



Sunday, June 18, 2023

Speaker: Bob Stephens

Scripture: Luke 18:31-19:10

Sermon Title: Stopping the Son

Good morning. It's an honor to be able to share God's Word today. Our passages in the Gospel of Luke are **Luke 18:31 to Luke 19:10**. I'm not going to begin by reading the passage as we usually do, but we're going to work through it section by section as we go along. So let's just begin our time together with prayer.

Oh gracious God, grant now by the working of Your Spirit, that Your written word and these spoken words would show us more clearly your Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in seeing Him more clearly that we may be moved to follow Him more nearly, today and always. Amen. Amen.

Well, summer officially begins this week, or as it's called in Canada, road construction season. And with that, it's often a time, despite the construction, that we do a little bit more traveling and get around a little bit more, even if those are just day trips here and there. But let me ask you a question. When you go on a journey somewhere of any length, what does it take to make you choose to stop along that way? Apart from those stops out of necessity but, just by choice, choosing to stop.

A true confession about myself. I think most people would say that I'm a fairly laid back person. Look half asleep most of the time [congregation laughs] but when I get behind the wheel of a car, when I'm going on any kind of a journey of any length, even just an hour or longer, I have just one thing on my mind. How soon can I reach my destination?

And I know that over the course of my life, I've passed up the opportunity, with that attitude, to take in some interesting attractions along the way. Some beautiful scenery. The right side of my brain at those times would say, "Oh, that's that's interesting. That's beautiful. You should check that out. You should get a picture of that." But then the left side would kick in and say, "But that would require me to stop. So no." I think there's probably therapy I could get for this.

Well, whether you're as driven as I am or not, let me ask this question of those of you who are married when you travel together. Does your spouse share the same priorities as you in terms of what's worth stopping for along the way? [Congregation laughs.] I'm going to take that as a no. Well, this morning, we're going to join Jesus on a journey and we're going to look at two situations for which he chose to stop along the way. And as we walk with Him through these stories, it would be good for us to realize that if we've been born again by His Spirit, then we truly do walk with him every single day as he moves through our city, where we go to school or go to work, where we shop and play, where we live. So let's see what we can learn to help us in our daily journeying with Jesus.

As it's recorded in Luke's gospel, this journey to Jerusalem begins Luke 18. But the story really begins back in **Luke 9**. All the way back there, we have the first time that Jesus directly informs his disciples of his impending suffering, His death and His resurrection. Then Luke records the transfiguration and talks about these two Old Testament figures, Moses and Elijah, who appear and they're talking to Jesus on the mountain. And we're told in Luke's gospel that their conversation was around Jesus' departure. In other words, his death which he, it says, was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

Then we have this statement in **Luke 9:51**. "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." The literal phrase here is captured well in the King James Version where it says, "... he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." His mind was made up. He knew not only what he had to do, but where he had to go and when. The time had come.

You see, he set out to reach Jerusalem in time for Passover, where the lamb, slain from the foundation of the world, would offer himself as the once for all atoning sacrifice for his people. So we join him as that journey continues in **Luke 18:31-34**. **31** "Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. **32** He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; **33** they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." **34** The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about."

The sermon title for this message is entitled, "Stopping the Son." It comes from these two stops on his way to Jerusalem that Jesus made in the city of Jericho, even though he was at least initially only passing through. But before we talk about those two stops, I want to point out in these verses. Two things that didn't stop him on his journey.

First of all, he wasn't stopped by the prospect of the pain that awaited Him. Jesus knew exactly what awaited him. Betrayal, mocking, flogging and death. He knew this because he had read and meditated on the Scriptures. He understood what the prophets and the psalmist had written, speaking of the Messiah's suffering and humiliation.

Furthermore, he knew that all that the prophets had written about him was soon to be fulfilled. But the knowledge of all that awaited him didn't deter him. Out of obedience to the Father, out of love for all those for whose sins he would die, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Secondly, he wasn't stopped by the dullness of the disciples who accompanied him. Despite the number of times Jesus had told them what was going to happen, they still didn't understand. They were still looking for a Messiah who would restore Israel by force, who would free them from Rome's occupation, who would sit on Israel's throne. It's a lonely feeling to be misunderstood by those closest to you.

