

Our Identity in Christ

Lesson Two on Bartimaeus and Zaccheus, Our Identity in Christ

Purpose:

1. To be prepared for living life one must have tools or wise skills.
2. God provides a tool that helps us fend off deceit and temptation.
3. Like Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus, we discover the enormous value of meeting Jesus.
4. The care and love God has shown to us in Jesus gives us a new identity that is the most important reality we have in our lives.

In this second session and following sessions, we are going to seek to discover tools, weapons, and wise skills that will work to keep a person safe and give them a fruitful life as followers of Jesus Christ. So, this is about good preparation for what lies ahead. Now, many of us probably have not been thinking about the importance of having wise tools that will benefit us greatly in a world intent on directing us down meaningless paths, deceitful streets and destructive roads. So, discovering wise skills might not have been initially what we were looking for. Nevertheless, as we get into these sessions, it will become more apparent to you that such tools and wise skills which God has provided are terribly important. They will give you a real life of security and fruitfulness that will work well for you, enabling you to have life-giving impact on the lives of others. They will help everyone be less vulnerable.

The parents speaking in Proverbs one and on through chapter seven understood what real life consists of. Jesus surely believed this. He realized Christians are naturally vulnerable and will be attacked. He says in Matthew 10:16: "See. I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Jesus wants to fortify his people. They will be assaulted, manipulated, and misled. So, they need to be prepared with good wisdom and shrewdness, knowing how to fend off those seeking to take them down. How are they going to respond if they have never considered what God has provided for them to fight with? That which God has provided we will call "tools". We could also call them "weapons" or "wise skills". In this course we will reveal one tool each session, a tool that every Christian needs to arm themselves with.

We find our first tool in the stories of Jesus' encounters with Bartimaeus and Zaccheus. These take place in Luke 18:35 to 19:10. Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem with his disciples and some women, like Mary Magdalene. They are passing through Jericho. Two surprising things happen. First there is a blind man sitting by the side of the road named Bartimaeus. Someone tells him Jesus of Nazareth is walking by. This startles him. He has heard of Jesus and how he healed other people. For him, this is one chance in a million. He recognizes his singular opportunity. Out of his mouth comes a loud shout, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me."



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Right away, the crowd that has gathered tells Bartimaeus to shut up. “Be quiet, you are disturbing everything!” They hate to hear Bartimaeus yelling. They are stern with him. No matter though, Bartimaeus knows his pressing need. Being blind has kept him from having a life of sight which others take for granted. He screams again, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.” His yelling, his plea causes Jesus to stop in his tracks. He tells the crowd, “Call him here.” With those words, the embarrassment of the crowd thinking Bartimaeus is disturbing the occasion, changes. There is an abrupt shift. Now they realize Jesus is not just some popular figure seeking to be acclaimed. They speak kinder words to Bartimaeus, “Take heart, get up, he is calling you.” We get what this means to Bartimaeus. He tosses off his cloak, springs to his feet and hurriedly makes his way to Jesus with excitement and joy.

Now we get to the heart of the matter. Jesus looks at him and asks a very specific question, “What do you want me to do for you?” He shows dignity and honor to Bartimaeus, allowing him to say what he wants to say. Bartimaeus keeps it simple, “Teacher, let me see again.” He believes Jesus cares. He believes Jesus has the power to enable him to see. Jesus hears his need, his plea for mercy, his bold interruption of the crowd, and the faith he has to humbly ask. So, what does Jesus do? He tells Bartimaeus, “Go, your faith has made you well.” Immediately, Bartimaeus regains his sight.

Bartimaeus does not leave it at that. He recognizes what has just happened to him. Jesus is not simply a miracle worker. He is much more than that. He is one to follow and that is what Bartimaeus does. He follows Jesus. He has a brand new life. That new life came from Jesus. For Bartimaeus, Jesus has become more than just giving him his physical sight. Nobody could do what Jesus did if he were not from God. A sudden healing of his blindness. You have to be kidding! For him, Jesus is the Messiah giving true life, real life. God is there for him.

