Two enquirers

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Principal A.C. Boyd

[0:00] shall we turn now to our readings in the gospel according to saint luke the readings in chapter 18 and chapter 19 in chapter 18 the story of the rich young ruler who came to jesus asking what must i do to inherit eternal life for what having done shall i inherit eternal life and then in chapter 19 the well-known story of sacchias now these two men in many ways are very different from each other one is called a ruler and although it doesn't explicitly say so it's very likely that's meant that he was a ruler of the synagogue he had an authoritative position and a respected position in the jewish community in the religious community sacchias as we know was a chief too but a chief of the tax collectors that group of people who were so despised and were really excommunicated from the jewish religious life although sacchias obviously from his name was himself a jew they were different from each other in that way and yet they do have something in common that makes it worth comparing them they're both said to be rich the ruler was very rich and sacchias was a rich tax collector and his position as a chief tax collector no doubt meant that he too was very rich and here we see jesus dealing with two rich men but dealing with them in very different ways they're different from each other and yet they've got something in common they're both very much men of their own age there are so many things about both of these men that that were true of them just because of the the time of history they lived in and just because of where they lived in and yet they are not so remote from our own day the things that really matter about both these men are things that make them very contemporary the kind of people that are with us today the kind of people that we meet with perhaps the kind of people that at heart we ourselves are so we want to look at these two men and and their encounters with jesus first of all we want to look at their approach to jesus looking at the one and then looking at the other we look at the rich ruler first and in his approach to jesus he is earnest and he is intense and he is in a way very reverent perhaps that doesn't come out so clearly in luke's account of the incident but it certainly comes out very very clearly in mark's account because when we turn to mark's account of this incident mark tells us that jesus was just leaving the city and this ruler came running to him and knelt before him in the road and put to him his question there was an earnestness and an intensity in his approach to jesus and there was an apparent reference one who is kneeling in the ground before him and he he uses these words in addressing jesus good master good master so there's that in this man's approach to jesus his earnestness his intensity his apparent reverence but when we listen to him speak he doesn't say an awful lot to begin with and yet what he does say

tells us so much about the man and in his approach to jesus he is so sure he is so sure in the first place that he knew what he wanted he wanted he wanted eternal life that's what his question was all about and he was so sure that he wanted it and he was also so sure that he knew who could tell him what to do to find it he comes to jesus and he's no doubt that he's in the right place to ask the right question he's so sure that this is the teacher who's going to tell him what to do to get eternal life and he's also so sure that when this good teacher tells him what to do he's no doubt in this score at all he's coming and in the few words that he's using he's suggesting this you just tell me and i do it i'm so sure i want eternal life i'm so sure that you'll be able to tell me and i'm quite sure that whatever you say i'll not only be willing but i'll be able to do it so there seems intensity his earnestness his apparent reverence and he's so sure and he seems to get so close to jesus he comes right up he he runs out into the road and he he kneels down in front of jesus where jesus is in the road he seems to get so close and he's saying to them jesus good master what shall i do you tell me yet this man who seemed to get so close as we see was really standing at quite a distance from jesus this man who seemed to be so earnest so intense and so reverent has to be shown by jesus himself that there's a there's a shallowness a thoughtlessness in what he's saying in the very way he addresses jesus even although he calls him good master he wasn't really thinking about

