

STEPS TO THE CROSS

Shining Light into Darkness

Luke 18:31 – 20:44

INTRODUCTION: **No person has ever been more intentional than Jesus.**

- As a twelve year old boy He told His earthly parents that He must be about His heavenly Father's business.
- In the early months of Jesus' ministry, He went back to His hometown of Nazareth to worship in the synagogue. He was asked to read the Scripture, and He chose a passage from Isaiah declaring what Messiah would do when He came to earth. Jesus told them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."
- The result of Jesus' revelation of Himself as their promised Savior brought not only scoffing but anger. The people of Nazareth drove Jesus out of town to the edge of a cliff where they tried to kill Him by throwing Jesus on the rocks below.
- The Scripture says simply that Jesus passed through the crowd and went His way.
- Jesus well knew He came into the world to die, but not in Nazareth, and not by falling off a cliff. He would be the Lamb of God, offered as a sacrifice for the sin of the people; and that would happen in Jerusalem some three and a half years after His hometown rejected Him.
- Our text in Luke, chapter 18, takes place on that day.

Luke 18:31–33 NKJV 31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. 33 They will scourge *Him* and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

Knowing exactly what awaited Him there, Jesus headed intentionally, purposefully to Jerusalem.

- **Today, and for the next six weeks, we are going to follow the steps of Jesus as He headed toward the cross, and beyond it to the resurrection.**
- We will not get to talk about everything our Savior did, for we cannot cover 192 hours in a mere three and a half hours of sermons.
- **We will focus on certain things our Lord said and did that are meant to guide our steps as His followers.**
- For Jesus has told those of us who have trusted Him as Savior and Lord, to take up our cross and follow Him.
- The first step we examine takes place on a day that had been appointed by the Father and revealed to Daniel the prophet six centuries earlier, as the day the Messiah would offer Himself to the Jews in Jerusalem as their Messiah-King. It was called the Day of Visitation.

Daniel 9:25 NKJV "Know therefore and understand, *That* from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, *There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.*

- This day was the completion of the 483rd year. This was the day of Messiah the Prince. Probably no one had been counting the time since the command of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem until this day, no one but Jesus that is. But this was exactly the time prophesied, 69 weeks of years, 483 years to the day.
- Another prophet saw this day as well. Zechariah had written centuries ago

Zechariah 9:9 NKJV Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He *is* just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.

- Jesus knew the Father had arranged for the donkey's colt to be available for Him. He would ride in on that donkey, and they would know. Jesus was presenting Himself to them as their Messiah, Savior, and King. It was an appointment set by His Father before the earth was even formed.
- On that day, Jesus, followed by His disciples, set out for Jerusalem to keep the appointment God had set.

But on His way, let those of us who follow Jesus see what Jesus did; and let us learn from Him.

I. THE SON OF GOD PAUSED TO SHINE HIS LIGHT INTO THE DARKNESS OF A MAN. (LUKE 18:35-43)

The road to Jerusalem passed through Jericho which was the home of blind Bartimaeus. Every day for Bartimaeus was a day of darkness. This day, like every day, he worked his way to the edge of the city where pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem might have mercy on him and throw a shekel or two into his clay bowl. If people were in a kind mood, he would have dinner that night. If they were not, he would not.

Bartimaeus had not been long at his favorite begging site when he heard a large group of people approaching up the road. "Who are they?" Bartimaeus inquired. Someone answered, "I think it is Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, followed by His disciples."

Bartimaeus had undoubtedly heard of Jesus, and what he heard thrilled his heart. He had probably heard that Jesus had cleansed lepers, and made lame men walk. He might have heard about Lazarus too, but what really excited him was that he had heard that Jesus could give sight to the blind.

So as Jesus and His disciples approached, Bartimaeus cried out for all he was worth, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." He called out again, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Bartimaeus was so loud and persistent, that people around him tried to get him to be quiet, but Bartimaeus knew of no one else who could offer him light instead of darkness, so he called out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

And then Jesus heard him, and He stopped. Do you want to be a faithful follower of Jesus? Then see what the Master does when time and important business presses Him. Here was the Son of God on the way to an appointment made by the Father and scheduled 483 years in advance. Here was the Messiah on the day of His visitation to Jerusalem. But when He heard blind Bartimaeus call out for mercy, He stopped. For that was why He came, to give mercy, even if it cost Him His life.

