

Sermon Notes : Robby Muhumuza

Topic : Grace that leads to salvation .

Theme : Understanding the Grace of God .

Bible passages : Luke 19:1-10.; Rom 5:1-15.

The story of Zacchaeus is one of my favourite stories from the Bible for a number of reasons .

One has to do with issues of my own height . As someone who is not endowed with what Gospel singer Judith Babirye calls "American height", I can relate with the stigma my fellow heightmate , Zacchaeus might have faced as a result of his short stature .

The second reason Zacchaeus is special to me is because God used his story to bring me to his saving grace .

41 years ago Prof Zac Fomum preached at a SU Student conference at Ntare School and I took the example of Zacchaeus and invited Jesus Christ to be the Lord , Master and Driver of my life and that has made ALL the difference in my life .

Zacchaeus was a very short man but he did not let his height get in his way .

" Zacchaeus " in Hebrew means " pure " or "Innocent " but his lifestyle was far from being pure or innocent until he was confronted with the amazing grace of God through his son Jesus Christ that put his life the right side up again.

I don't know about your name and its meaning and whether your behavior and actions reflect the positive attributes in that name :

- Muhumuza , " the one who gives rest ",
- Mwesigwa , " the one you can trust",
- Byakatonda, "the one dedicated to God".

You can go on and on but until the amazing grace of God changed my life , I was not bringing rest and peace to my parents but was beginning to get them worried by my escaping from home to attend every village dance and starting to acquire some girl friends at a tender age .

Back to our friend Zacchaeus .

Zacchaeus worked very hard to compensate for what he lacked in physical stature and height .

What he lacked in height he made it up in amassing wealth.

Luke 19:2 described him thus : " He was a chief tax collector and he was rich ".

It looks like the tax collection occupation is marred with many temptations of cheating , fraud , bribes and extortion . Many of you may remember the findings of the URA Commission of inquiry a few years

ago that showed a rotten system and thieving of multi billions of Shs.

- It looks like Zacchaeus tried to use ill gotten wealth to earn respect , popularity , fulfillment and happiness but without success .

The more money he massed , the emptier he felt .

Money bought him an expensive house and expansive bed but no sleep or rest at night .

Money bought him many friends and hangers on but no love.

Money bought him the most expensive food but no appetite .

Zacchaeus was not willing to settle for less .

When he heard that the Messiah , the son of God was passing in his home town , Jericho , he was determined to meet the unique man that would give him the peace of mind , love , happiness and fulfillment that had eluded him for life.

But there was a BIG problem.

He thought that the man he so much desired to meet , was not accessible . There were too many people crowding around Jesus and he knew that his short height was a big disadvantage and would get in his way.

And don't know about you and your relationship with God.

What is that thing or things that are blocking your intimate relationship with God ?

Can you do something about it?

For Zacchaeus, on the surface, it looked like it was his short height that was in his way of meeting the Son of God.

But in reality it was his many shortcomings that were in his way.

Way out!

Zaccheaus' longing to meet the Son of God was so deep that he was willing to lay down his dignity and climb a tree to get what his heart deeply longed for .

What are some of your human efforts to reach God so that he could give you the joy , satisfaction and fulfillment that you deeply long for?

Is it works? Is it giving generously to the ACP ? Could it be joining the choir or Church Council or volunteering as an Usher or whatever.

Is it giving generously to charity causes through Rotary Club, Lions Club and all the different fundraising functions for all sorts of causes ? Orphans , Fistula , etc ?

Whereas all these works are good and commendable, they can never win you favor or righteousness before God.

In fact the Word of God in Isaiah 64:4 categorically reminds us that " all our righteous acts are like filthy rags " .
Yuck !

All our well intended acts , if we do them hoping to get God's attention and favour without repentance of our sins and turning away from them , they are too short to reach God.

But Zaccheaus was willing to take a step of faith (however undignified it was) and he got Jesus attention.

My brother and sister listening to me today , what is getting in your way of taking a step of faith to be publicly seen as needing the intervention of God in your life ?

When an invitation of those needing Jesus in their loves is made, what forces you to keep your hand down or what clamps your feet down from moving in front to be prayed for ?