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

what he was saying and he seemed to get so close and yet he's standing at a distance tell me that's all i need you'll be my teacher and that's all i want from you you just be my teacher of course jesus has to be our teacher we all need jesus as our teacher among other things jesus is our teacher and he's got to be our teacher and yet as we see here as we see here in the story of this man as we see here as we're going to compare this man with the approach of saccaeus as we see throughout all scripture it's not just a teacher we need in jesus and indeed if we're ever going to really know jesus as our teacher and if we're ever going to be really taught by him as the way in the way we need to be taught we need another relationship to jesus it's not enough just to do what this man did and come and say jesus tell me and that's all i ask of you you just tell me and i'll go away and i'll do it yes we need jesus as a teacher but this man was coming and he seemed to come so close and yet he stood
so far off he had to learn that if he was really going to be taught if really jesus was going to be his teacher then there was another relationship that was necessary there are so many like this man we said that in so many ways this man belonged to his own generation to his own country at so many points he's so different from us perhaps even in the fact that he was so wealthy he's so different from all of us and yet in so many ways he's so like so many contemporary people it's perhaps so like what some of us were and perhaps so like what some of us stay seemingly so earnest in our approach to jesus seemingly so keen to learn from him seemingly so sure about what we really want that we really are interested in eternal life seemingly so sure that yes jesus is the one who will teach us and yet tragically also so sure that all we need to do is to be told and then we've got what it takes to to do what we're told we too perhaps like this man need to be faced up with a shallowness so often in our approaching jesus we've got to be told to stop and think about the implications of the language that we use when we address him and got to be reminded that well if we're really going to be taught by him then it's not just a teacher we need but we need another relationship with jesus a relationship that jesus himself speaks of when he speaks in terms of abiding in him and letting his word abide in us see jesus wasn't deceived jesus wasn't flattered by the way this man approached him and if there's a warning here for ourselves in the way we approach jesus a warning to us to examine whether we're really as earnest as we appear to be whether we're as sincere as we appear to be whether there isn't a shallowness that we're using words and addressing jesus that the implications of which we aren't facing out and whether in our seeking him we're prepared for for that totality of commitment to him and that abiding in him that's necessary there's that warning and also there's a warning for us as those who would be witnesses for jesus those who would who would speak of jesus to others those who are teachers and preachers those who are christian servants i think too often it's easy for us not just to be deceived but to be flattered there are folks who can come when they can make that show of sincerity that show of earnestness that show of being sure that they know what they're looking for and we can be flattered but jesus wasn't we need the wisdom of jesus himself to recognize what is true and what is untrue but when we compare this man's approach to jesus
with the approach of saccaeus there's so much that's different saccaeus too was earnest and intense it manifested itself in a totally different way this rich ruler in his earnestness and his intent intenseness comes and before everyone he he drops down in the road before jesus saccaeus showed his earnestness in a totally different way he was a little man and there were great crowds and because of the crowds he wasn't seeing jesus and he wasn't finding out what he wanted to find out and so he was prepared to do the unusual thing and even perhaps to make himself look ridiculous in eyes in men's eyes yes he shows his earnestness but in a different way and on the surface he doesn't seem to get so close to jesus as the rich ruler did the rich ruler comes and he bows on the road before jesus but saccaeus doesn't push his way through the crowd into that but he does so much more he does something that seems to keep him at a distance from jesus he runs ahead and he gets on far enough so that by the time jesus is coming along the road he's already up in his place in the tree in the sycamore tree the sycamore tree with its branches that were so easy to climb the sycamore tree with its the kind of tree that's mentioned here was indeed an evergreen tree and so the sycamore tree that was providing good shade and from which he could see without being seen as he thought he seems to keep at a distance and yet as the story unfolds it's obvious that this man who seemed to be keeping at a distance was looking for and ready for a much closer contact with jesus than the rich ruler and this man who seemed to be keeping at a distance in his heart there was already a reverence that was much truer than the reverence of the rich ruler and the rich ruler was so sure that saccaeus and the sophist seems to be so unsure he wants to see

