

Healing Our Wounded Heart - 4 'Loneliness' Luke 19: 1-10

Good Morning God's people! God is so good, all the time! I am sure that God is still so good even with the Coronavirus affecting the entire United States.

As you know, because of the Coronavirus, we have been worshiping like this. We pray that people of our faith will become more and more strong by faith in difficult and turmoil times in and out of the country. May the Lord's great grace and blessings be with all God's people who worship our God at home.

We feel loneliness in the midst of all the people around us, like the phrase "solitude among the masses". A newspaper conducted a survey among its readers. The survey asked, "What is the greatest challenge you face?" The three most repeated responses were fear, worry, and loneliness. If we conclude that fear and worry are caused by loneliness, then loneliness is the greatest problem that afflict people. A medical research report revealed that over 80% of people who visit a psychiatrist for mental problems do so out of loneliness.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent and the fourth Sunday of my sermon series. I would like to share with you about loneliness.

Who do you think was the loneliest person in the Bible? When I asked myself the same question, the name Zacchaeus came to mind. As the chief tax collector of Jericho, perhaps none was as lonely as Zacchaeus.

Today, we will look at the reason behind Zacchaeus' loneliness and how he overcame such loneliness.

Why was Zacchaeus so lonely and how was he able to overcome his loneliness?

1. Zacchaeus was lonely because he led a life devoid of God.

According to the second verse of today's bible scripture, Zacchaeus was a wealthy chief tax collector of Jericho. Jericho was a bustling border city located near Jordan River. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector of this booming trade hub city called Jericho. He was the highest-ranking person of the tax agency.

During the time of Christ, tax collectors were often viewed and treated as traitors by the people of Israel. Tax collectors, as instruments of the Roman Empire, enjoyed and exercised a special authority bestowed by the Roman government to levy and collect taxes as they wished. Tax collectors turned over a portion of collected taxes to the Roman government, but through clever and beguiling methods and bookkeeping, kept most of the proceeds as their personal wealth. As a result, people referred to tax collectors as 'licensed thieves' and considered them to be public enemy number one. Zacchaeus was not a mere tax collector; rather, he was the chief tax collector, making him the most despised and perhaps the greatest extortionist of his day. Therefore, the Bible not only refers to him as the chief tax collector, but as a wealthy man to boot. He became exceedingly wealthy by extorting the livelihood and the blood of his fellow people.

Zacchaeus was indeed wealthy; yet, he had emptiness in his heart. He had no friends. He was lonely. Why was that so?

It is because Zacchaeus lived without God. People cannot live without God since God created mankind.

Craig Ellison, a noted Christian psychologist, once stated that there are three types of loneliness: emotional loneliness, societal loneliness, and existential loneliness. Emotional loneliness results from our feelings and mood, whereas societal loneliness comes from the loss of a close relationship with one's neighbors. Existential loneliness refers to the basic, innate loneliness that every person is born with. Inception of existential loneliness took place when God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. A tide of loneliness often overwhelms us without reason, despite the fact that our loved ones surround us and all things are going well in our lives. Such basic, viviparous loneliness result when our relationship with God has gone off track. The important fact is that existential loneliness is the cause of all loneliness—emotional and societal loneliness.

Is the President of the US happy because he is the President? Are millionaires not lonely? Do celebrities feel true happiness because of their popularity? Not at all. Conversely, increasing one's authority, wealth, and popularity often result in increased loneliness.

Zacchaeus was lonely because he was ultimately living without God. His soul became more and more lonely as he lived farther and farther away from God, engrossed in his sole pursuit of money and material wealth. Remember the fact that away from God, our lives will always be full of loneliness. Life without God as the ultimate objective is destined for loneliness, regardless of the amount of worldly success.

2. Zacchaeus was able to escape from loneliness when he received Jesus into his life.

Living in the midst of hateful and stinging glares from his neighbors, Zacchaeus heard rumors about Jesus Christ. He heard that Jesus was a friend of sinners and that He performed many miracles. It is only natural that Zacchaeus, the object of hatred, scorn, and ostracism, took interest in Jesus. Upon hearing that Jesus is coming to his neighborhood, he wanted to meet this Man, to see what He was like. So he went out into the street to meet Him.

