

So Monday afternoon we got back from India and, and it was a fantastic trip. We went to be with our mission partners at North India Christian Mission. It's always some of my favorite updates to hear what their ministry is doing, what the Lord is doing through them. And it was such a blessing to be able to see it firsthand. And I wanted to share a few pictures with you to recap the trip.

First of all, this was our team after we had just gotten in from a 16 hour flight from New York to Delhi. And so we were a little exhausted, ready to go to bed. But this was a great team day. Our first stop was to the Taj Mahal, which was mind blowing, but believe it or not, it's much smaller than what people think. I was told that I am the only one in the history of the Taj Mahal that has ever taken a picture like that.

I couldn't believe it. And then we got to go and do the real work of ministry. We went and visited several churches that were associated with NICM or were actually started by the Ministry of North India. So this is where we worshiped a couple of Sundays ago, Faithful brothers and Sisters in Christ gathering in the face of persecution and threat. So we got to do that.

One of the main reasons why we went, they had these nine men. Well, there was eight, there was a ninth one elsewhere. But they had been trained up, gone through theology training, ministry training. And so we got to be a part of their graduation in the morning. And then later on that afternoon, we got to ordain them into ministry.

And now these men are out serving in new churches and new communities and new opportunities in the ministry. We got to visit two different sewing centers. Sherwood Oaks has provided some sewing machines to these centers over the years. And so these young ladies had gone through and received a certificate and diploma for their work. And then we got to go to another one and celebrate with them the hard work that they've put in.

And it's just such a blessing to, to be able to see that in person.

We went to a couple of different villages and just kind of shared the love of Jesus, his villages and places that the ministry is rooted in. This is called Ashantytown. Kids here in the picture live in these homes. And every month NICM goes and provides food for them. We got to be a part of that distribution.

And we have some amazing folks in our church who knit together these hats and gloves and just save them for whenever there's a trip. And so we took some of them and got to hand them out to A group of kids that just. I mean, you can see the smile on their faces. They were so excited. We also gave them cake while they were there, and so I think they were pretty excited about that, too.

It wasn't just all work. I got to learn how to play a new instrument. You sound like a little square. You squeeze that and then play. And that was a lot of fun.

He was much better at it than I was. We got to connect even more with our mission partners at NICM and had a lot of fun getting to know them more. And then we also built in some time for some R and R. We got some rest and relaxation along the way. And then this is probably my favorite picture from the trip. On the last day, we were eating McDonald's in deli, and we walked out and.

And this monkey had snatched somebody's ice cream cone and took it and ran up and perched himself there and was just eating it in front of them, like, what? What are you gonna do? And I took it because, one, it's not every day that you see a monkey eating an ice cream cone on the street, right? But I also took it, too, because I'm pretty sure that's the look I give my girls after I put them to bed. And then they come up for a glass of water, and they catch me eating ice cream at night.

I'm like, what? How did you know? I'm busted. Somebody asked me this week what my favorite part of the trip, what the hardest part of the trip, and maybe what the most surprising part of the trip was. And my answer is the same to all three questions.

We got to go to two different leper colonies while we were there. And these are places where somebody has contracted leprosy, which is still a thing. They are immediately excommunicated. They are abandoned by their families. The government has built these communities, and they just kind of put people there, give them their basic needs, but that's about it.

And North India has a relationship with a couple of these different communities. And they go and they minister to them, and they share the love of Jesus with them. And they let them know that their life has dignity and worth and value. And they hand out food every month that is able to provide them nourishment for that month.

The first one of these that we went and visited was literally in the middle of a landfill.

And the sign and message was clear. You are trash that we want to get rid of. And this ministry goes and lets them know that, no, they have inherent value because God's image is on them. And so they care for them and they love them and they point them to Jesus. And it hit me right here, actually, in this moment, as I was speaking with this lady whose family had completely left her when they found out that she had leprosy.

That this is not. These are not people that need to just be getting rid of and forgotten about. These are the people that Jesus came for.

These are the people that Jesus spent time with. These were the people that Jesus was around. He came for the marginalized, for the forgotten, for the overlooked, for the unwanted. And then he challenges those of us who maybe don't feel marginalized or forgotten or overlooked to care for those that are. I've heard it said that Jesus came to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable to those who were on the outskirts of society, Jesus came to comfort them and to show them the love of the Father.

And to those who felt like they were insiders, to those who looked at themselves as being better than everyone else, those who demanded their own way, those who looked down on the people around them, Jesus came to afflict them. He came to ruffle their feathers just a little bit, to challenge their way of thinking. And what we see throughout the Gospels is that it does not matter whether you were afflicted or comfortable. Jesus was disruptive. Jesus disrupted people's lives.