Is it your name, or age , or position and title ? Does it make you feel embarrassed and undignified to be seen among those accepting vulnerability before God ?

Zacchaeus was so determined to meet the Son of God that he threw all caution to the wind and climbed a tree . May we learn from him and take whatever it takes to meet God so that he can minister to our deepest needs deep in our hearts and lives .

Look ! While Zaccheas was scheming, strategizing and working on tactics of seeing Jesus , the Son of God , out of his amazing Grace had long planned to meet Zaccheas and change his life forever !
Alelua!

When Jesus gets near the tree, he stops and with an ear to ear smile and open arms calls out :

Lk 19:5 " Zaccheaus hurry and come down , for I must stay at your house today " .

Wow ! Amazing !

Jesus knew his name !

Jesus knew his deep longing for dealing with his guilt of sin !

Jesus identified him from the crowd !

Jesus was very keen to be a guest at his house .

"House " here, is a symbolic representation of being in his heart and his life . Remember , the Word of God in 1 Cor 3:16 and 6:19 says that " your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit " .

What was Zaccheaus reaction ?

Lk 19:16 says it all:

" So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully " .

Zaccheaus threw a sumptuous dinner for Jesus Christ at his home .

He opened his home , exposing himself and all he was to Jesus and allowed Jesus to inspect the house and deal with the deep rooted issues in the house and in his life .

The encounter with Jesus didn't leave Zaccheaus the same at all !

He repented of all his sins, including, corruption, cheating, extortion of people by over taxing them more than they should have paid and keeping a large chunk of it rather than handing it over to the Roman Government Revenue Authority coffers.

The encounter with Jesus transformed Zaccheaus . He became a man with a testimony on his lips about the transforming power of Jesus in his life .

Not only his words changed, even more important his actions too changed .

He gave away half of what he had accumulated to the poor, the widows, orphans and other marginalized and the destitute.

Those he had cheated, and defrauded , he paid back with interest of four times more .

Apart from a few grumbling Pharisees, I can imagine the merry making, dancing and rejoicing among his family members , his workers , those he had cheated and the widows and orphans of Jericho Town Council.

And this rejoicing was replicated in heaven because the Word of God says there is rejoicing in heaven even when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7).

Tradition holds that Zaccheas' other name was Mathias and he later replaced Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle of Jesus and went on to become the first Bishop of Caesarea!

This story best illustrates the amazing grace of God that leads to confession repentance , restitution and transformed life that improves community relations and is also pleasing to God.

That's what we need so badly in our individual lives , in our families, in our communities, in Uganda, and indeed in the whole world.

May you and I resolve to make this part of our lives everyday so that we can contribute to bringing into reality Jesus' words in Luke 19:9-10:

" Today , salvation has come to this house ...for the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost " .

Amen.

The second passage we read today :Rom 5: 1-15 too has important lessons about the grace of God and how it is the oil that smoothens our daily walk with God on the Christian journey of faith.

Rom 5: 2-5 clearly shows us that living the Christian life is not a walk in the park .

Starting the Christian journey or putting our faith in God does not lead to a sweat-less Utopia on earth with no pain or suffering.

Rom 5:2-5 talks of suffering that produces endurance or stamina or perseverance , that is not giving up or giving in .

It also adds that endurance produces character.

Character refers to being strong, firm, reliable, a strong pillar who is dependable .

Without suffering or being tested in the crucible under fire, there is no purification to remove impurity and produce high grade refined gold !

But thanks be to God , his Grace sustains us so that we are not consumed !

In the above passage we are encouraged that character produces hope, and adds that hope does not put us to shame.

In other words, the grace of God does not stop us from undergoing the pain and suffering of being sick, accidents , unemployment or being dropped from employment or even death of loved ones or facing other calamities that befall us as human beings in this side of Paradise .

The only difference is that the Grace of God prevents us from being consumed into smithereens.

Let's be encouraged by the story of the three young men in the Book of Daniel 3 (Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego) who were not consumed by fire in King Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace.

Instead a fourth person " like a son of God" was seen with them in the fire and they escaped unburnt.

Whenever we go through the fires of life , let's continue to rely on and trust in God to give us his grace and strength not to be consumed but to emerge stronger and victorious.

Amen.