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

jesus who he is for the rich ruler he was so sure but with saccaeus there's a big question he wants to see jesus who he is and it was a question that was raised not because of total ignorance about jesus but it was a question that was raised because of what he had been already learning about jesus of course the rich ruler came to jesus because of what he had already been hearing about jesus and what he had been hearing about jesus had convinced him that this man is a teacher he's a good teacher and that's all he is and that's all i need but saccaeus had been learning about jesus and he had been learning things that had not at this stage so much been answering questions as raising questions raising questions that were vital for him to know the answer to raising the question who is he he'd been hearing things about this jesus
welcoming tax collectors like himself he had heard about this jesus calling and receiving into the number of his closest disciples a tax collector this jesus was welcoming those whom society and the religious community in particular were casting out these things were raising questions and saccaeus wanted to see jesus who he is that description of saccaeus isn't telling us that saccaeus wanted to see what jesus looked like the kind of language that's used here is language that's very reminiscent of the language that we find in the lips of those who were possessed by demons actually the language that was the language of the demons themselves those demons perverted evil wicked as they were they had spiritual inside and more than once we hear them through the mouths of those whom they possessed saying to jesus we know you who you are we know you who you are and saccaeus wanted to see jesus who he is who is he there wasn't the certainty the superficial certainty that there was in the ruler but there were these vital questions and he wasn't going to be satisfied and nothing was going to stand in his way until he got the answer because the key is knew that what was important about jesus and what was important for him was who is jesus and the man who seemed to be keeping his distance was brought very near because jesus comes along and jesus knows that he's in the tree and jesus has already led his heart and jesus is saying to this man come down and saccaeus was so ready to come down and when we look at these two men and their approaches to jesus oh how it becomes us to be asking ourselves how does jesus read our hearts today is there just something in the way of a superficial reverence a shallow certainty about ourselves or is there that intense wanting to know who jesus is and you know that's something that will be in the heart of even those who have already discovered who jesus is there's a time when by the grace of god either suddenly or or through the working of grace over a period of time we come to to a conviction and we're able to say yes i know who he is i know why he's come and by his grace i've responded to his own revelation of himself but you know we never come to the end of asking who he is and our right relationship with jesus is always a matter of asking and seeking more and more god's own answer to that question who is well having looked at the approach of these two men to jesus let us look very briefly at how jesus dealt with them and he dealt with them as he knew them as the one who read their hearts first of all we find them dealing with this rich ruler and he exposes the thoughtless use of language
[20:27] when jesus answers this man who says to him good master what shall i do to inherit eternal life when jesus answers him by saying why do you call me good jesus isn't for one moment in any way denying his own goodness his own sinlessness or in any way casting any doubt upon the truth of his own deity when jesus says to this man why do you call me good he's not saying because i'm not good there's only one that's good it's god but he's saying to this man think about what you're saying he's saying to this man do you realize what you're saying when you call me good do you realize what you're saying you who profess to have such an interest in eternal life have you begun to have the right thoughts of what eternal life is all about have you begun to think about eternal life in terms of the one who is really good the one in whose presence no sin can abide you see jesus exposes the shallowness of this man's language and he goes on to answer the man on the level of his own asking the man was saying what shall i do to inherit eternal life and jesus answers him at the level of his own asking not because his own asking was sufficient because jesus wanted to expose that his question was insufficient and so jesus answers him at that level and he speaks to him about the commandments and a man is given a further opportunity to expose his own misunderstanding of the commandments themselves of course the man who hadn't really begun to think about the goodness the absolute goodness of god must have had an inadequate understanding of the commandments and what obedience to the commandments really was but the man is given the opportunity not only to expose his own misunderstanding of the commandments and what obedience was all about but at the same time he was given the opportunity to expose his own dissatisfaction for for all his sureness for all his sureness about for all his certainty about his

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

own certainty about his own capability to do what he would be told this man exposes that up till now for all his obedience there was a a dissatisfaction and so jesus deals with this man he deals with him faithfully he's not being hard he's not being harsh but he's wanting to bring this man to look back into his own heart and life and so he comes to the point when he's saying to this man there's one thing you lack and when he says to jesus there's one thing you lack he's not when jesus rather says to him there's one thing you lack jesus isn't saying well you've got all that you've got all that that's fine you've got all these obediences you just need one more and then you'll be perfect jesus isn't sort of totting up his obediences and saying to him just one more and you're there rather he was saying you know there's one thing that's lacking one thing that's lacking