Discussion Questions: What had caused Bartimaeus to call out to Jesus so promptly the way he did? Why do you think the crowd tried to quiet him? If we have a need and we could call on Jesus, what can we learn from this story that can help us? Even if a person is not blind, what are some things that come up where a person is desperate for help, feeling there is nowhere to turn? What difference does it make that Jesus is alive today sitting at the right hand of God the Father? How might this story speak to someone who still hasn't found the answer they need?

Special Exercise: Have someone in the class pretend to be a rock star and someone else pretend to be Bartimaeus. Have the rock star say to Bartimaeus, “Look at that crowd out there. They paid big money to listen to me. See how they are waving their hands to the beat of the music. They are in ecstasy. See the power I have. What do you say to that, Bartimaeus?” Now as class members pretend they are Bartimaeus, what are they going to say to this rock star? See what comes out of their mouths. What would Bartimaeus say in response?

Before Jesus gets through Jericho, he meets up with another man, a very different situation, a very different looking man. He is a hated tax collector named Zacchaeus. Like most of us, he is attracted to a parade. In this case townspeople have lined the streets to watch Jesus of Nazareth walk by. Zacchaeus



is short. He can't see over the crowd. But he doesn't want to lose his opportunity to see Jesus. He runs ahead, finds a sycamore tree and climbs up high enough so he can get a good look at Jesus.

To his great surprise, Jesus sees him and stops. He looks up and speaks to Zacchaeus. He says, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." Hearing this, the crowd is set back. They can't believe what Jesus is saying. Doesn't Jesus know this man is a cheat, one who works for the Romans? Nobody respects him. For them, Zacchaeus is a lost cause. Their question is, "Why Jesus, would you even give him the time of day?" What they don't realize is that something very powerful is going on here. That something is what is happening in Zacchaeus' heart. For the first time, perhaps ever, he is feeling accepted, cared for, and wanted. He is hearing a person whom he has never met call out his name. This Jesus wants to spend time with him, enjoy his hospitality. He can't believe what is happening within him.

He speaks to Jesus with the crowd hearing his words. "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." His words stun the crowd. Those words also tell Jesus that Zacchaeus is repenting of any past sins. He is speaking as a man who believes he is loved. For him, that is all that matters. Money which has had such a strong hold on him loses its grip. It is Jesus who gives him real life, real joy, real peace.

Jesus recognizes what is happening. He speaks clearly, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Discussion Questions: Describe the difference you see in how the crowd sees Zacchaeus and how Jesus sees Zacchaeus. Prior to this story, what do you think Zacchaeus thought of himself? When he realizes Jesus cares about him and does not let the crowd keep them apart, what does this tell Zacchaeus about his importance to Jesus? What tells you Zacchaeus had a change of heart? When people realize they have hurt others and taken advantage of vulnerable people, what does this story tell them? What new freedom do you believe Zacchaeus felt at the end of this story? Was he better off with all his money or with Jesus? Explain.

In these two stories we have two men who met up with Jesus. Their lives changed dramatically. Bartimaeus had an obvious need. He was blind. Once able to see, Bartimaeus realizes no one can make him see unless that person is from God. To him Jesus is not a mere man, but is the Messiah, his Savior, his eternal Lord. Bartimaeus now has a whole new identity. God is for him, not against him. Bartimaeus is now a Christ follower. Jesus is the one who is most important to him.

Zacchaeus had a hidden need. He needed to know he was valuable to someone. Yes, he was valuable to God. He needed someone who accepted him, loved him, and treasured him. He didn't know that about himself but now he had found it out. He had become part of Jesus's family.

Whether we are young or older, we are probably somewhat like either Bartimaeus or Zacchaeus with similar inner questions. Is someone going to show up who is really there for me? Someone who cares. Someone to give me real hope, not fantasy hope, not deceptive hope, not a momentary high. Someone who will stand for me in spite of the crowd. That crowd which assumes they've got everything handled.



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I need someone I can count on, not only today but always. Someone who is not going to let me down. Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Quote: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.” Napoleon Bonaparte

Discussion Questions: Name some short-term things that make a person feel good for the moment but will soon disappear. Name some people who might make a person feel good but they too will soon be gone. What was it about Jesus that transformed the total outlook of the lives of these two men? What did Jesus do that gave each of them a whole new sense of identity? What happens when a person comes to a point in their lives when it seems like nobody cares about them? Is there anyone to look to?

