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Jesus and Divine Appointments

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If ever a man was primed for a conversation with Jesus, it was Zacchaeus, whose name in Hebrew means “pure” or “righteous.” I’m sure his neighbors found his name ironic—like calling a drug dealer Doctor, or a bank robber Reverend. As a *chief* tax collector in ancient Israel, Zacchaeus and his underlings taxed fellow Jews, paid the Romans, and skimmed enough to make themselves rich. He was anything but *pure* or *righteous*.

The Tax Collector

So hated were tax collectors that religious leaders spoke of them in the same breath as prostitutes, murderers, and thieves. When Jesus came to town Zacchaeus couldn’t see over the crowd or squeeze through it without risking an elbow to the face. Not easily dissuaded, he raced ahead of the throng and climbed a sycamore fig tree. A good choice since it had low-hanging branches that a short man could reach. As he walked past the tree Jesus quickly spotted the town’s most despised citizen clinging to a branch.

Though we don’t know why Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, I suspect he had heard of the Lord's earlier encounters that day. In the first Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee and tax-collector who entered the temple to pray.

The Pharisee prayed to himself, thanking God he wasn’t like “other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector” (Luke 18:11). Meanwhile, the tax collector beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Jesus concluded the parable by saying the tax collector, not the Pharisee, went home justified before God.

The Rich Man

Later in the day Jesus told a rich, young ruler to keep all of the commandments if he wanted to inherit eternal life. The man, with cast-iron confidence, assured Jesus he had kept each one from his youth. In other words, he believed he loved God above all else and his neighbor as himself. In order to help the man realize he might not love his neighbor as much as himself, Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor (Luke 18:22). No doubt stunned, and certainly saddened, the rich man walked away, chastened and exposed.

Just as the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable trusted in his own righteousness to win God’s favor, the rich man trusted in his wealth. Had Jesus praised him for his righteous life and simply asked for a donation, the young man may have complied. But Jesus asked for *everything*—not just a token offering, but everything.

The Blind Man

Shortly after that encounter, a blind man pleaded with Jesus to heal his eyes. And he didn't whisper his plea. He shouted at Jesus. Annoyed by the distraction, the leaders of the procession ordered the blind man to shut-up. Instead, he raised his voice. When Jesus came along, he stopped, had the blind man brought to him, and asked what he wanted.

“Lord, I want to receive my sight.”

Jesus responded, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you” (Luke 18:42).

Zacchaeus Wanted to See Jesus

After these earlier encounters, Jesus entered Jericho, Zacchaeus’s home town.

Keep in mind that the Lord didn’t get up in the morning, gather his disciples, and set the agenda for the day:

9:00 am: Tell parable of Pharisee and tax collector

10:00 am: Talk with rich ruler

11:00 am: Heal blind man

11:30 am: Call down Zacchaeus, a notorious tax collector, from the limb of a tree

Noon: Lunch with Zacchaeus at his home

Neither did Jesus tap into his divine nature to get an advance peek at the morning. Instead, he listened to the voice of his Father and followed his direction. This is important to realize because it’s easy for us to think we’re somehow different from Jesus in this regard. But like him, we too can receive direction from God through the Holy Spirit.

God orchestrated the events of the Lord's day so he could fulfill his mission, just like he does for us.

As Jesus listened to his Father and walked by faith, so must we.

As God prepared Zacchaeus’s for a conversation with Jesus, so he prepares people for a conversation with us.

Just as Jesus walked in step with his Father to accomplish his mission, so must we.

Don’t miss this profound truth: God arranges your schedule so your life will have maximum impact. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he said, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 NASB).