

This Lenten season we spent a lot of time talking about ways that we can become closer to God. We work on ways to better our relationship with God. And this week, yesterday, I had a really bad day. And I forgot everything that I've been telling everybody these last 30 some days. I forgot that there are more people out there than just me. I forgot that there are people that are having a really hard time, that are struggling with life. They're struggling to get through day to day. And I focused on myself. We all do that, right? We all have those moments where we forget.

So, it made me angry. It made me angry that I forgot. So I was already angry because of what was going on around me. And then I got more angry because I was doing the exact things that I asked all of you to not do. So that made me angrier, and so I got to be more on that goat side of everything as opposed on the sheep side. And that made me angrier. And I'm like, I am losing this battle. I'm losing this battle in so many ways because I'm not paying attention. I'm forgetting everything that our readings tell us about. I'm acting like the disciples when Jesus is telling them what's going to happen.

I know that if we live a righteous life, if we act like the sheep, if we do the right thing for the right reasons, we will get to heaven. I know that. I know that we want everyone to get there, that we want to share his love and peace. I know that, but I couldn't see past what was right in front of me. It was easier for me to be angry and accept what was happening and do nothing about it than it was for me to recognize I can change this. I can be the person to change what's going on right now. And we all can; but it's hard. It's hard. It takes a lot of work. You know I talked about perspective, putting ourselves and other people's perspectives last week.

I know I did a very poor job of that, because I was so distracted with everything going on that my message got a little confusing. It got confusing for me. When I went and rewatched it this week, I'm like I don't remember saying that at all. But it's important to put ourselves in other people's perspective.

When I put myself in the perspective of what was making me angry yesterday I recognized that the people have so much more going on than that five minute window of what was going on negatively is nothing compared to what else is happening in their lives. I started to think this is foolish. Their lives are so great, so much bigger than what's going on right now, that we need to focus on that. How can we help them in this way? It's like the second story from today.

Now, the blind man was sitting there, doing what he does everyday living his normal life, and he's got more problems than most of the other people around him. But everybody was so focused on themselves and what was going on, and that they could get to Jesus that they overlooked him. They forgot to put himself, put themselves in his perspective. He recognized that Jesus was the Messiah. He recognized that he was the one and the rest of it didn't matter to him. It didn't matter if these people were cutting him off from Jesus. It didn't matter that they were ignoring him, they were telling him to

be quiet today, and weren't letting him be him. They weren't putting themselves in his perspective; he didn't care. He kept trying to get better. He kept trying to find a way. And he did.

Like Zacchaeus trying climbing that tree story is a great story, we all know it, right? We learned it in VBS. We learned it in Sunday school. We all know the story. We know that this man is small compared to everybody else and he can't see. He can't see Jesus. So he climbs the tree. But when you read the story, and you listen to what it says, there's so much in it that we don't know.

His name, Zacchaeus, means innocent. He's an innocent that is in this story, and then it's a man that is being blocked from God. All the people there are more worried about themselves. When we get in groups, and we do like a group picture, what's the first thing we say? Short people in front, right? You want to make sure that they get seen. When we're out of the parade, the first thing we do is short people in front, kids in front. You make sure that they have access to everything going on. But in the story, they're all pushing him back. They're all pushing him away. He's a tax collector, so yeah, they don't want them near Jesus. He's not worthy. He's a sinner, right? That's what we keep being told from the Pharisees. Jesus spends his time with sinners, with tax collectors, and prostitutes. People that nobody else wants to spend time with. And they treat Zacchaeus that way. They keep pushing him in the back, pushing him in the back till he finally finds his own way to get up.

Now it's interesting that his name is innocent because he's a tax collector. You would not assume a tax collector would be innocent, right? I mean they're evil people. The Greek word that they use in the story for short means not having wisdom. Kind of like innocent, right? You don't know things. So, in this case, is he really this terrible, terrible person? Or is he just some kid that got put in a bad spot? He thought he was helping his people by becoming a tax collector. He thought he was giving them peace and making it easier on them than having somebody like a Roman sit in that spot who wouldn't care? The Roman wouldn't listen to their problems. The Roman wouldn't try to work things out with them, make it easier for them, maybe like now or nothing.

But Zacchaeus, this innocent boy, young man is trying to help his people, and all he gets met with is hate and aggression. His own people hate him. The Romans hate him. Everybody hates this kid. They push him away, so he can't see anything. So, he has to do it himself. He has to climb the tree and get up there.

Jesus doesn't worry about all of that. He doesn't worry about the negative things that this guy has done or hasn't done. Because it's about perspective. His perspective is that we are all God's children. That we are all here to be loved by him. We are all here to find the way. We're all here to make a better life for ourselves in this world and in the next. Do you know what Jesus means? What the word Jesus means. It literally means salvation. So when Jesus tells the kid to come down from the tree, and he's telling him

that he's going to his house, he's telling him, I am giving you salvation. Your faith in me will be there. I'm finding the one that has been lost, and I'm providing that salvation.

There's a lot in that story that we haven't really heard before. It gives us a new perspective on it. We talk on Wednesday nights about or a couple Wednesday nights ago. We talked about Judas. Judas is important to the Easter story. We're brought up thinking he is the most horrible person in the world. But if he wasn't there, nothing would have happened. Jesus wouldn't have been handed over. He wouldn't have been crucified. He wouldn't have risen. We wouldn't have been saved.

Sometimes bad things happen. We don't know why, but we know that God has a purpose for it. In today's stories of chaos was that a bad thing? You didn't mean to be bad. He didn't try to be bad, but everybody around him hated him and reflected on that. Except for Jesus. He saw the good in this one person and saved him.

That made me stop being angry from yesterday. Because there's good in everybody. It doesn't always come out, but we work hard to make it come out. And sometimes I have to work harder to stop being that crowd pushing everybody back and opening up and letting it in. It's easy to do it today. It's easy to do it on Sunday. It's easier to do it from the pulpit and say I'm good. It's hard to do it when you're getting kicked by a five-year-old. You got another one on your back. He got one gouging out your nose. It's easy to get angry. Trust me, and it's easy to get angry at their parents. And it's easy to get angry at everybody else instead of thinking these kids are still good. They just need a little direction for a second. And that's what I'm asking, that we give everybody that second, the moment. So we realize that Jesus saved all of them; just like he saves us. Let us pray.