For Jesus to be nearing the end of His earthly mission to pay for all the time that he had invested in these 12 men, for them to still be so dull. It would be understandable if it at least gave him pause. Can I really afford to leave this crew right now to carry on this mission? But just as he trusted the Father to vindicate him by raising Him from the dead, so he trusted the Holy Spirit, who he himself would send to enlighten and equip his followers to be his faithful witnesses when the time came.

And so on he went towards Jerusalem. On that trip, he passes through Jericho and there he encounters two men. In both cases, it mentions that Jesus was passing by or passing through. But both men got Jesus' attention and he stopped to interact with each of them. One was a poor beggar, the other powerful and wealthy. One had nothing but faith. The other had everything except salvation. One made sure he was heard. The other hoped he would go unnoticed. Jesus was stopped by a beggar's cry and a rich man's curiosity.

Let's look first of all at that. Stopped by the beggars' cry. We read in **Luke 18:35-43**. **35** "As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. **36** When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. **37** They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. **38** He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" **39** Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, **41** "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. **42** Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." **43** Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God."

As I was meditating on this passage again this week, I was struck by the statement here in **Luke 18:39**. "Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet." I think there's a lesson there. When someone, anyone, other than Jesus is leading the way whether as individuals, as families, as institutions, as organizations of any kind, then we can count on it. Priorities will be out of whack, lives will go off track and needs around us will go unmet.

In the wise prayer of Carrie Underwood, "Jesus, take the wheel." Or to use the Apostle Paul's metaphor in **Galatians 5:25**, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." You can't keep in step with someone if you're leading the way, if you're walking ahead of them. So why did they rebuke the beggar? There's a number of possibilities. It may have simply been because he was being disruptive. They just said, "Quiet, quiet. You're making too much of a scene." You know, needy people can be disruptive.

The depths of pain they may be experiencing, their sense of desperation about their circumstances, their feeling of being powerless, can cause them to create some disturbance to attract attention. And that can be inconvenient for us. Maybe they rebuked him for the same reason that they rebuked the parents earlier in this chapter who were bringing their children to Jesus. I think the disciples thought they were Jesus' security patrols responsible for managing the crowds.

But I wonder if they tried to quiet him because of what he was saying. Calling out, "Jesus son of David." Publicly identifying Jesus as the Messiah. You see, perhaps in wanting to silence him, they were taking their cue from Jesus himself, how he'd often forbidden demons from identifying who he was. And all the times that he told people to keep miracles that he performed to themselves.

But now you see, he's no longer hiding his identity. In fact, just a few days after this, he would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling another prophecy, making the bold announcement that Israel's true king had arrived. At any rate, for whatever reason that they tried to silence the beggar, it didn't work. And he shouted all the more. Jesus stopped. Confronted by a cry for mercy, the journey to Jerusalem could wait.

It's easy for us to be preoccupied with our own problems. Committed to our own agendas or just so busy that we either ignore or become impatient with interruptions. But we never find that in how Jesus handled those who came to him. He stopped, he ordered the man to be brought to him. In almost every miracle Jesus performed, the person needing healing either came to Jesus, was brought to Jesus, or someone came asking Jesus to go to the sick person. The one who came from heaven to bring us salvation, turns and calls us to come to Him. And most times, people need the help of someone else to be brought to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks the blind man. Did he just want a few coins? Did he simply think that Jesus, as a kind Rabbi that he'd heard about, would give him the alms (gift of money etc.) for which he was begging from everyone else? Or was there something more he desired? Something only Jesus could do? Jesus wanted the man to articulate his desire to him. In so doing, he wanted him to elevate his expectations and to put his faith into words. "Lord, I want to see." And when he spoke his desire, Jesus responded, "Receive your sight. Your faith has healed you."

