

One Saviour and Two Responses: A Comparison and Analysis of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10

Dan Lioy¹

Abstract

This journal article undertakes a comparison and analysis of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10. One reason for doing so is the paucity of scholarship exploring the interrelationship between these two texts. A second motivation is that both passages showcase two contrasting responses to the Saviour, one characterized by unbelief and the other by belief. A third incentive for this endeavour is that the importance of believing in the Saviour receives elucidation. As this essay demonstrates, each narrative advances a key theme of the third Synoptic Gospel, namely, that Jesus, the divine-human Son, came to earth to unshackle those enslaved to sin and restore them in their relationship with God.

1. Introduction

The Gospel of Luke provides readers with a detailed account of Jesus' works, teachings, and life. Like the other three canonical Gospel writers,

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

Luke paid close attention to historical facts. For instance, the Evangelist recorded the names of several Roman officials in power at the time of Jesus' birth; yet, in contrast to contemporary writing conventions, the author was not obsessed with furnishing precise details or maintaining a slavish chronological order. Indeed, numerous events placed in this Gospel are not arranged to match the exact sequence in which they occurred.

Furthermore, rather than Luke being exhaustive in his treatment of his subject, he only included information that he deemed essential for understanding the way of salvation. The author's interest was to demonstrate the historical veracity and worldwide significance of the soteriological events he narrated. This included depicting Jesus not only as the Jewish Messiah, but also as the Saviour of all the earth's inhabitants. Fittingly, the Evangelist portrays Jesus as the Redeemer who sought to find and deliver people who were 'lost' (19:10).

It would be incorrect to surmise that the Gospel of Luke is merely a compilation of irreconcilable fragments; instead, it is better to regard the third Synoptic Gospel as an integrated narrative written by a well-informed person. In contrast to the other three gospels, which were presumably penned by Jewish believers, a Gentile Christian possibly wrote the Gospel of Luke. An alternative, lesser-held option is that Luke was a Hellenized Jew. If Luke was a Gentile, his own ethnic roots and his Gentile audience may explain why his gospel has a universal perspective.

Antioch of Syria might have been Luke's place of birth. Greek names with contractions ending in 'as' (such as Luke's original Greek name, Loukas) were common among slaves. Greek and Roman masters often educated their slaves to become physicians and later freed them to practise medicine. One corresponding postulate is that Luke could have

been an emancipated bondservant whose former master trained to be a healer of the body. There is further speculation that Luke was born into the household of Theophilus, a government official who sponsored Luke's research and writing of the third Synoptic Gospel.

In keeping with the preceding suppositions, the central theme of the third Synoptic Gospel is that God offers salvation to all people when they trust in the Messiah. Additionally, the Father's saving acts in human history come to fulfilment through the advent of his Son. Time and again, Luke emphasised that deliverance from sin was not the sole possession of one ethnic group; rather, it was open to people of all races and human conditions. The message of Luke's Gospel is that the redemption Jesus provided was broad enough to include everyone who came to him in repentance and faith. Even though the physician-evangelist presented Jesus as the Saviour of all humanity, readers discover that only a minority of individuals believe in him.

Clarifying with respect to the above are the descriptive analyses of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10 in sections 2.0 and 3.0, respectively. Each of these texts represents what O'Toole (1991:108) labels as a 'quest story'. The prototypical narrative involves an individual who 'approaches Jesus' in search of 'something very important'. On the one hand, both passages draw attention to an inquisitor or seeker; on the other hand, they highlight two divergent reactions to Jesus. One response is characterised by unbelief and disappointment, while the other entails faith in Jesus that leads to salvation.

An examination of the academic literature dealing with the Gospel of Luke indicates there are mainly incidental, disconnected observations comparing the rich young ruler with the chief tax collector. Six exceptions are Carroll (2012:373), France (2013:298–9), Green (1997:666–7), Hamm (1988:436), O'Hanlon (1981:9), and O'Toole

(1992:1033), who each devote about a paragraph to state some parallels between these two individuals. Three additional exceptions are Garland (2011:744), Galloway (2011:51–52), and Tannehill (1986:123–4), who each offer two paragraphs to contrast the attitudes and responses of each person. These concessions notwithstanding, there remains a paucity of scholarship exploring in a focused, sustained manner the interrelationship between the two passages under consideration.

As the following sections demonstrate, there is value in examining the preceding, potentially relevant lacuna. The endeavour includes the discourse in section 4, in which an extended comparison and analysis of the two principal texts is undertaken. This is followed by section 5, in which the key findings of the study are conveyed. With the preceding in mind, the major claim is that Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10 showcase two different responses to the Saviour, one characterized by unbelief and the other by belief. Each narrative, in turn, moves forward a key theme of the third Synoptic Gospel, namely, that Jesus, the divine-human Son, came to earth to unshackle those enslaved to sin and restore them in their relationship with God. The irony is that the powerbrokers of society, as represented by the rich young ruler, spurn the Messiah and his gracious offer of salvation. Oppositely, the dregs of society, as represented by the prominent tax collector, Zacchaeus, trust in Jesus for eternal life and become heirs of the divine kingdom.

