesis 12:1-3). How has God gifted you? In what ways do those gifts imply the task(s) God calls you to? Do you ever feel like keeping your gifts safely in a "scarf," rather than actively using them for God's work in the world?

- Jesus' story wouldn't have made sense if the servants had all instantly believed they "owned" the large sum of money they received. How easy or hard do you find it to shift from thinking "I OWN all this" to "I'm a steward to whom God has entrusted these things (material possessions or gifts and talents) to use for God's purposes"?

Prayer: King Jesus, I want to serve you faithfully. Help me to see in what ways you have gifted me and help me use those gifts to serve you boldly and faithfully. Amen.

SATURDAY 4.1.23 Pray for your neighbors and your city

Jesus entered a city that broke his heart Luke 19:29-48

Jesus' long journey (which began in Luke 9:51) ended as he entered Jerusalem. He very deliberately entered in a way that echoed history (cf. 1 Kings 1:32-39) and prophecy (Zechariah 9:9-10). His entry said he symbolically claimed kingship, but peacefully. He wept over the city, and his tears showed that he loved the city's people. But he also wept because their heedless leaders did not love him.

- The prophet Zechariah said a righteous king would ride on a donkey's colt to offer peace and salvation to the people. How did Luke hint that Jesus pre-arranged his ride into Jerusalem to fulfill that prophecy (verses 31-34)? Who sang and praised Jesus (verses 37-39)? Who disliked his entrance into the holy city (verse 47)? Would you more likely have been with "the establishment" who didn't want their orderly status quo upset, or with the upstart rabbi from Galilee?

Prayer: Loving Lord, when you were born, Jerusalem ignored the news. When you came to the city, its leaders still didn't welcome you. Lord, I open my heart—I want to make room for you in my life. Amen.

## Weekly Prayer Requests

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<sup>19</sup> Zondervan, NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook (Kindle Locations 234126-234128, 234142). Kindle Edition.