that means that all your supposed obediences are really disobedience there's one thing that's lacking the starting point the beginning point and he puts this man to the test and he exposes to this man that what is lacking is that there's no trust in the god whose commandments he thought he was obeying there wasn't that faith the faith without which it is impossible to please god his trust was in his riches here is this man and he thinks all i need is a teacher and once he tells me what to do i'll be able to go and do it and everything will be lovely and jesus is able to expose to this man that he's in bondage far from being free to do what jesus would tell him to do he's in bondage he's in bondage to his own riches he's in bondage he's trusting in riches and the very riches that he's trusted in bring him into bondage and he still wants to keep god at a distance he's wanting to be taught by jesus as a teacher but it's seen that he's not ready for that commitment that was involved in following jesus jesus deals with this man as he is he exposes the wrong relationship to god and he tells him that that's what's necessary the relationship of trust and faith he exposes his own bondage to his riches he exposes to him that he wasn't really the free man that he thought he was and oh how thankful we should be when jesus in his mercy begins to teach us what we really are and exposes the shallows that he might bring us to a right dealing with himself so different is jesus dealing with sacchiais they were both rich but there's no commandment to sacchiais to go and sell everything no because the relationship was different altogether jesus came to sacchiais and he read the heart he read a heart in which there was already this stirring that was god's own one more he comes to sacchiais and he's inviting himself in he comes to sacchiais and he says to gathias come down make haste and come down for today i must abide at your house and the word that is used here by jesus is a word that means not just that he would come and wait for an hour and have a meal but it means that he was actually going to stay that night with sacchiais and that was the word that was the implications also of the criticism that was made against jesus he's gone to rest to spend the night in the house of a man who's a sinner you see jesus was was inviting himself in we don't know just to what extent jesus was already convicted of the sinfulness of his past life there was obviously a restlessness there was a dissatisfaction we can't measure the depth of conviction but what we do see quite clearly is that when jesus was inviting himself in the key in sacchiais was ready
to respond he wasn't saying oh no i'm not ready for that this is an imposition this is an intrusion let me let me let me find out a little more about you no when jesus says i must abide sacchiais is ready in some ways this incident here reminds me of that earlier time remember right at the very beginning of of jesus public ministry and when he's for the first time calling disciples and there are those two disciples who were disciples of john and they're following jesus and jesus turns around and he says what are you looking for and they say to him master where do you stay and jesus said come and see well here it's something like that sacchiais was saying i want to see jesus i want to know who he is and jesus is saying sacchiais you want to know who i am i'll come in and show you and he comes in and he shows him luke obviously telescopes the story and he brings us to that climax where sacchiais he knows jesus who he is he knows that indeed this is the one who has come to seek and to save those who were lost he knows that this is the jesus whom he needs not just as a teacher but the one who will come in and abide in his life and teach from that abiding in him and it's already taking effect and sacchiais is standing up and he's saying the half of my goods i give to the poor and if i've taken anything by false accusation i restore fourfold he's not boasting but he's expressing the liberty that he has found in christ the liberty to live a new life because he had not only a teacher but he had one whom he was beginning to understand who he was and why he had come and sacchiais was himself the answer to the criticism he had gone to rest in the house of a man who was a sinner yes indeed he had and this was the result of it and the outcome in these two lives are so different the rich man went away sorrowful he went away and he still had his riches

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

but he hadn't responded even to the teaching that he had asked he had his riches but he didn't have eternal life and he didn't have much else he was a rich young ruler and no doubt he was young enough to have lived to see the roman invasion and his own goods and the goods of all his contemporaries confiscated by the romans and there was sacchiais and he had received jesus in and he was rich he was giving away and yet he was rich because jesus was telling him that he indeed also was a son of abram yes he had been a son of abram by birth and there was a criticism there of the the the religious readers who were cutting him off he was a he was a son of abram and the religious attitude to him ought to have been well he's a son of abram and he's turned aside and he ought to be sought and the good shepherd had come and he had found him and he was now not just by descent but spiritually a son of abram a son of abram in terms of those words that we were reading in romans those were of faith they are the children of abram it's those who believe who inherit the promises we were suggesting that these two men although they're men of their own country men of their own
generation they're very much the folks who are with us they're very much the folks who we meet not just outside but the folks who come into our congregations as jesus reads our own hearts today what does he find do they find those who are saying i want to know jesus who he is and that's our quest and he's ready to say i'll come in and i'll show you who i am and it's not just a one-off thing as we said that the the ongoing search even of the believing heart even of those who have already come to faith is to want to know more of jesus so jesus relationship to us all through life would be that he would keep coming in and showing us who he is and giving us the liberty to live our lives with him and for him and for him and this is life eternal that we should know god and jesus christ his only son amen let us pray oh lord our god again we thank thee for thy word we thank thee for the inspiration of thy word we thank thee for the assurance that when we turn to the bible we have the word of god we thank thee for the inspiration of the holy spirit that assures us that we don't only have the the right words but that the the words the truths of the gospel come to us in the right forms in the right stories in all the right ways that we need to hear it but we'll speak home to our hearts oh lord bring us to thy word with the humility of those who are asking the right questions and who are asking them not out of self-confidence but are asking them as those who see down who see our need for thine own mercy thine own compassion and thine own gentle and gracious dealing with us and we'll speak to our hearts through the person of our lord and savior jesus christ amen

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host