



JESUS PASSED BY

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Greetings and welcome to Let the Bible Speak... a time together to open the word of God and let it speak about the issues of our day and of our individual lives. I hope you had a good week and I'm glad you're starting a new one by joining us to investigate the scriptures.

Today, I want us to go back to a familiar day in the life of Jesus; the day Jesus met two memorable men, one, by the side of the road and the other -- up in a tree. I'm talking, of course, about Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus. We know Bartimaeus as the poor, blind man who sat on the roadside begging. Zacchaeus was famous because of his stature -- and he was infamous because of his occupation, he was a hated tax collector. But both men had life-changing encounters with Christ the day He came to the city of Jericho.

Let's first read from Luke chapter 18, starting in verse 35: ***"Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'"*** And the record goes on to tell of how Jesus healed him. Now continuing in Luke 19:1-10: ***"Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.'" So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, 'He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.'" Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.'" And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.'"***

The ministry of Jesus was coming to a close. He was slowly making His way to Jerusalem for the final time where the cross awaited Him. He had spent three and a half years walking the dusty roads of Galilee and of Samaria, and Judea preaching the gospel of the kingdom, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute, and even raising up the dead. His teachings had piqued interest; sparked hope; and stirred controversy. His miracles had attracted a following even if many of those who followed Him were only interested in seeing Him perform wonders. By this time, He was well known among His people and wherever He went, it caused a commotion.

His journey to the Mount of Olives and His final descent into Jerusalem took Him through the town of Jericho. When you piece together the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it appears to have unfolded like this: Jesus was coming up from the Jordan valley and approached the town of Jericho at the eastern gate. Somewhere outside the city, there sat pitiful Bartimaeus. He was blind and he was poor, and he sat by the roadside begging. As usual, a crowd followed Jesus and after Jesus walked by the blind man could hear the commotion of the multitude. He asked someone what all the fuss was about and “they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.” I imagine his heart fluttered in his chest when they told him that because he had HEARD of Jesus. I know that because he knew who Jesus claimed to be and apparently believed it. He had probably heard about all the miracles that Jesus had performed, and he therefore concluded that Jesus was the Messiah. How excited he must have been to hear that Jesus had passed that way and he immediately started to find a way to intercept Jesus as He journeyed about the city. He probably knew that Jesus was headed to Jerusalem for the Passover and knew that He would leave through the southern gate and so he groped his way along the wall of the city to position himself where he could meet the Lord when He departed.

Meanwhile, Jesus entered and passed through Jericho and there was another man who had heard about the Lord, and he too was determined to get near Him and catch a glimpse of Him. His name was Zacchaeus. Now, Zacchaeus, you probably remember, was a short man. He couldn’t see over the crowd and so, he famously climbed up into the branches of a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus as He passed by. Not only was he ‘vertically challenged’, but Zacchaeus also had another problem and that was that people in the town hated him because he was a tax collector. He was a Jew working for the Roman government collecting taxes and tax collectors in that day were known to be less than honest and take more than was required and they would line their own pockets. These Jews were looked on as traitors because not only did the Jews resent paying taxes to the occupying Roman government, but they were also using their position to get rich on their backs. They were collecting oppressive amounts of tax and flaunting their luxury before the poor and common people they were taking from. So, Zacchaeus was a despised man and so, he thought he would just hide away in the foliage of a sycamore tree and get a look at Jesus as he passed by. The record says, “So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.”

Well, if you know the story, Jesus did pass under that tree and He knew Zacchaeus was sitting up there and He looked up and saw him and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” And I love what the bible then says: “So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.” However unscrupulous of a life Zacchaeus may have lived before then, when Jesus went home with him, his life was radically changed. And the same will happen to you when you take Jesus into your home and your heart. Your life will be transformed and your home will be transformed; your marriage will be transformed; the way you rear your children will be transformed; all will be changed when Jesus goes home with a man or a woman. And life was changed for Zacchaeus that day; all because when the Lord passed by and called for him, Zacchaeus seized that precious and rare opportunity and “made haste, and came down, and received the Lord joyfully”.

And so, Jesus then makes His way out of the house of Zacchaeus and exits the city at the southern gate to leave for Jerusalem, and here this blind beggar, Bartimaeus, has been waiting for Christ to appear. After he had heard the commotion of the Lord entering the city, he had groped his way along the city wall to the gate where Jesus would exit and positioned himself to meet Him. And as Jesus now passes by, Bartimaeus cries out to Him, "'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet..." They didn't think this lowly man had any business calling out and bothering Jesus, but I want you to see his persistence! I want you to see how pressing of a matter this was to him and how precious he saw this opportunity as Jesus came passing his way! It says, "...but he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, that I may receive my sight.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God." Here's a man who realized what a great opportunity presented itself when Jesus passed by and he called upon Him to help.