2. A Descriptive Analysis of Luke 18:18–30

The episode involving the rich young ruler is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. Accordingly, pertinent information from Matthew 19:16–30 and Mark 10:17–31 is correlated with Luke 18:18–30 to inform the descriptive analysis that follows. Jesus' encounter with the wealthy official took place in Perea in the winter of AD 30. This

location notwithstanding, Jesus was heading with unshakable resolve to Jerusalem. As the Saviour did so, someone came running up to him and knelt before him as an act of reverence. When the details of the various Gospel accounts are considered, it is ascertained that the enquirer was not only rich, but also a leader and young. Hendriksen (1973:723) surmises the official was likely less than 40 years old.

When the aristocrat's meticulous record of law-keeping is taken into consideration, the various accounts leave the impression that he enjoyed a sterling reputation. The descriptions found in the Synoptic Gospels could have fitted one of the local Jewish council or court representatives. They acted under the authority of the Roman government and exercised judicial as well as administrative responsibilities. Accordingly, the enquirer may have been a synagogue official, a Pharisee, or a pious civic leader. If these suppositions are accurate, it is reasonable to deduce that the enquirer had garnered numerous accolades.

Despite the above flourishes, the young man lacked assurance of 'eternal life' (Luke 18:18), a concept well established within Second Temple Judaism. In John 17:3, Jesus defined eternal life as enjoying a personal relationship with the Father based on knowing him as the one true God. Furthermore, it is only possible to genuinely know the Father through faith in the Son, whom the Father had sent to reveal himself. In short, eternal life is a growing relationship with the triune God that begins, not just when the believer dies, but at conversion.

Perhaps based on rumours about Jesus the patrician had heard, he sought out the itinerant preacher from Nazareth for a definitive answer to the aspirant's urgent query. Evidently, the young man expected to be given a meritworthy task he could accomplish to win favour with God. Based on this observation, it is evident the ruler thought in terms of earning salvation through the scrupulous observance of edicts. Likewise,

the aristocrat seemed unaware of the truth that eternal life could only be received as the Father's gift from the Son. Newman and Stine (1988) paraphrase the official's question as, 'what must I do to make myself good enough?' He had been raised to heed the Mosaic Law, but he still felt unfulfilled. Put another way, there was a gaping spiritual void within him.

The official's enquiry reflected current Jewish thinking concerning the way to gain acceptance with God. For instance, in Jesus' night-time conversation with Nicodemus, the latter initially operated under the assumption that those who wanted to be right with God had to strive to perfectly obey the Law. With profound insight, Jesus told the Pharisee and respected member of the Sanhedrin that, to see God's kingdom, a person must be 'born again' (John 3:3). In this decisive intervention, God miraculously raises the repentant from spiritual death to new life. The desires, goals, and actions of the regenerate are so radically changed that they want to live for God and serve others.

Against this theological backdrop, to see God's kingdom (because of the new birth) means to experience fully the redemptive blessings associated with the rule of the Lord in one's life, both in the present and throughout eternity. Like a helpless, vulnerable child, even such an accomplished individual as the rich young ruler needed to be spiritually reborn. Moreover, God's power alone, not human effort, could transform the official's sinful heart (as well as that of all people). Ultimately, the kingdom of God could be received only by those with childlike faith. Edwards (2002:312) elucidates that just as children are dependent on their parents, so believers are dependent on their heavenly Father for eternal life.

In the young man's initial greeting, he complimented Jesus for being a 'good teacher' (Luke 18:18). The Greek adjective translated 'good'

denotes what is upright or honourable. In this context, the noun rendered 'teacher' refers to distinguished rabbis who instructed others in truths about God, his commandments, and his expectations for humankind. To point the aristocrat's thinking in the proper direction, Jesus asked why the wealthy ruler considered Jesus to be impeccable within his essential nature. The Saviour also declared that no person was intrinsically good. Indeed, since only God was infinitely holy, he alone could be called 'good' as well as determine who and what was 'good'.

Marshall (1978:684) interjects that Jesus, in his response, sought to eliminate 'any cheapening of the idea of goodness'. Accordingly, Jesus' point was that true virtue was not found in sinful people or the deeds they performed; rather, there was only one source of supreme goodness, namely, God. It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that Jesus was denying his own deity and ethical flawlessness. Behind his statement was the awareness of his unity with the Father and the Spirit. Also, Jesus wanted the young man to seriously consider the implications of calling the Saviour 'good' (v. 19) before frivolously using the term. The prudence of Jesus' approach is brought out in verse 23, which reveals that ultimately the aristocrat made a conscious decision not to follow Jesus.

The Messiah next said that if the aspiring leader truly prized the life God gave, he should obey the 'commandments' (v. 20). The latter renders a Greek noun that refers to the precepts, injunctions, and edicts of God, particularly those recorded in the Pentateuch. It would be incorrect, however, to conclude from Jesus' statement that he thought heeding the Mosaic Law could earn eternal life; rather, Jesus' strategy was to help his enquirer recognize his inability to obtain God's favour through good works. Jesus could have done the ruler's thinking for him

by telling him that salvation could never be merited by what one does; instead, Jesus worked with the aristocrat on his current level of understanding and led him to confront the truth on his own terms and in his own way.

According to Matthew 19:18, the official asked which decrees he should keep. Jesus' reply in Luke 18:20 focused on a subset of the Ten Commandments that primarily concerned one's relationship with other people. The Messiah cited prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing, perjury, defrauding (which is akin to coveting), and dishonouring parents. Matthew 19:19 adds Jesus' emphasis on the importance of people loving others as much as themselves.

