

Compass Bearing #13

Devotions to Navigate the Coronavirus Pandemic

"The Tale of Two Rich Guys"

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Jesus had an encounter with two men in nearly back-to-back episodes recorded in the Gospel of Luke. The first guy's story is told in Luke 18:18-30. We don't know his name. Let's call him **X**. The second guy's story is told in Luke 19:1-10. His name is Zacchaeus. So, we'll call him **Z**.

Both **X** and **Z** held positions of power. Both had great wealth. And both were deeply curious about this man named Jesus. But this is where their similarities end.

X approached Jesus with a good question, "*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" (Luke 18:18). It's a question all of us ask. We figure that if our good deeds stack up higher than our bad ones, we are a shoe-in for heaven. We become our own personal Lord and Savior. Go ahead, Jesus, list off the commandments. And we join **X** in saying, "*All these I have kept since I was a boy*" (v. 21).

Jesus responded to this arrogant self-evaluation of **X** with this little request, "*You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me*" (v.22). Stack up your good deeds to the moon if you want. You still lack one thing. Or, if you're like me, you still lack several things.

Z had a different approach. He knew he wasn't worthy on his own to come to Jesus. So he waited for Jesus to come to him. "*He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way*" (Luke 19:3-4). If **X** thought he was self-righteous enough to earn God's favor, **Z** knew he was sinful enough not to deserve it.

Jesus responded to this humble self-awareness of **Z** with an invitation, "*Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.*" So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly (v. 5-6). Just picture Jesus heading into the home for a friendly visit with a (gasp) tax collector, a real sinner (v. 7). **X** was looking for a list of rules, which he expected to master. **Z** was hoping for a relationship, which he was surprised to get.

How did these two rich guys respond? When challenged by Jesus to sell, give, and follow, **X** went away "*very sad, because he was very wealthy*" (Luke 18:23). When invited into a relationship with Jesus, **Z** proclaimed, "*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*" (Luke 19:8). **X** chose a life of social isolation over the loss of status. But **Z**, who had lived a life of social distancing (tax collectors were that despised), embraced a new life of social intimacy with Jesus.

What about you? Are you looking for a list of rules to follow or a relationship to embrace? Rules-seekers will end up on a dead-end street, all alone. But relationship-seekers will be so changed that they become change-agents for others in their lives.

Prayer: Jesus, here I am. I realize I cannot earn my way to heaven. In fact, I admit that I am not worthy of being in the presence of the almighty creator of the universe. You are perfect. I am not. I openly confess my sins before you. Forgive me, Lord. Thank you for your death on the cross and your resurrection from the tomb. I believe you conquered sin and death for someone even like me. I accept your invitation to be in relationship with you, and I promise to follow you all of my life. Amen