So, what is the tool here in these stories? The tool is this. Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus now have lives where their roots go deep into what only a loving God can provide. They have met Jesus. They have found all they would ever want in him. Jesus has become their main priority. They are noticed, they are loved. Whatever comes along in their future is nothing compared to what they already have. They are on solid ground, eternal ground. They have a new identity—adopted into the family of God. However, for them Jesus’ death and resurrection has not yet occurred. When that happens, Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus will find even more security in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

For many Christians, this security starts with baptism. That baptism can take place when one is an infant. That infant has no awareness of being adopted into the family of God because of the finished work Jesus completed for them, bringing them salvation. Now some might see baptism as some kind of magical act that gives a person a ticket to heaven and that’s that. Nothing more needs to happen. If we think of baptism that way, we overlook one most important point. It is the faith of the parent(s) that justifies infant baptism in the first place. They are the ones who will teach the child the meaning of what happened to them in baptism. They will enable the child to see the identity they have as God’s child. This will give them a new life, a solid way to live into their future life. What Jesus did is to make sure through his death and resurrection that all had been provided for them to live securely “in Christ”.

So, parents and yes, grandparents have a great challenge in front of them. They are the ones who will share with their child as that child is growing up. As the child hears who God is, what Jesus has done for them, what it means to live as a Christian, that child will then begin to take on consciously their identity as a child of God. Their parents are helping them come to see themselves as disciples or followers of Jesus. Through the teaching, the prayers, and the modeling of the Christian life they receive from their parents; their baptism is no longer for them a magical trick but an adoption into all the family gifts God has provided to them through his love. Having received a new outlook on life as Bartimaeus did, having received forgiveness of sin and acceptance as Zacchaeus did, they now are in a position to live the Christian life, secure in Christ.

Discussion Questions: If a parent brings a child forward to be baptized, what is that parent or perhaps grandparenting committing themselves to? Can a child grow in faith by simply being baptized? If a couple



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adopts an infant, what is it they now need to do in order for this child to see them and honor them as permanent parents? How is this similar to parents bringing up their baptized infant in the faith?

Connivers seek to attack one's sense of identity and change it into something else. We see this with what the serpent sought to do with Adam and Eve. Youth who see themselves as eternal children of God are in a better position to fend off evil - evil from within themselves, evil from the world, and evil from the devil and his henchmen. We will be learning more about all this. But this new identity plants one's life on solid ground and that gets us started with a tool that is fundamental for life.

Consider this: A person who is "in Christ" living inside of Christ's commitment to them can now stand against the connivers who say,

1. You need this drug to solve your dissatisfaction with life.
2. You need to have sexual partners before marriage because everyone is doing it. Don't worry about the baggage you will be bringing into your marriage.
3. You need to enjoy watching Internet pornography. There will be no harm.
4. Follow the crowd. They know how to have the most fun.
5. Be nice to everyone and never suspect them of having a hidden agenda.
6. Don't worry about courage. All will be well. Just hang out.

Discussion Questions: What gifts do we receive in baptism? (See Luther's Small Catechism and read what Luther says about baptism). What do you hear here? Why is it important that we build our house or our lives on the solid rock which God has given us, and not on sand? (See Matthew 7:24-27). When someone is being led down a dead-end road, why is it important to recall who one really is as a child of God?

Summary:

1. Jesus has come to give us a true foundation for our lives.
2. Being baptized into Christ brings us into the family of God. It establishes us in a relationship with God that is eternal.
3. It is the parents' and/or grandparents' assignment to bring their offspring up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4; Psalm 78:1-8).
4. When we meet up with deceitful and conniving people, we need to recall who we are "in Christ" as God's children so we don't get drawn into destructive, meaningless living.
5. We need to remember God is there for us and that is all we really need. (Romans 8:31-39).

Suggested Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus the Christ, to us that we might be transformed by his presence and his completed actions for us. Give us your Holy Spirit that we might daily claim what you have given us— a new identity in Christ as your adopted children. Thank you for grounding our lives in your amazing love and the redemption Christ has secured for us. Give us grace to give you our lives daily so that we can stand strong in our new identity, fending off all falsehood and Satan's attacks upon us.