He either made them feel like they were loved and valuable when everybody else pushed them aside, or he challenged people to think of themselves, maybe in a little bit of a different light, to not think of themselves more highly than they ought, as Paul would go on and say in Philippians 2. But it didn't matter one way or another. When you had an encounter with Jesus, something changed, even if it was just inside of you and you felt conflicted, like something changed. We see an example of that in our text today that Maggie read for us. Luke, chapter 19.

Starting in verse one, the Word of the Lord, Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little. Okay, sorry. You know that you had it in your head as well, right? Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through, and a man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

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. And when Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and he said to him, zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. And so he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, he has gone to be the guest of a sinner.

That part's not in the song, is it?

The name Zacchaeus means righteous one, and Zacchaeus was anything but that. To be righteous means to be right with God and to do right with

others. Zacchaeus had spent his life breaking God's law by taking advantage of others, earning, you know, ill gotten gain from their backs. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. Rome was overseeing Israel at this time and kind of over them.

They were occupying the land and they controlled everything, including taxes, taxing a hefty amount from everybody, from the Jewish people. But Rome didn't just collect the taxes themselves. They would hire people out to do that, local people from within the communities to be tax collectors for them. And so if you were to become a tax collector, even if you were doing it because you were trying to just provide for your family, becoming a tax collector immediately ostracized you from the community. You were looked at as a traitor.

You are betraying your own people. And tax collectors would take money for themselves. Rome would give them a bill and say, hey, this is what is owed. But they would collect that, and then they would collect a little bit more for themselves. The system was corrupt, so tax collectors would get wealthy off of cheating their neighbors.

And Zacchaeus, it says, wasn't just a tax collector. Verse 2 says that Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in that area. He was overseeing the entire corrupt system and he was lining his pockets and he was becoming very wealthy by taking advantage of the people that he lived in community with. And so when Zacchaeus walked down the street, people didn't look at him and see an upstanding businessman who had. Who had really pulled himself together and made a life for him.

No, they saw someone who was a liar, who was a cheat. They saw a traitor who had sold out his own people in his own town for personal gain. Someone who had taken advantage of widows and farmers and working families just to make himself comfortable.

And so when Jesus comes to town, Zacchaeus is curious. And we don't know what led up to him being curious about Jesus, but what we know is that he threw off all dignity, this wealthy man who probably put him, like, made himself up to be better than what he was. He threw all of that away and he ran, which was very undignified for somebody his age during this time. He ran in front of the crowds and he became like a kid. And he climbed up this tree.

And when we hear the word sycamore tree, don't think of the sycamore tree as, like, what I've got in our backyard that, you know, it's about 35ft in the air before you find a branch. It was this sycamore fig tree that. I mean, doesn't that look like an incredible tree that you want to go and climb? And so Zacchaeus, you can just imagine him pulling himself up there and sitting on one of these branches, his legs dangling over. And here from the road come Jesus and his disciples and the crowd.

And Jesus gets to Zacchaeus as he's sitting on this branch, and he looks up, and I imagine the crowd leans in and they're like, give it to him, Jesus. Tell him exactly what he deserves. Tell him where he can go.

And if I were Jesus, I would want to give Zacchaeus a piece of my mind. I would want to pull him together and say, man, you've got to stop taking advantage of people. You can't put people in the middle of a landfill. You can't take advantage of people for your own gain. People have worth and dignity because they are made in the image of God.

How dare you treat them the way that you've been treating them.

Instead of confronting and condemning Zacchaeus, though, Jesus shows him grace.

He says, come down. I need to stay in your house today. And this is more than just Zacchaeus, come down. I'm going to go have a meal in your house. We need to, like, get cleaned up, freshened up as we're on our journey.

This is Jesus inviting Zacchaeus into relationship. This is Jesus knowing full well who he's talking about, saying, I want to spend some time with you. I want to be with you.

In that moment, Zacchaeus probably experienced something that he hadn't felt in a long time. Mercy, grace, acceptance. This man who had caused so much affliction on others, who maybe came to see Jesus that day because he was afflicted by what he had done.

And he experienced the grace of the Lord and the comfort of the Father. And that comfort afflicted him. We see it in verse 8. Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 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 the four times the amount.

We don't know what happened between verse 7 and verse 8. But here's what I like to imagine. I imagine that there's a little bit of time between these two verses. And Zacchaeus came down and he welcomed Jesus. And they walked to his house.

And as they walked in, Zacchaeus was probably painfully aware that everybody knew that his house was likely the nicest house in the neighborhood and that it had been built and furnished by taking advantage of others.