That's when a problem arose. Throngs of people already lined the street, and Zacchaeus, who was a short man, could not see into the street. Most people would have given up at this point and went home. But Zacchaeus, who was so lonely, had to meet Jesus. So, without hesitation, he climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus. The fact that Zacchaeus, who was known as a sinner, climbed a tree to see Jesus showed just how desperate—and lonely—he was. He ignored the stares and shamelessly climbed a tree to see Jesus.

As He was walking down the street, Jesus saw Zacchaeus on top of a sycamore tree. According to the fifth verse of Luke chapter 19, Jesus said to him, "**Zacchaeus, make**

haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” Jesus already knew just how lonely Zacchaeus felt and how desperately he wanted to meet Him. Zacchaeus was overjoyed upon hearing those words from Jesus. Verse 6 states, **“So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.”** For most of his adult life, everyone ignored Zacchaeus, and either avoided him or scornfully confronted him. Yet, Jesus was different. Just like the rumors he heard, Jesus was warm, fair, and gentle. Zacchaeus had the confidence in his heart that Jesus was indeed the one who can wash away the loneliness from his heart. So with haste, he came down from the tree and joyfully received Jesus.

Do you feel implacable loneliness and emptiness in your hearts? From deep within, receive Jesus. Jesus will help you cast away your loneliness.

3. Zacchaeus made the decision to live without loneliness.

Zacchaeus, who lived away from God, was naturally lonely. Living with the absence of God, he led an aimless life. As his neighbors hated him more and more, as they pointed fingers at him more frequently, Zacchaeus only concentrated on increasing his wealth. But Jesus called to Zacchaeus. Not only did He call on him, Jesus told him that He would be staying at his house. There was no boundary to the joy that Zacchaeus felt. But there was still one more problem.

Let’s take a look at verse 7. **“But when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.”**” They were gossiping. They were criticizing and complaining about the fact that Jesus was going to the house of a man who was considered a sinner. In truth, Zacchaeus, up to that point, lived isolated from not only God, but others. He built a wall between himself and those around him. Existential loneliness, coupled with emotional and societal loneliness, made Zacchaeus a total social outcast. It was natural for people to criticize Jesus for visiting the house of Zacchaeus.

But in verse 8, Zacchaeus responds to the people’s criticizing. **“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.”** This shows the determination of Zacchaeus to escape from his loneliness. He said he would give half of his wealth to the poor. Furthermore, he said that he would repay four times the money he unjustly extorted from other people.

When Zacchaeus received Christ and remedied his spiritual, or existential loneliness, he learned of the method to solve his societal loneliness that resulted from his relationship with those around him. He made the decision to change his life and fix his relationship with his neighbors. How did Jesus respond to Zacchaeus’ determination? In verse 9, He states, **“Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham.”** Jesus declared that Zacchaeus was no longer a sinner, but a child of God. Our loneliness comes from our broken relationship with God. We also become lonely when our relationship with our neighbors is broken. After receiving Christ, Zacchaeus realized why his community ostracized him and he decided to lead a new life. He vowed to become a new man, a good, benevolent person who benefits others rather than harming them. As the phrase “good is good” indicates, develop good relations with others when possible.

Dear God's people, are you lonely today? Do incomprehensible emptiness and sadness bother you? Lift your eyes and see Jesus at the Cross. There, we will find the cure to our loneliness and gaze upon the happiest person in the world. Lay our loneliness in front of Jesus and His Cross and experience the amazing love of our Lord. Our loneliness will turn into happiness and pleasure. Amen.

Let us pray!

Loving God, thank you for calling us to be your Children even though we don't deserve to be. We are living with existential loneliness in this world like Zacchaeus who had broken relationships with his friends and neighbors. Lord, help us to receive You as the master of our lives and as our savior so that we may receive true joy and happiness in our lives.

Help us to remember the fact that away from you, our lives will always be full of loneliness. Life without You is destined for loneliness, regardless the amount of worldly success. Help us to lay our loneliness in front of Jesus and His Cross and experience the amazing love of our Lord in this Lenten season.

We pray in Jesus name!