A comparison of the three Synoptic Gospels indicates some variation in the form and order of the edicts Jesus cited, which Hendriksen (1973:725) considers to be 'minor' in 'character'. Lenski (1946:915) infers from his examination of the relevant intertextual data that the Saviour was not constrained to adhere to the exact wording of the Decalogue. Garland (2011:731) takes the analysis further when he points out that Jesus' interlocutor arrived with a 'selfish question about his own future security'; and in response, the Messiah shifted the young man's 'attention to others, which requires selflessness'. Bock (1996:1479) surmises that the way in which a person 'treats others' points to 'acts of faithfulness' that are both 'concrete' and measurable.

The pious aristocrat, perhaps like his scrupulous peers, genuinely thought he had wholeheartedly observed since his childhood all the commandments Jesus mentioned (Luke 18:21). Most likely, this points back to the enquirer's bar mitzvah at the age of 13 when all Jewish males assumed personal responsibility for heeding the Mosaic Law. Evidently, the aspiring leader thought Jesus needed to give him a longer list, so that he could set about observing these directives, too. Clearly,

the official had not yet grasped the fact that keeping the law could never save anyone. It could only disclose a person's sin and the need for a Saviour. Also, for the ruler, obedience to the law was a matter of external compliance. He did not realise that inner conformity was also imperative, and that it was impossible for people to fully achieve this by themselves.

According to Mark 10:21, Jesus looked at the aristocrat intently and felt empathy for him. The Greek verb rendered 'loved' denotes the unselfish, unconditional compassion of the Messiah. It seeks to reach out to others in need, even when the object seems unworthy of being loved. The editorial note in the second Synoptic Gospel shows how Jesus' love for all people was individualized in this situation. Out of compassion, the Saviour told the young man something he did not want to hear, namely, to sell all he owned—which included his land, houses, and livestock—and give the proceeds to the destitute (Luke 18:22). Jesus assured the official he would have riches in 'heaven'. By doing this, he would demonstrate that earthly wealth no longer prevented him from exclusively following the Redeemer.

The Greek verb rendered 'lack' (v. 22) pointed to an area of the enquirer's spiritual life that remained deficient. Jesus drew attention to this when, according to Matthew 19:21, he addressed the aspiring leader's desire to be 'perfect'. The latter renders an adjective that also can be translated 'mature' or 'full grown'. In this context, it refers to the complete absence of deficiency in any area of one's spiritual life. As it turns out, this was not the case with the rich young ruler, for he was unduly attached to his material belongings, a shortcoming against which the Hebrew sacred writings warned.

In Jesus' day, his Jewish peers felt that a person's lot in life was a measure of God's approval. If people were wealthy, it allegedly was a

sign that God was on their side. In contrast, if people lived in poverty, it reputedly meant that they had sinned and were suffering God's judgment. Jews living in that era also measured people by their role in society. Those most respected were the religious leaders, such as the Pharisees and priests, along with the ruling classes. Affluent laypersons and the working middle class were also respected, but they were lower in the social order and tended to look up to the Pharisees and other religious leaders. As France (2002:399) observes, the Saviour's remarks were not just an 'expression' of his 'attitude toward wealth', but also 'part of a broader critique of conventional human values'.

Luke 18:23 indicates that Jesus had touched the enquirer's heart, and he was devastated. The official felt extremely 'sad', in which the underlying Greek adjective points to the presence of grief, distress, or anguish. Mark 10:22 uses the idiomatic expression rendered '[his] face fell'. This translates a verb that metaphorically can refer to the sky being covered with dark clouds. In the case of the aristocrat, he became gloomy and went away dejected, for he did not want to part with his substantial temporal possessions to receive the treasures of heaven. Jesus never specifically stated the one item or attribute the young man lacked. Nonetheless, as soon as Jesus instructed the ruler to sell whatever he owned, the one shortcoming took control of his heart and dictated his response. He chose his belongings over everlasting life.

Jesus' directive to sell everything pointed to the commandments in the Decalogue that he did not mention, namely, those requiring that God be first. From this, as Talbert (2002:202) concludes, the official was an 'idolater' in which material 'wealth' was the false deity he venerated. It is worth stressing that Jesus' directive for the aristocrat to sell his possessions was not a command that God dictated to everyone. That said, believers should be willing to relinquish whatever distracts them

from wholeheartedly following Jesus. Ultimately, giving to the poor does not save anyone; however, with respect to the ruler, his riches were a barrier between himself and God.

As the official began to leave, Jesus shifted his attention to his disciples. Compared to Matthew and Luke, Mark's Gospel provides more details about the emotional aspects of the exchange that unfolded between the Saviour and his followers. To begin, as he looked at them, he noted that it was difficult for the wealthy to 'enter' (Mark 10:23) the divine 'kingdom' and for that reason submit to God's rule. This statement astounded and possibly alarmed the Twelve (v. 24). Their response, though, did not stop Jesus from reiterating his declaration. Next, Jesus clarified that it was 'easier' (Luke 18:25) for a 'camel' to pass through a sewing needle's 'eye' than for those who amassed lots of possessions to gain entrance into heaven.

