

Luke 18:31-19:10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 18 verse 31 to chapter 19 verse 10. And taking the twelve he said to them, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished, for he will be delivered over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon, and after flogging him they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.

But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. As he drew near to Jericho a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging, and hearing a crowd go by he inquired what this meant.

They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. And he cried out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near he asked him, What do you want me to do for you? He said, Lord, let me recover my sight.

And Jesus said to him, Recover your sight. Your faith has made you well. And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people when they saw it gave praise to God.

[1 : 1 4] He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a cheap tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.

So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And 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.

So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all grumbled. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.

And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Towards the end of Luke chapter 18, Jesus gives the third prediction of his death. It's important that Jesus declares his death to the twelve beforehand.

[2 : 2 1] Jesus is going up to Jerusalem. He's ascending to the place where he will be condemned and crucified. This is not an accident. It's not someone caught in circumstance beyond his control. Jesus predicts in clear and explicit detail what will happen, who will the participants be, and what exactly they will do.

And furthermore, all of this is happening in fulfilment of what the prophets declared would happen to the Son of Man. God is in control, and Jesus as the Son of Man is in control of his fate.

Jesus nears Jericho with the crowd, and he's surrounded with a great many people, excited by this potential Messiah, this prophet and teacher. And a blind man calls out to him as the Son of David.

This is the first time that Jesus has been addressed in this way during his ministry in the Gospel. The messianic secret perhaps has slipped, and the time is nearing for open revelation of Jesus' identity.

This blind man is the first person beyond the disciples to speak of Jesus openly in this way. Once again, there's someone socially marginal, without status, who wishes to get close to Jesus, but is rebuked by others.

[3 : 27] Once again, Jesus insists that the person be allowed access to him, and explicitly calls for him. Jesus declares that his faith has made him well. His faith here seems to be shown in his persistence, on the basis of his confidence that Jesus has the capacity and the willingness to heal him.

He also perceives, even in his blindness, who Jesus really is, before almost anyone else. The man by the side of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho needing assistance, with everyone passing by, might also remind us of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

While others ask what they must do to receive the kingdom, and other things like that, the blind man begs for mercy, and is asked by Jesus what he should do for him. There is perhaps some irony here.

Our fixation can often be upon what we must do, when all we had to do was ask for mercy. It's like pulling a door that says push. The city is Jericho, which has a history.

Jericho is the only city mentioned on the itinerary of the travel narrative, that takes up a third of the Gospel of Luke. I've already mentioned the possible connection of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho in the parable of the Good Samaritan, now mirrored in the road from Jericho to Jerusalem.

[4 : 40] The city of Jericho had previously been visited by a namesake of Jesus, Joshua. When Joshua had visited, back in the book of Joshua, a prostitute was saved, but the city was destroyed.

And now a tax collector is saved, as a new Joshua visits the city. We are told the species of the tree that Zacchaeus climbed. It's a fig mulberry, like the tree symbolising Israel, potentially, in chapter 17, verse 6.

It is likely that we're supposed to make something of this fact, although I'm not sure exactly what we should make of it. Zacchaeus gets right with the poor, and he restores fourfold of what he owes.

This degree of restitution is mentioned in Exodus chapter 22, verse 1, and in 2 Samuel chapter 12, verse 6, when David responds to the parable of Nathan, the prophet. Exodus chapter 22, verse 1 reads, If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.

There are ways in which this story draws together a great many of the themes that have been at play in the travel narrative of the last few chapters. Zacchaeus is a tax collector that Jesus eats with.

[5 : 50] Eating with the tax collectors was the cause of the controversy in chapter 15, at the very beginning. The people are grumbling about this fact, much as they did back then. Zacchaeus is also a rich man who is saved and who sells his possessions and gives to the poor, unlike the rich ruler in the preceding chapter.

Jesus also describes him as a son of Abraham. This continues the theme of the redefinition of the family of Abraham, but also the theme of the recovery of his last children.

Zacchaeus is a restored son, and he offers restitution for a stolen sheep. Maybe both of these things call back to the parables in chapter 15. A question to consider.

Zacchaeus' repentance and salvation is manifested and demonstrated in his new way of treating his wealth. How does this fit in with broader themes of Luke's gospel?

What lessons might it hold for us?