SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — November 9, 2025

> Then Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

At last! On the sixth and final encounter with a rich man in the middle section of Luke's Gospel (Luke 12-19), there is a positive outcome. It's not impossible for a wealthy man to enter into God's reign. He simply needs to repent and not be wealthy anymore.

Let's give a quick recap of the previous five:

- **Luke 12:13-31**: It all begins with someone asking Jesus to help settle a dispute over an inheritance. Jesus responds with a parable about a rich "fool," who thinks constantly about accumulating more wealth, and whose end is having his life "demanded" of him.
- **Luke 14:1-24**: Jesus dines with the "leader of the Pharisees," watching as the guests play games about where they sit. Jesus counsels them to take the lower places to sit, and then gives advice about who to invite in the first place: "when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" — offering a parable about a rich man who does so when his original guests turn him down.

  (Interlude: Parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son.)
- **Luke 16:1-13**: Jesus tells a parable about a middle manager who defects from the unjust system of his wealthy master. The middle manager makes friends with the unjust wealth before his job ends, basically finding a new family. Jesus concludes with the bottom-line principle, "You cannot serve God and wealth."
- **Luke 16:19-31**: Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, showing us what happens when you serve wealth: you isolate yourself from other human beings, building a "great chasm" — which the rich man cannot see until they are in the afterlife. It is similar to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, where Jacob Marley informs Ebenezer Scrooge that he is forging long chains for himself that will become visible in the afterlife. Here's the greatest problem with typical human economics: it builds large gaps between rich and poor, which is totally against God's intentions for the human family — that we are all equal in God's sight, each of us deserving the opportunity to have our lives flourish with our neighbors.
- **Luke 18:1-30**: Jesus tells parables about perceiving others as unequal, as lesser, a parable about a widow and unjust judge and also about a Pharisee and tax collector. The disciples exhibit this behavior by trying to prevent children from coming to him, to which Jesus responds, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not *receive* the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." This is followed immediately by a "very rich" "ruler" who asks Jesus about *inheriting* God's reign — deserving it and not just receiving it as a gift. Jesus tells him to go and sell everything he owns, give it to the poor, and come follow Jesus. The man walks away sad. Jesus says, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

So it is quite momentous that the encounters with rich men ends with the salvation of Zacchaeus, a very wealthy man:

- Not all tax collectors were wealthy, though all were collaborators with the Roman Empire's oppressive economics. But it says that Zacchaeus is a "chief tax collector," so he's near the top of the wealth pyramid — he is "rich."
- Contrary to our Sunday School songs, the Greek text (badly translated) says that Zacchaeus is of "young age," not "small stature," so he likely has inherited his position from his parents. He has 'generational' wealth.
- Zacchaeus does not simply become charitable. He recognizes that he has "defrauded" people to gain wealth, and so his giving away wealth are reparations — a righting of the wrong.
- His actions would clearly lose him his position. The Romans would not tolerate someone who makes reparations. He was giving up his wealth and taking his place once again as a child of Abraham.

Are there any examples of like Zacchaeus in recent history? Perhaps the most famous example of a billionaire philanthropist is Bill Gates. Yes, he has been charitable, giving away portions of his wealth. But this is not reparations, not righting the wrongs of how he gained his wealth as an admission of the injustice of our system of wealth. He's not in danger of losing all his wealth like Zacchaeus. I think the closest example, far from perfect, is Franklin Roosevelt, who was a wealthy man who other rich people saw as betraying them, raising their taxes to provide the New Deal for a hurting citizenry in the Great Depression.

Next week: the cost of doing what Zacchaeus did.