In the first century AD, the hole in a needle was possibly the smallest opening imaginable for Palestine's residents. Also, camels were regarded as the largest and most common domesticated beasts of burden. According to an old tradition, Jesus' word picture referred to a low gate in the wall of Jerusalem. This gate, which was for those who arrived after the main gates had been shut for the night, was called 'the eye of the needle'. People could get through easily, but camels could crawl through only with great difficulty—on their knees—and only if their cargo was unloaded.

According to this line of reasoning, Jesus' point was that the wealthy could enter the kingdom only if they got down on their knees (in other words, humbled themselves) and unloaded their possessions. While in some ways the preceding tradition may seem attractive, no reliable evidence exists that there ever was a gate called the 'eye of the needle'. It seems more consistent, then, with Jesus' style of teaching and his use

of humour and exaggeration to conclude that he meant a literal camel and needle. In brief, he was talking about an impossibility, not a difficulty. The corollary is that only God could save a human being.

Luke 18:26 does not record the emotions Jesus' disciples felt at this moment. Matthew 19:25 states that the Saviour's remark caused the Twelve to be 'greatly astonished'; in comparison, Mark 10:26 reports they were 'even more amazed'. Two different Greek adverbs are used in each passage, though they utilize the same verb. Also, while the adverbs concern the same sort of emotional response, the term used in Mark 10:26 points to an intensification of the disciples' initial reaction recorded in verse 24. To be explicit, in the wake of their surprise and shock they nearly lost their mental composure.

The dismay of the Twelve indicates they accepted the common thinking of their peers regarding the presence of wealth as an ironclad affirmation of God's special favour. Jesus, of course, rejected this mistaken notion. His followers were so stunned that they wondered how anyone could be 'saved' (Luke 18:26). This renders a Greek verb, which in this context, refers to deliverance from the penalties of divine judgment. Evidently, the Twelve agreed with the religious leaders, who taught that those who had many material possessions were most favoured by God. If, therefore, the rich could not enter heaven, how could the poor ever hope to do so?

Next, Jesus gave the answer that his provocative statement had anticipated. Entering heaven was 'impossible' (v. 27) for people to merit, but all things were 'possible' for God to do in his grace. Put another way, while no one (not even the wealthy) could earn eternal life through the scrupulous observance of the Mosaic Law, the Father gave salvation freely to those who believed in the Son. Admittedly, while human sinfulness made it impossible for fallen people to become

regenerate on their own, the rich had temptations to sin unique to them; yet, even then God could achieve the impossible, namely, change any human heart.

It seems the Twelve operated on the basis of payment and reward. Peter, at least, reflected this debit-and-credit mindset when he reminded the Saviour (perhaps with an attitude of smugness) that the entire group had abandoned everything to become his disciples (Luke 18:28). Evidently, Peter and the rest of the eleven thought they deserved more recognition than others for the sacrifices they had made to accompany Jesus. Marshall (1978:688) articulates the ‘unspoken thought’ with the question, ‘What shall we get in return for our self-sacrifice?’ In this exchange, the Messiah decided not to challenge how genuinely unselfish the Twelve had been up to this point; instead, Jesus affirmed their commitment, though it was imperfect.

‘Truly’ (v. 29) renders the Greek emphatic particle *amēn*, which is Hebrew in origin and points to the dependability and certitude of a statement. In this case, the Father would not overlook any sacrifice his spiritual children made for the sake of his Son. A comparison of the three Synoptic Gospels provides a fuller understanding of what Jesus promised. In Matthew 19:28, he directed the attention of his disciples to the messianic age, when the entire creation would be renewed. At that time, Jesus would reign from his ‘glorious throne’. Moreover, the Twelve would be seated on their respective ‘thrones’ and be given authority to make judicial decisions concerning Israel’s ‘twelve tribes’. One option is to take Jesus’ statement literally; a second possibility is that he was speaking figuratively.

Mark 10:29–30 records Jesus’ acknowledgement that his disciples had given up all sorts of financial claims and inheritance rights in connection with their families and ancestral estates. They did so on

account of the Son and his plan of redemption, which involved both the ‘gospel’ (Mark 10:29) and the ‘kingdom of God’ (Luke 18:29). Nolland (1993a:891) opines that from an eternal perspective, the priorities of the Creator ‘transcend even the most sacred and binding of human loyalties’.

The Saviour reassured his followers that in the ‘present age’ (v. 30), he would shower them with innumerable spiritual blessings. Their generous reward also included becoming part of the worldwide body of Christ, along with its numerous members and the possibility of being maltreated for one’s faith. Though believers may suffer for their devotion to the Messiah, they were assured that the divine kingdom belonged to them. Furthermore, at the consummation of history, they would become heirs of ‘eternal life’. The implication is that the gospel, eternal life, the kingdom of God, and salvation were all linked to faith in the Messiah and demonstrated by an unmitigated resolve to be his disciple.

3. A Descriptive Analysis of Luke 19:1–10

As noted in the previous section, Jesus spent the months before his crucifixion in Perea. Except for his return to restore Lazarus to life, Jesus remained out of the Jerusalem area during this time until his triumphal entry. In this regard, Luke 18:31–34 provides a useful literary and theological context to the Saviour’s encounter with Zacchaeus and the emphasis in 19:10 on Jesus’ redemptive mission to ‘seek and save’ those who were spiritually ‘lost’. As Jesus and his disciples travelled toward Jerusalem, he stopped to warn them about what would happen to him in the city. An examination of the third Synoptic Gospel indicates this was one of several warnings Jesus gave his disciples regarding his upcoming death.