So He asked those standing around to bring Bartimaeus to Him. Then Jesus asked him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Bartimaeus quickly replied, "I want to receive my sight." Jesus said, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." And immediately, Bartimaeus could see again, and he joined the crowd following the Savior.

Folks, **The Savior always has time to shine His light into the darkness of a life who will call out to Him.** My friend, do you hear me? You who know there is a spiritual darkness in the depth of your soul. The Savior always has time to shine His light into the darkness of a life who will call out to Him. Will you call out to Him today?

And fellow disciple, follower of Christ, what does this say to us who are often so busy with our schedules that we avoid those who appear to be in darkness, not wanting to give up the precious time or to delay our self-important schedule?

I was convicted even as I wrote this message because God brought to mind times I had worked late at church and went out to my truck well after dark and eager to get home. Here would come a man in obvious need walking down the drive by the office, headed right by my truck, and I hoped he would not stop me to talk or ask for something. I had to stop writing the sermon and ask for God's forgiveness for not wanting the man to cry out for God's mercy or help so I could tell Him of the Savior who could bring light into the darkness of his life if He would trust in Him.

Brother or Sister in Christ,

Do you share in my conviction because don't we all often find ourselves pressed for time and driven by our schedules so that when an encounter presents itself where we could let the light of the Lord Jesus shine thru us on some soul stranded in darkness, we just pass by. And we excuse ourselves with the words "I just don't have time." That's not what Jesus did!

But notice with me that Jesus did not stop with taking time with an unfortunate soul that probably most of the citizens pitied.

II. JESUS SHINED HIS LIGHT UPON THE DESPISED. (LUKE 19:1-10)

From the outskirts of town where He healed Bartimaeus, Jesus led His disciples through the city of Jericho, still steadfastly heading to Jerusalem. There was someone in Jericho He had to see. If all the people of the city had taken a poll as to who that man was that Jesus wanted to meet, probably no one would have guessed that it was Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was probably the most hated and despised man in Jericho. He was a chief tax collector which meant two things: he was considered a traitor to his own people because he worked for Rome, and he cheated the people in the collection of Rome's taxes and thereby became very rich. Zacchaeus did not know that the eternal God was coming to see him personally. If he had known, he probably would have guessed it was for the purpose of throwing him straight into hell. He knew in his heart that was what he deserved.

But that morning, when he heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem, there was a strange and unexplainable yearning in his heart to see the Man. So he hurried to the main thoroughfare where Jesus would have to pass by if He were leaving town headed for Jerusalem. I can picture him when he arrived. He needed to find a spot in front of everybody else, because Zacchaeus was very short in stature. I imagine that when he saw the crowd already gathered, he tried to squirm his way to the front. But when people saw who it was who was trying to pass between

them, they gleefully cut him off. They might have to pay him the taxes or risk a Roman jail, but they did not have to let him cut in the line. Who cared whether Zacchaeus could see Jesus or not. Surely Jesus would not care to see him, sinner that he was.

But Zacchaeus was as shrewd as he was wicked. He spotted a sycamore tree, and he climbed it so that he could see Jesus as He passed by on the road. Imagine the surprise of this tax collector when the Savior stopped and looked straight up at him. And then to his and the crowd's utter astonishment, Jesus called his name. "Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down. I need to go with you to your house."

The people complained that Jesus would go to the house of the town's biggest crook, and sadly I identify with them. Dare to join me in thinking of the person in this world you most despise.

Corrupt government official, cheating businessman, a relative turn traitor, a friend who has forsaken you. Do we pray for Jesus to spot them above the rest of the crowd of humanity, save, and transform them? Or do we think more of God's justice at the thought of them, hoping that they will get theirs in the end?

The Bible does not tell us what all Jesus said to Zacchaeus, but whatever it was, Zacchaeus put his trust and faith in Jesus that very day. And Zacchaeus's faith was not just words either. He promised that he would restore everything he had gained by deceit fourfold, and that he would give half of all his money to the poor. He had turned in faith to Jesus and he was a truly changed man.