And as the meal was being prepared, which took a little bit of time, I mean, he had at least 13 house guests over. They probably were sitting and talking. Zacchaeus was getting to know Jesus. Jesus was getting to

know him. This intimate moment was starting to change Zacchaeus on the inside.

And then they sit down and they have dinner. And Zacchaeus is overwhelmed by the grace that he is receiving from Jesus and he can't hardly take it anymore. And so he stands up and he says, look here and now, this is what I'm going to do. There are some something inside of him that changes because of the grace that he had received in Jesus. Paul says in Romans, chapter 2, verse 4, that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance.

And here is Zacchaeus. He had experienced God's kindness in a new and powerful way. And it was causing him to stand up and say, man, I am repenting from my old life and I'm going to make restitution for all of the wrong that I have done. And Jewish law only required repayment like this of an additional 20%. You stole something from somebody, you give it back plus 20%.

And we see that Zacchaeus is like, no, I'm giving half of my wealth away. And if I took advantage of anybody, I'm making it up four times. This is a joy filled response to grace. And Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house because this man too is the son of Abraham. And this is my favorite verse in this account.

Remember when Zacchaeus was walking through town, people looked at him and they saw a morally corrupt traitor who had partnered with Rome to take advantage of his own people. He was a scoundrel. People would talk about him behind his back. Nobody liked him. He was a social and religious outcast.

But Jesus looks at him and says, no, he belongs to the family of God too. And what I love about this is that it is just a reminder that no one is too far from the reach of God's grace.

I want to say that again because I want to make sure that we hear it. No one, no one, not even you, is too far gone. The grace of God cannot reach them. No one sin is able to keep them from the reach of God's salvation. And in this verse, Jesus isn't saying that Zacchaeus earned his salvation by paying back what he had taken from people.

He's saying that. That no, this is a reflection of what is happening inside of this man's heart. Zacchaeus is just responding to it, that Jesus had already shown him grace when he said, zacchaeus, come down. I'm going to stay at your house. I want to be in relationship with you.

Zacchaeus had already accepted that grace by welcoming Jesus into his home. And then he responds with repentance and restitution. In other words, making amends is not a condition for receiving God's grace, it is an outcome of it. Repentance and making right the things that your

sin had made wrong is not so that we can earn God's grace. It is proof that there is something that is happening inside of you.

It's a response to the grace that we have received, not a way of earning it. And when we become right with God, the natural outcome is that we want to make it right with others. The hope and healing that we find in Jesus, it never stays private. It moves through us and it changes us and it transforms our relationships. And that's the focus of step nine in recovery programs, regeneration, the ministry that we're starting in the fall, put step nine like this.

We make direct amends whenever possible, submitting to God, his Word and biblical counsel. I mean, this is what we see Zacchaeus do and amend is taking responsibility for the harm that we have caused others and then doing what we can to repair it, not because we can make it right, not to try to make ourselves right, but in response to the grace of our Heavenly Father that we have received. Because here's the thing, our sinful actions, yes, they hurt us and they damage our relationship with God, but our sinful actions and behaviors, they have ramifications in the lives of other people, too. We add to the brokenness and pain of the lives of others through our sinful choices. And our sin leaves an emotional, physical, spiritual, sometimes financial wound in other people's lives.

And sometimes that wound is intentional, and we knew exactly what we were doing when we caused it. And sometimes that wound is just collateral damage from the destructive life that we are living. But either way, our sin causes damage. And step nine, which, again, these steps are not just for recovery, they are deceptive Discipleship steps, challenges us to take responsibility for the damage that we've caused and to make things right when we can. And this is Hard work.

I read a story this last week about a man who was telling his wife that he needed to have a crucial conversation with somebody. He knew it, and he kept avoiding it and he kept putting it off. And he told her, every time I go and I try to have this conversation, my palms get sweaty and my mouth gets dry. And his wife looked at him and said, well, lick your palms.

Like, in other words, you got to do what needs to be done. Find a way. Find a way to do it. The hard work of heart work, it needs to just be done. We need to find a way to do it.

Because when we do, man, we can begin to truly experience hope and healing that Jesus wants for us. And the good news is that we don't have to do it alone. So a few steps of how you can make amends. And really it's just three things to pray for. Number one, pray for wisdom.

Praying for wisdom invites a posture of humility in our life that

says, yeah, one, I'm not perfect. My actions have probably caused harm to others. There's probably some wounds that I've left in people because of our relationship.

And we need help sometimes thinking about who we have hurt and how we have hurt them. We need God's wisdom to show this to us. And when we pray these things, we may. Somebody may come to mind and our temptation might be like, well, that was so many years ago, they've probably forgotten about it. I don't want to bring it back up, but here's the thing that I know in my life and you probably know in yours as well.