Readers can only imagine the solemnity of the moment as Jesus gathered the Twelve around him (18:31). Next, Jesus detailed the harsh treatment that awaited him, such as mocking, insults, and flogging (v. 32). In some instances, the scourge used for the mocking was enough to cause death. Jesus did not specifically mention the cruel and horrible crucifixion, but he did imply it by describing all the events that typically led up to it. For the first time, Jesus also identified his executioners as Gentiles and foretold his resurrection on the third day. In making these declarations, Jesus sought to prepare his followers for the worst, assure them that all the upcoming events followed the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah, and affirm to them that he would triumph over the grave (v. 33).

It is not difficult to picture the growing sense of alarm welling up in Jesus' disciples. They heard his words, but they failed to comprehend their meaning until after the incidents had occurred (v. 34). The Twelve could not imagine such horrible events happening to Jesus, particularly how, as Bock (1996:1499) indicates, Jesus' 'death could fit into the divine plan'. Perhaps they thought this was another of Jesus' paradoxical sayings, which they would later figure out; or perhaps Luke indicated that the meaning of Jesus' words was concealed from his followers in the same way that his identity was veiled from the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Furthermore, it is difficult to know exactly how the Twelve perceived Jesus as the Messiah and how that impacted their grasp of unfolding events. Acts 1:6 indicates Jesus' followers were caught up in the popular idea that the Messiah would throw off pagan rule and establish a Jewish kingdom. Consequently, the notion of a suffering Redeemer was foreign to the disciples, as it was to many of their Jewish peers in that day. They revelled in the prophecies from the Psalms, Daniel, and

elsewhere that foretold a conquering Messiah-Monarch; yet, they overlooked those oracles—especially from Isaiah—that also spoke about the Redeemer as a Suffering Servant.

For the preceding reasons, when Jesus spoke about his crucifixion, the Twelve could not comprehend such a concept and perhaps instead looked for some hidden meaning in Jesus' words. It was not until after his crucifixion and resurrection were complete that the disciples looked back and fully realized that Jesus had foretold everything that would happen. Paradoxically, the chief priests and Pharisees recognised Jesus' claim that he would rise again and requested that a guard be posted at his tomb; but the events took his followers by surprise.

The three Synoptic Gospels recount an episode in which Jesus, while on the outskirts of Jericho, encountered two blind beggars, one of whom Mark 10:46 identifies as 'Bartimaeus'. Evidently, as Calvin (2009:367–8) suggests, Bartimaeus was the more vocal of the two in pleading with Jesus to restore their sight. Some in the throng of pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem to observe the Passover festival attempted to silence the beggars' pleas for 'mercy' (Luke 10:38). Jesus, however, stopped and directed that the pair be brought to him. Then, Jesus, in response to their entreaty, placed his hands on their eyes and enabled them to instantly receive their sight. Mark 10:52 indicates that the bold request put forward by Bartimaeus was prompted by his belief that Jesus could restore his sight. The Messiah not only affirmed this truth, but also declared that spiritual wellness had come to Bartimaeus (along with the other unnamed beggar).

Luke 19:1 notes that once Jesus entered Jericho, he intended to progressively make his way through the town. As clarified by Strauss (2002:462), there were 'two Jerichos' in the first century AD. One was the 'uninhabited city' showcased in the Hebrew sacred writings, while

the second was the a ‘new city’ built by Herod the Great and situated approximately a ‘mile to the south’. One possibility (albeit disputed) is that in the episode under consideration, the Messiah and his followers were making their way from the ‘old Jericho’ to the ‘new Jericho’.

Jericho is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world and the first population centre the Israelites conquered under Joshua’s command. It is in a wide plain of the lower Jordan river valley at the foot of the ascent of the Judean mountains. Jericho is about eight miles northwest of the spot where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea and about five miles west of the Jordan. The combination of rich soil, water from seasonal rains, and constant sunshine made Jericho an attractive place for settlement.

After Jesus entered Jericho, he met a rich and influential tax collector named Zacchaeus (v. 2). Even though his name literally meant ‘pure’ or ‘innocent’, most likely he acquired his wealth over the years through fraudulent means. In Jesus’ day, publicans were agents or contract workers who collected tariffs and tolls in designated areas. Tax collectors were usually Romans; yet, as in the case of Zacchaeus, some of them were Jewish. Because of the opportunity to become wealthy, tax collectors paid the Romans for the opportunity to collect tariffs and tolls.

Under the Roman system, all males over the age of 14 and all females over 12 were subject to a poll tax. There was also a land tax, as well as several indirect taxes on imports and exports, and even taxes on common items such as salt. Farmers who tried to move their goods outside of their own territory were hit with road tolls that ate up most of their profits. Many transported goods, including slaves, were also subject to taxation. To make a profit, publicans would charge several times more than what the Roman government required. The desire for

personal gain would invariably lead to the inflation of what was charged. Each person involved in the collection process would pocket some of the excess money being amassed.