Well, how did Jesus know that the man had faith? What evidence did he see? I think there are three things we can see here in the man's actions, in his words, and in his response to his healing that demonstrated his faith in Jesus. First of all, we see it in his perception. He understood that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David. This is, in this gospel, the first time anyone has called Jesus by that name. Although this man's physical eyes were blind, God had already opened his spiritual understanding to recognize who Jesus was. And there we have his cries for mercy. He believed that what he needed was exactly what Jesus offered. Mercy, honor and unmerited favor. Born out of his compassion. And expressed in his ability to heal.

But how did this blind man know about Jesus of Nazareth? How was he able to make the connection so that it stirred him to action when he heard that Jesus was passing by? Obviously, someone in his life had told him things that Jesus had done for them, or something they saw him do, and things they heard him say about himself and about the Kingdom of God. This is where the conviction came that this man was the Son of David who would and could help him. Secondly, we see his faith in his persistence. He would not be silenced.

Luke 18 opens with a parable with the express purpose, Luke tells us, of teaching us that we should always pray and not give up. And Jesus ends that parable with this question, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" You see, it takes faith to persist in prayer. As Pastor John pointed out recently in talking on prayer from those well known words of Jesus, that we are to keep on asking and we will receive. To keep on seeking and we will find. To keep on knocking and the door will be opened for us. And the beggar kept asking.

Thirdly, his faith is shown in his pursuit. It says that he followed Jesus. We might picture that as just, "Well, as Jesus continued down the road, he followed him for a little while to show his appreciation." But there's an interesting detail in Mark's gospel about this account. Mark names this beggar. This is Bartimaeus. And the fact that Mark names him suggests a couple of things. First of all, this man was known. And secondly, that he was probably known because he had continued to be a member of the Christian community. And so when Mark names him, the people reading Mark's letter would know, "Oh, I know him."

He followed Jesus not just for a few steps but with his life in praise and gratitude. Jesus responds to need and a cry for mercy. He responds to faith that's more than words and that results in obedience.

Now we come to the second encounter that caused Jesus to stop on his journey. In **Luke 19:1-4**, we read, **1** "Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. **2** A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. **3** He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. **4** So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

"

Zacchaeus is identified as a chief tax collector and as wealthy. And the two go together like peanut butter and jam. One was probably the result of being efficient and underhanded and a little bit devious. At the other, of abusing his power for his own gain. As a result, Zacchaeus was a despised man. As a Jew, he was viewed as a traitor to his people for serving the Romans. He was considered unrighteous. But he was curious, it says, to see who Jesus was. To check out what all the fuss was about this man.

But he wanted to do it at a distance. He wanted to go unnoticed. Earlier in **Luke 18**, there's another tax collector, this time in a parable, that Jesus told. About two men going into the temple to pray. And about that man, it says, **Luke 18:13** "... the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Perhaps just like that tax collector, Zacchaeus also felt unworthy of making direct contact with Jesus.

A little while ago at the Good Neighbours center, the food pantry there, I was standing outside sort of monitoring the line of clients who still wanted to get in as it was getting near the end of the day. I engaged in conversation with someone in the crowd. The young man told me that he wasn't sleeping very well because of back trouble that he was having. And I said, "Would it be okay if I pray for you?" And this is what Caleb said. He said, "Well, I don't really go to church." The message being, "Before you waste your time praying, you need to know that I probably don't qualify for an answer to prayer. I don't go to church." Of course, that doesn't matter. The next couple of times I saw Caleb, he made a point of seeking me out and telling me his back was better.

Many people feel they don't have a right to meet Jesus. But Jesus did not leave Zacchaeus the option of simply remaining curious and observing from a distance. Curiosity about Jesus. It's a good starting point. But that alone won't bring the change in our lives. Only meeting him will do that. And so we read on in **Luke 19:5-7, 5** "When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." **6** So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. **7** All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

Again, we have a command to come to Jesus. We don't know how Jesus knew his name, whether it was a divine insight or simply because everybody around was pointing him out, "The man in the tree, that's Zacchaeus!" When Jesus called him, Jesus says to him, "I must stay at your house today." Now remember, Jesus was just passing through. But all of a sudden, there was a necessity. That word communicates not only necessity, but it communicates a sense of destiny. "This has to happen. I must stay at your house today."