Luke 19:9-10 says, "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.**"

And He still does. It does not matter who you are, where you are, or what you're doing. **Jesus is still seeking the lost. And He is willing and able to shine His light right where you're sitting.**

And among the lost Jesus is seeking are those we dislike or despise. We may not want to give them the time of day, but Jesus gave up His life for them, just as He did for each of us. **If we would take up our cross and follow Jesus, we would forgive and help them find a sycamore tree.**

And as we continue to follow the steps of Jesus on that all important day we see that

III. THE SON SHINED HIS LIGHT ON A CITY. (LUKE 19:28-44)

From Jericho Jesus and His disciples again went up toward Jerusalem. At the outskirts of the city, before they entered the gate in the wall, Jesus sent two of the disciples in to fetch a young donkey. He told them to tell the owners that the Lord needed it, and they would let them have it, and they did. The disciples took some of their own coats and laid on the donkey to provide a makeshift blanket for Jesus. The Master mounted the colt and rode through the gate to enter the city, just as Zechariah said He would.

People in Jerusalem had wondered if Jesus would come to the Passover. Most knew the priests wanted to kill Him, but they also knew that Jesus wanted to be in Jerusalem, especially at Passover time. Word had spread from the moment He appeared in Jericho, only a few miles away, so by the time Jesus rode into the city, a great throng of people awaited Him.

As His donkey progressed down the main road in Jerusalem, people began to wave palm branches and lay them on the path before Him. Many took off their coats and spread them before the donkey to pave the way for Jesus. And then the crowd began to quote Psalm 118, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." "Hosanna" they cried. "Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna to the Son of David."

The people rejoiced in their praise, and some there on that day genuinely believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and with all sincerity of heart they offered their praise. The Pharisees were enraged of course. They called out to Jesus to make the people stop praising Him as if He were God. Jesus simply said, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

We might think that this day of the week of the suffering of our Lord would be the one day in which His joy was unspoiled. After all, a great multitude had hailed Him as the Messiah and coming King. But the Bible says that as Jesus went on up the road into the city, He wept. He wept over Jerusalem. He cried as He spoke,

Luke 19:42-44 NKJV ..."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. 43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 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."

Jesus knew that only a few of the crowd that welcomed Him really believed in Him and trusted in Him. In a few days, some of these same people would follow the lead of the priests and cry, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him." Jesus knew that even after He was crucified before their eyes, paying the price for their sin with His own blood; and even after He rose from the dead and appeared to more than 500 of them, and even after thousands were saved as they believed in Him on the day of Pentecost, still, most,... by far most, would not believe and would forever remain lost in their sins.

God's judgment upon Jerusalem would come. The Romans would eventually destroy it in 70 A.D., not leaving a single stone upon another. But far more tragic than that was that when those who did not believe died, they would be separated from Him and from the Father forever. They would be tormented in the flames of hell because they refused to trust Him.

And here is the final and most important of all the lessons we might glean from these first steps of Jesus as He steadfastly marched toward the cross:

Not only will the Son of God shine in the darkness of any life who will call out to Him,

Not only will Jesus shine His light into the hearts and souls of the most despised of the world, because He has come to seek and to save all who are lost,

But our Savior grieves for those who reject Him and weeps for a city that would gladly take His life.

How long has it been since we wept for our city? It is full of people who want nothing to do with Jesus. Our streets are crowded every day by people who have no time for the Lord and no thought of their eternal destiny.

In our call as disciples to be witnesses, we are to witness first in our Jerusalem – Bay County and its cities and towns. And what is the sentiment of our heart? Are our eyes even close to tears over the lostness all around us? We should pray that the tender compassion of the Savior might be duplicated in our heart to move us not only to tears but to action.

Have you ever wept for the lost of our city? Ask the Lord to burden your heart as His heart was broken for Jerusalem.

Who is the hated or despised person in your life? Would you forgive them? Would you pray for them?

Do you need the light of the Lord Jesus to shine in your life? Would you call out to Him and trust Him?