The Jews held their fellow citizens who were tax collectors in disdain because they served as agents of the despised Roman government. Also, everyone could see how the publicans became rich at the expense of their own people. Furthermore, Jewish tax collectors were considered ceremonially impure, since they had frequent contact with Gentiles. Because Jericho was on a major trade route and a centre for commerce, there were plenty of opportunities for a leading publican such as Zacchaeus to become rich. He probably employed and supervised local Jews to do the actual task of gouging others. These individuals would know the ways the local people tried to avoid taxation. For these reasons, it is likely Zacchaeus was despised by the Jewish residents in Jericho.

Perhaps on the day Jesus arrived, Zacchaeus was walking along the main thoroughfare or heading toward his customs station when he heard the commotion of the crowd. It remains unclear, though, why Zacchaeus was so eager to catch a glimpse of Jesus (Luke 19:3). Despite the tax collector's repeated efforts, his short stature prevented him from looking over the heads of the entourage following the Saviour. Also, it is likely that no one would enable such a reviled publican to move to the front to obtain a better view. So, Zacchaeus decided to scale a 'sycamore-fig tree' (v. 4) growing beside the road. Since these trees had wide, low-hanging branches attached to shorter, wider trunks, they were relatively easy to climb.

Most likely, Zacchaeus intended to remain undetected in the tree. After all, a person with his considerable wealth and influence typically tried to avoid the embarrassment of being found in a such a conspicuous spot;

nonetheless, his encounter with the Saviour that day would prove to be a life-changing experience for Zacchaeus. Imagine the astonishment the publican must have felt when Jesus passed by, saw the tax collector, and deliberately made eye contact with him. With Zacchaeus being up above eye level in the tree, few within the throng would have bothered to notice him; but Jesus, through supernatural insight, already knew about Zacchaeus and summoned him.

Perhaps the tax collector's heart started to race when Jesus called Zacchaeus by name and told him not to waste any time descending from the branch where he sat (v. 5). Jesus literally said it was 'necessary' for him, as part of his God-given redemptive mission, to lodge that night in the home of Zacchaeus. Jesus' words implied that his acceptance and forgiveness of Zacchaeus was unconditional. The request must have come as a surprise to a person accustomed to the scorn of his fellow Jews. Likely, the crowds were just as stunned when they heard that a popular and highly regarded Jewish rabbi wanted to socialise with someone whom the locals considered to be a swindler and turncoat.

Most likely, Jesus wanted others to know that all people—even a loathed tax gatherer such as Zacchaeus—needed to hear the good news about the kingdom. After all, as stated in section 1.0, Jesus came to earth to redeem people like the publican. France (2013:298) explains that 'for Jesus, the work of salvation took precedence over social protocol'. Such observations notwithstanding, it remains unclear why Zacchaeus was thrilled to accept Jesus' request (v. 6). Despite the official's possible embarrassment, he quickly climbed down the tree and received Jesus as a guest in the publican's home. This episode is a wonderful illustration of what it means for the lost to open their hearts in repentance and faith to the Saviour.

Unlike the exuberance Zacchaeus felt, many in the crowd were displeased with Jesus' choice of whom to honour with his fellowship. In turn, the throng displayed their annoyance by grumbling among themselves (v. 7). At first, it may have been just a few irritated bystanders; but then, a chorus of discontent quickly emerged. The consensus was that Zacchaeus had violated the Mosaic Law and so was unworthy to be in Jesus' esteemed presence. The throng, however, failed to realise that Jesus came to earth to redeem sinners. Certainly Zacchaeus—along with everyone else in the crowd—fitted that description.

Judging from the intensity of the reaction of the bystanders to Jesus' decision, Zacchaeus must have been an extraordinarily dishonest tax collector. Though he was regarded a notorious transgressor of the Mosaic Law and worthy of condemnation, the official seemed increasingly eager to meet Jesus. Otherwise, why would such a wealthy, influential man as Zacchaeus risk the undignified action of climbing up a tree? Those blinded by pride could not see how God had prepared the heart of the publican to meet the perfect, sinless Messiah. So, even though the throngs were correct about Zacchaeus' reprehensible past, they failed to appreciate the grace-oriented nature of Jesus' salvific mission.

Zacchaeus had wronged many people, and the Mosaic Law required full restitution plus an additional one-fifth in circumstances in which money was acquired by fraud. Zacchaeus, however, went far beyond what the legal code mandated. Presumably, later that day, during a meal hosted by Zacchaeus at his domicile in honour of Jesus, the tax gatherer stood up in front of his guests and said that he would give half his wealth to the destitute. Additionally, if the publican had overcharged people on their taxes, he would give them back four times as much (v. 8). The law

required a fourfold restitution only when an animal was stolen and killed. If the animal was found alive, only twofold restitution was required.

A point of dispute centres around the best way to understand the assertions Zacchaeus made about himself in verse 8. Nolland (1993b:906) clarifies that this reading of the text ‘involves taking the present tense verbs as iterative, rather than as futuristic’. One proponent is Fitzmyer (1985:1221), who thinks the tax collector was defending his status as a righteous person by calling attention to his established practice of treating others in an equitable and unselfish manner. According to this view, Zacchaeus sought to ‘vindicate’ himself in response to the overly biased accusations made by the ‘grumbling crowd’ (v. 7). In contrast, this essay sides with the interpretation, as summarized by Bovon (2013:598–9), that the publican made an ‘ethical decision’ to ‘act charitably’ toward, rather than defraud, others. This commitment was ‘motivated and transformed’ by his ‘encounter with Jesus’. Indeed, the emphasis in the narrative is on someone who was ‘lost’ (v. 10) receiving by faith the ‘salvation’ (v. 9) the Redeemer freely offered.