It's not like Jesus had decided suddenly to stay in Jericho and he didn't have other housing options. Jericho was essentially a bedroom community to Jerusalem. So a lot of the priests and the Levites who served in the temple lived in Jericho. You remember the story of the Good Samaritan. How the man wounded and beaten on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem gets passed by priests and Levites. That's because they were on a commute going back and forth from their homes to their service in the temple. So if Jesus was looking for a righteous place to stay, he had lots of options.

It's so remarkable to these people that he chooses to say, "I must stay with you Zacchaeus." But for Zacchaeus, it changed everything. It says, "He welcomed him gladly." And it says in **Luke 19:8, 8-10** " **8** ... "Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." **9** Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

We don't know what transpired in the conversation between Jesus and Zacchaeus in his house leading up to Zacchaeus's response. But I don't think Jesus needed to point out to this tax collector what sins he had committed or what was wrong with his life that needed to be changed. But the encounter with Jesus changed him from the inside out. The evidence of it, the sign of his true repentance was in the change in his attitude towards both his possessions and towards other people. He went from being greedy to generous, giving half his wealth to the poor. And then he took ownership of his wrongdoing by planning to make legal restitution with all that he had cheated.

This passage that we've looked at today is bookended by two statements that Jesus made about the Son of man. His favorite expression then when he spoke about himself in the third person was to call himself the Son of Man. The term that probably came from the prophet Daniel. He begins by speaking of what would happen to the Son of Man. That he would be arrested and killed. But the passage ends with why that was going to happen. Because his purpose in coming, His reason for giving his life was to seek and to save the lost, to open blind eyes, to turn lives around that were lost in selfishness and sin. And he's still seeking. He's still saying, "Bring him to me. Come down. I must stay at your house."

Wrapping up this morning, there's several questions this passage raised for me by way of making a personal application. Let me share them with you as possible takeaways for all of us to think about and pray about and that God might speak to us. First of all, who might Jesus be asking me to bring to him? Whose faith might be activated? Whose curiosity about Jesus might be aroused by my telling them what I know and have experienced about Jesus?

Secondly, am I prepared to be inconvenienced to help meet needs around me? Do we even recognize needs around us? Do I miss them because I'm out front leading the way, saying, "Jesus, try and keep up." Like the difference between Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus, some needs are obvious. Some less so. But in either case, to meet those needs will probably interrupt my schedule.

The third question that comes to my mind is, what evidence of curiosity about Jesus do I see in those around me? One thing's for sure, we're not going to find them up in trees. But still, there are people all around us even 2,000 years later in a postmodern world who are curious about this man, Jesus. What might be a clue to me that a friend or a family member or a neighbor or a co worker is curious about who Jesus is? What could I do to uncover that curiosity? And then at the same time that we are disciples accompanying Jesus, we can also see ourselves in the story, like Bartimaeus, in need of his help and mercy. Like Zacchaeus having areas of our lives that need transformation.

So let me just encourage you, if you have a particular need this morning, let me encourage you to make your way at the end of the service over by the doors of the prayer room where there'll be people happy to pray in faith for you today. Finally, let me pose one more very vital question, perhaps for someone here this morning or watching online. Are you yourself merely viewing Jesus out of curiosity from a distance as an intellectual exercise? Or have you, in fact, by faith welcomed Him gladly into your life? Has your life been changed by personally experiencing the unconditional love, the generous mercy Jesus has towards you? He desires to be welcomed into your house. He came to seek and save the lost, and that either was or is every single one of us.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, you did not wait for me to draw near to you, but clothed yourself in frail humanity. You did not wait for me to cry out to you but you let me hear your voice calling me. May we be forever grateful for the cross. May we be forever available to the gentle leading of your Spirit in our lives. And may we be forever filled with your compassion to recognize and respond to the needs around us. All this we pray. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*