When we've hurt people, they usually remember, if someone hurt you, you probably remember. And so if you've prayed for wisdom to know who you've hurt, and you might want to listen to those names that the Lord brings to mind.

The second thing, pray for guidance. Another word for this is discernment. Pray for guidance on what to do next, how you should make it right. Maybe it's paying back money that you borrowed or stole. Maybe it's fixing something you broke.

Maybe making amends means going and clearing up somebody's reputation after you spoke badly about them behind their back, admitting to your kids that you were wrong.

Pray for guidance to tell someone, I can't change the past, but here's what I'm committing to from this point on. And making amends isn't about erasing the past. It's about taking responsibility for it and then trying to make it right. And so pray for discernment and guidance on when to have the conversation. Timing is important on these things.

You want it to value them. You don't. You don't want to rush it. You don't want to make it feel like it's just something that you're like, ah, let's get this over with. Take it seriously and think about what will help them.

Receive this gift that you're giving them the best possible way. And then seek guidance on if you should make it right. The truth is that there are times where one, just because of circumstances, we can't. Maybe the person has passed, maybe they've moved far away, maybe there's a restraining order. I don't know what it could be.

Maybe wisdom would say you can't. It's why step nine says, make amends whenever possible. Sometimes it's not possible.

Pray how you can do it, and if you should do it, pray that this will help heal the relationship.

And then lastly, pray for help.

Spend time preparing and asking the Lord to help you know what to say and how to say it. Help you know the right actions to take to make right the things that your sin made wrong. Help the other person heal and grow. Psalm 51:17 says, My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. God, you will not be despise.

God does not turn away someone who is genuinely broken and contrite. And my experience is that most people don't either. And so show genuine contrition and ask how you can make it right. And then maybe listen to them because they know what your sin took from them and so they probably know how you can make it right. So pray for wisdom, pray for guidance, and pray for help.

Jesus came to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. And at the end of our text today, Zacchaeus, the righteous one, he lived up to his name. He became right with God, and he did right by others. And then Jesus closes with this reminder about why he came in verse 10. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

Jesus continues to seek us out, to show us grace. He came to restore our relationship with God and with others. And his grace, when it touches our life, we don't just experience forgiveness. We begin to experience, experience transformation. It changes everything about us.

It disrupts us.

And his grace frees us to face our past and to make things right. We don't have to be embarrassed or ashamed by it. We know that those things don't define us. And so we can go out in humility and love and try to make right the things that our sin made wrong, not to earn grace, but in response to the grace that we have received.

So as we close today, I just want to challenge you with this question that you probably know is coming.

Who do I need to make things right with.

Zacchaeus? There was a sense of urgency in him right here, right now, today. This is what I'm doing. And maybe right here, right now, today, you need to take the next step.

Maybe you feel like Zacchaeus, when you think about your past, when you think about the past week, there's a lot of things that you wish that you could undo, words that you wish that you could take back, people you've hurt by decisions you regret.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus didn't come for perfect people. Jesus came to seek and save lost people like me, me and you and Zacchaeus. And we cannot earn that kind of grace. We can only

receive it. So this morning, if you are ready to receive that grace, if you are tired of running, if you just think, man, there's.

There's too many things. There's no way that God could love me or forgive me. I just want you to know, again, nobody is out of the reach of God's grace. No. Going to have people around the room with orange lanyards, and they want to pray with you and talk to you and help you make and take that next step with Him.

And we're going to come to a time of communion. We've got stations in the front and in the back for those of us who have received that grace. Communion reminds us once again that we are free to face our past because Jesus has saved us from it. He has carried it to the cross. His body was pierced for our transgressions.

His blood was shed for our sin. And now, because of our faith in him and the work on the cross, we are forgiven and we are made new. We have been made right with God, and so now we can go out and live right with others and make it right when we know that our sin has made it wrong. That is the freedom that we have because of grace. And we remember that it was the cost of Jesus on the cross.

As we take the bread which represents his body, and we drink the cup that represents his blood. Let me pray. Jesus, thank you so much for how you love us, for pursuing us, for seeking and saving us, wanting to save us. Thank you for that free gift of grace. And Lord, I pray that as we receive it and experience it, that it will transform us in the way that we go out to others and we make right the places and the ways that our sin is made wrong.

And we can't fix it completely and we can't take away the pain that we've caused. But maybe, maybe just even us taking that step is a is exactly what the other person needs to start their healing process. And so God, help us to do, like Matt talked about last week, help us to do what we can do and to trust you with the results. So for that person that you put into our mind today, Lord, give us your wisdom, give us your guidance, and give us your help to do what we can to make things right. In Jesus name, amen.