Friend, this is a principle that is found throughout the word of God and His dealings with sinful men and women. God's grace has a season. God's mercy is a door that is open just for a while. God's gracious offer of salvation passes our way, but it doesn't remain forever. In Isaiah 55, the prophet prophecies of Jesus the Messiah saying that God, thru His Son would extend a glorious invitation to weary, thirsty, hungry, and lost mankind. He says in verse 1: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price." What a gracious invitation! What grace and mercy He would extend to a sinful and undone people! But notice what he then says in verse 6: "Seek the LORD **while He may be found**, Call upon Him **while He is near**. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon." Underscore that: Seek Him "WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND". Call upon Him "WHILE HE IS NEAR", meaning there will be a time when He will NOT be found and when He will NOT be near. You see, Jesus passes by and when He does, that is our opportunity. Some seem to think that Jesus will simply stand aside forever and allow them to live as they please, do as they wish, use their life for their own selfish purposes, and if the time should come that they see a need for Him, then He will be there. But that's not the case.

God appealed to Israel, His people, to repent of their sinful idolatry long before God's judgment fell. Jeremiah wept over their ruined condition and said in Jeremiah 8:20 "The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!" The time for preparation was past; the time for sowing was over; they had let the time for repentance slip away and now day was done and they were not saved. That's the case for many even today who squander the many opportunities that God mercifully provides. In fact, after Jesus left Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus in Jericho, He journeyed the few miles to Jerusalem where the cross awaited Him. And as Jesus come down the Mount of Olives toward the city, He stopped and He look out over it and He envisioned not only the rejection He would face when He entered, but He also saw the awful destruction that would befall it a few years later when Titus and the Romans would destroy it.

The bible says in Luke 19:41-44 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to

the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." By that, He means: 'you were so blinded and so hardened by your sin and by your pride and by your prejudice that you never realized the opportunity that God put before you. He said "I would have been like a mother hen that gathers her chicks under wings; I wanted to save you and protect you... BUT YOU WERE NOT WILLING." They let Jesus pass by without calling upon Him.

My friend, maybe you're in a lost condition today. Maybe you're that blind beggar spiritually speaking. Maybe you're like Zacchaeus who lived for greed and gain and you're a great sinner in God's eyes and Jesus is passing by you today. He may be passing by as you come across a channel like this and hear a gospel sermon. He may be passing by as the sorrows and tragedies or maybe even joys in your life make you stop and think for even just a moment about spiritual matters. He may be passing by as some loved one or person of influence in your life pleads with you to consider Him. He may be passing by as some sermon, some song, some prayer, some scripture, some word of admonishment, tries to point you to Jesus. And you may think: another time... another day... there be other chances... "when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee..." But Jesus passes by. He doesn't stay forever. Doors of opportunity eventually close.

I remember hearing a preacher on the radio tell a story one day about preaching to a large congregation. A young man was there who was obviously affected by the preacher's sermon. The preacher could tell that that young man's conscience was being stirred. He shifted and squirmed in his seat and looked down at the floor. And when the invitation was finally extended, the young man looked at his songbook and nervously shifted around for a few lines and suddenly put down his book and looked as though he was going to step out into the aisle. He stopped though. The next verse came, and once again, he nervously fidgeted and moved as though he had made up his mind and was going to step out...but he didn't. A third time, and this time he stepped out into the aisle, turned around and ran out the back door and never returned to that place again. Time passed and that preacher was called to go visit that same young man in the hospital. He reminded him of that service and told him how he had wondered several times what was going through that young man's mind that day. The man told him, I was about to go forward. I had struggled with this matter in my heart for a while and something in your sermon stirred me and made me want to go forward. But there was just too much to give up. I just couldn't bring myself to turn my back on the life I had. I finally decided there was anything to all this religion stuff. And despite that preacher's pleas, even in sickness, that young man couldn't bring himself to believe, and he went out into eternity with obeying the gospel of Christ. I didn't know that young man. I don't even know who he was, but it would appear to me that Jesus one day passed by... and he looked... and he thought... maybe... what if... but he didn't. He let Jesus pass on by and Jesus went on His way.

The wise man said, "He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Proverbs 29:1) "TODAY, IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." (Hebrews 4:7)

Is Jesus passing by today? As you pause to listen to this gospel sermon as perhaps you've listened to many others; or as you find yourself in the place where you are being confronted with questions and anxieties and worries about your spiritual state; IS JESUS PASSING BY? As Jesus told Zacchaeus, "Make haste! Come down!" Run to meet Him. This may well be the most important day of your life and you may make the most important decision you will ever make in your life because it will determine where you spend eternity! And friend, He may never pass this way again. If Jesus is passing by, I hope you'll decide to follow Him and do whatever you have to do to learn what He wants you to do and how He

wants you to live and that you'll follow Him in gospel obedience and in a transformed life because this day, "Jesus passed by."

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