The better interpretive option, then, is to understand Zacchaeus candidly evaluating the crimes he committed and acknowledging that he was as guilty as the lowest common robber. So, in contrast to the religious elite, Zacchaeus truly repented of his sins. Jesus took note of the decision Zacchaeus made. The Saviour declared that this penitent tax collector had shown by his pledge to be generous and make restitution to the poor that he was genuinely saved. He was a true reborn descendant of Abraham and child of the covenant promise (v. 9). Scripture reveals that Abraham is the spiritual ancestor of all who trusted in the Lord for redemption. Jesus earlier declared that it was

difficult for those awash in riches to be redeemed; yet, the transformation in the attitude, priorities, and behaviour of Zacchaeus shows that it is not impossible. Ironically, the tax collector stood in sharp contrast to the rich young ruler.

The residents of Jericho had criticized Jesus for associating with Zacchaeus, whom they also slandered and rejected. In verse 10, however, the Saviour declared that he had come to earth to ‘seek’ (like a shepherd) and ‘save’ (or rescue) those who were ‘lost’. In referring to himself as the ‘Son of Man,’ Jesus drew attention to his unique, authoritative status as the suffering Servant and Messiah. This verse is a fitting summary concerning why Jesus left the glories of heaven. In brief, his mission was not to please himself; instead, his objective was to redeem sinners from divine judgment.

4. A Comparison and Analysis of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10

Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10 spotlight Jesus’ encounter with two wealthy, prominent individuals. Fitzmyer (1985:1222) considers Zacchaeus to be a ‘foil’ to the rich young ruler. In keeping with the observations put forward by various scholars, it is worthwhile to note that the latter person was an unnamed, respected leader and Torah-observant member of his ethnic Jewish community. The other individual was also someone of influence named Zacchaeus; however, his fellow Jews disdained him for allegedly violating the edicts in the Mosaic Law involving ceremonial purity. Even more objectionable was his perceived collaboration with the hated Roman overlords. While the Synoptic Gospels do not disclose the origin of the rich young ruler’s wealth, it is likely that the publican amassed his fortune by repeatedly gouging his Jewish peers living in Jericho and its environs.

Both aspirants were aware of their deep spiritual need. For the anonymous individual showcased in 18:18–30, the realization gradually emerged over a period of time. Admittedly, he did everything he could to heed the Decalogue, along with all the other commandments in the Pentateuch; yet, despite his sustained, compulsive efforts, he sensed that something was lacking in his quest to secure God’s favour. This awareness prompted the official to ask what task he had overlooked to obtain everlasting life. For the person in the limelight in 19:1–10, the recognition of his spiritual need seems to have arisen suddenly. The narrative leaves the impression that when Zacchaeus learned about Jesus’ arrival, it immediately triggered something within the tax collector. This impelled him to go out of his way—even to the point of risking embarrassment—to catch an exclusive glimpse of the Saviour.

On one level, Jesus engaged both wealthy individuals in a civil and candid manner. On another level, the Saviour tailored his interaction to reflect the specific needs of each person. With respect to the rich young ruler, Jesus challenged the nature of the aristocrat’s lead-in question, took his assertion of Torah observance at face value, and pinpointed the foremost area he still needed to address. The result of the exchange is that despite the official’s claim of devotion to God, he refused to abandon his substantial financial holdings to benefit the impoverished. He demonstrated by his response that he was an idolater, in which he sacrificed everything—including his relationship with the Creator—on the altar of hoarding material wealth.

Concerning the detested publican, he made no pretence about the ethical nature of his personal and professional existence. Neither did he let his riches or his notoriety prevent him from stealing a quick look at Jesus. For his part, the Saviour intentionally reached out to Zacchaeus in an unconditional, welcoming manner. In turn, the tax collector

enthusiastically received Jesus into the publican's home as his guest. Neither he nor the Saviour were deterred by the grumbling that ensued among the onlookers over the fact that Jesus chose to befriend a loathed malefactor. Indeed, Zacchaeus was so transformed by Jesus' redemptive presence that the tax collector exceeded what was required in the Mosaic Law to make restitution to those whom he had defrauded over the years. He demonstrated by his actions that he was willing to sacrifice his material wealth on the altar of becoming a genuine follower of Jesus.

Within the context of the first century AD, peers of the rich young ruler would have regarded him as being a leading member of society with an impeccable reputation. In contrast, the affluent publican would be seen as a swindler who had long ago lost his moral compass. Similarly, bystanders—including Jesus' disciples—viewed the Torah-observant aristocrat as enjoying God's favour; oppositely, spectators uniformly concluded that the publican was a transgressor who deserved God's wrath. The two narratives, though, portray radically different outcomes. On the one hand, it was the despised tax collector who experienced the Father's offer of salvation through his Son; on the other hand, it was the wealthy nobleman who failed to achieve his goal of inheriting eternal life. Whereas he fell short in his attempt to enter God's kingdom, divine grace enabled Zacchaeus to become a reborn child of Abraham.

