

FLEA VIDEO #10: "SOMETHING PERSONAL" (Luke 19:1-10)

6.19.20

I have a wonderful story of intimacy for you all today, of how completely personal God takes each and every one of us. It's a story about the huge difference between how people saw somebody and how Jesus saw somebody - and the huge difference that can make in people's lives.

This is at a time when Jesus is nearing the end of His ministry and, in fact, He is on His way to Jerusalem for the final time. And He was just entering Jericho - meaning that He had just a little over 15 miles to go on His journey.

Now the Bible tells us that there was a man in Jericho named Zacchaeus, and we are told that he was a "chief tax collector" and that he was wealthy. Those two things went hand-in-hand. Tax collectors were notorious and hated in that time because they essentially worked for the occupying Roman forces there; in fact, the Romans ruled over Palestine partly with the help of the tax money the collectors collected. But not only were they hated for that, but also for the fact that, as long as the Romans got the taxes due them, the collectors could take as much from their own people in the name of taxes as they could get away with. Now as a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus had a group of tax collectors working under him. After the Romans got their cut, he got his cut - again, as much as he could get away with. So as a chief collector, he might have been even more hated.

Now, as Jesus was coming through town, accompanied by the huge crowds that were the norm wherever He was traveling, Zacchaeus had a desire to be able to see this famous person. One problem - Zacchaeus was short. While he might have had a big bank account, he was a little dinky dude - too short of height to be able to see over the crowd that was surrounding Jesus.

So, he hit upon an ingenious idea. If his natural assets weren't enough, he'd just borrow some. He'd find some height. He began looking around him and he saw some sycamore trees growing along the road that Jesus was traveling. That would be perfect, he thought. So, just like any little kid would do, he pulled himself up into one of the low branches and scrambled up as high as he thought he needed to be to be able to see this famous guy from Nazareth. Now nobody seemed to notice that this guy in the fancy clothes was climbing a tree. Imagine some famous person we know doing that. Anyway, he found what he thought was a good spot, so he settled in and waited for Jesus to come by.

Pretty soon he heard a buzz that became louder and louder. Sure enough, a huge crowd of people was heading his way and, as he looked, he noticed they seemed to be surrounding one guy in particular. Wow, that must be Jesus, he thought. Even though there didn't seem to be anything special about Him, He sure had the attention of the crowd. Zacchaeus smiled to himself. This branch was the perfect place. He could see Jesus, but nobody could see him.

But all of a sudden, just when he thought that Jesus was passing, the crowd stopped. And the people started to part to let Jesus through. Jesus was no longer walking the road but now walking a new direction - right toward his tree! Zacchaeus held his breath. Oh man, this couldn't be good.

And sure enough, Jesus walked up to the tree in which little old Zacchaeus was perched. And as the crowd watched, Jesus looked up into the tree until His eyes met those of Zacchaeus. He was petrified; what was Jesus going to do? Embarrass him? Accuse him? Just keep staring at him?

But instead, Zacchaeus saw Jesus begin to smile at him. And then He said the impossible: ***"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today"*** - ***Jesus Christ, Luke 19:5b***. Jesus wanted to share time with him, share a meal with him, in his own house. That's something only best friends did. He couldn't believe it - and neither could the crowd. They just stood there in disbelief, muttering about Jesus: ***"He has gone to be the guest of a sinner"*** - ***Luke 19:7b***. But faster than you could say, "Hamburger and fries," or whatever they'd eat back then, Zacchaeus scrambled down to the ground.

But his encounter with Jesus made Zacchaeus a changed man. He told Jesus that he was going to give away half his wealth, and pay back four times the amount of any money he had acquired wrongly. Those actions, Jesus said, reflected a change of heart - a heart that had now been born into salvation. As He said, this is why He came: ***"[T]he Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"*** - ***Jesus Christ, Luke 19:10***.

Now this story is about something Jesus said that was impossible - and it may not be what you'd think. It is one word in particular that Jesus said: "Zacchaeus." Why is that a big deal? Because, as far as we know, Jesus and Zacchaeus had never met - not once. Yet when Jesus came to the tree where Zacchaeus was sitting, He called out to him like they were old friends - because, in Jesus' mind, they were.

I know that sometimes the world seems crazy, with forces going helter-skelter all around us in such a way that it is very easy to feel helpless, or afraid, or alone. But we need to remember, we are invited to know, that God knows us; He knows each and every one of us - personally and intimately. One of my favorite Bible verses is God speaking in Isaiah 43, where He says: ***"[T]his is what the Lord says - He who created you, ... He who formed you "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine"*** - ***God speaking, Isaiah 43:1***. "I have summoned you by name; you are Mine." Now that's intimacy; that is personal. David knew that God knew him intimately and personally as well; he wrote: ***You have searched me, Lord, and You know me You are familiar with all my ways*** - ***David, Psalm 139:1, 3b***. Now that's intimacy; that is personal. And just think about what Jesus shared once with His disciples: ***"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care"*** - ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:29***. If God looks after the smallest of things He created, won't He so much more look after you? And it is because God knows us intimately and takes us personally that He said through His Son: ***"[S]urely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"*** - ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b***. So, no matter what is going on around you, no matter what you are feeling, reach out to God. Through Jesus, He has already reached out to you - by name!