According to Matthew 19:30 and Mark 10:31, Jesus declared that in the end times, the status and prestige savoured by the elite would be upended. The profound irony is that many who were now regarded as being the greatest would one day be viewed as the least important. Oppositely, those who appeared to be the least important now would one day be the greatest. The inference is that that the rich, far from being shining examples of piety, were often the worst of sinners. In

contrast, many of the poor and despised were in fact the most faithful servants of God. When the Lord established full and final justice at the terminus of the age, realities, not appearances, would form the basis of his judgment.

5. Conclusion

This journal article undertakes a comparison and analysis of Luke 18:18–30 and 19:1–10. There are at least three reasons for doing so: (1) a paucity of scholarship exists exploring in depth the interrelationship between these two texts; (2) both passages showcase two contrasting responses to the Saviour, one characterized by unbelief and the other by belief; and, (3) the importance of believing in the Saviour receives elucidation. The major claim is that a consideration of each narrative advances a key theme of the third Synoptic Gospel, namely, that Jesus, the divine-human Son, came to earth to unshackle those enslaved to sin and restore them in their relationship with God.

The first section broaches the need for the study undertaken in the essay, including the overview reiterated in the preceding paragraph. General background information is provided concerning the Gospel of Luke. One supposition advanced is the possibility that the author was a freed physician-slave (whether Gentile or Jew) whom a government official named Theophilus sponsored to research and write the third Synoptic Gospel. In keeping with this premise, the author's own experiences of existing on the margins of society could explain the universal perspective found throughout his treatise.

That inclusive mindset can be seen in the central theme of Luke's Gospel, which is that the Father offers salvation to the lost, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, when they trust in

the Son. The preceding truth notwithstanding, only a minority of individuals come to the Saviour in repentance and faith. Also, it is not necessarily those with prominence and power in society who turn to the Messiah for redemption. The latter observation is brought into sharp relief in the descriptive analyses appearing in sections 2 and 3, respectively. The former deals with Luke 18:18–30, while the latter concerns 19:1–10.

When these two texts are compared and analysed, it is discovered that a nameless, rich, young ruler expressed a keen desire to do anything necessary to gain possession of ‘eternal life’ (18:18); yet, paradoxically, he refused to abandon his vast material wealth as a prelude to obtaining his desire (v. 23). In contrast, a despised, high-ranking publican identified as Zacchaeus willingly relinquished his money to follow Jesus (19:8). Surprisingly, the person who enjoyed the respect and admiration of his peers scorned the most precious gift in the entire cosmos—an intimate relationship with the Creator. Just as shocking is the fact that someone whom others in society loathed became a beloved child in God’s spiritual family.

For ministers of the gospel, the significance of the insights arising from the preceding comparison and analysis cannot be overstated. To take this assessment further, the tax collector evidently realized that there was nothing he could do on his own to merit eternal life. The encounter Zacchaeus had with Jesus resulted in the publican abandoning his erstwhile fraudulent ways (which points to repentance) and receiving the ‘salvation’ (v. 10) Jesus freely offered (indicating the presence of regenerative faith). Oppositely, the Torah-observant aristocrat, regardless of how hard he tried, fell short in his efforts to gain entrance to God’s kingdom. Tragically, the young man’s idolatrous lust for

material wealth sabotaged him from seeing his deepest spiritual need satisfied.

Reference List

- Balz H and Schneider G (eds.) 1990. *Exegetical Dictionary of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Logos Research Systems edition.
- Blomberg CL 1992. *Matthew*. Nashville: Broadman.
- Bratcher RG and Nida EA 1961. *A translator's handbook on the gospel of Mark*. New York: United Bible Societies. Logos Research Systems edition.
- Bock DL 1996. *Luke 9:51–24:53*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Bock DL 2002. *Jesus According to the Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Boring ME 1995. The Gospel of Matthew. In LE Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 8:89–505. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Bovon F 2013. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27*. Translated by DS Deer. H Koester (ed.). Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Brown RE 1997. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday.
- Calvin J 2009. *Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Volume 2. Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- Carroll JT 2012. *Luke: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- Carson DA 1984. Matthew. In FE Gaebelein (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 8:3–599. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Cole RA 1983. *Mark*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Constable TL 2016. Notes on Luke. Dallas: Sonic Light. Accessed from <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/luke.pdf>.

- Cranfield CEB 1983. *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpepper RA 1995. The Gospel of Luke. In LE Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 9:3–490. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Danker FW (ed.) 2000. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Logos Research Systems edition.
- deSilva DA 2004. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Edwards JR 2002. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Ellis EE 1983. *The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Egelkraut HL 1976. *Jesus' Mission to Jerusalem: A Redaction Critical Study of the Travel Narrative in the Gospel of Luke, Lk 9:51–19:48*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Fitzmyer JA 1985. *The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV)*. New York: Doubleday and Company.
- France RT 2002. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- France RT 2007. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- France RT 2013. *Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Galloway TL 2011. The Centrality of Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel: An Exegetical Study of Luke 19:1–10. Master of Arts Thesis, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, United States.
- Garland DE 2002. Mark. In CE Arnold (ed.), *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, 1:205–317. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Garland DE 2011. *Luke*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Geldenhuis N 1983. *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Godet FL 1981. *Commentary on Luke*. Grand Rapids: Kregel.

- Green JB 1995. *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Green JB 1997. *The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Guthrie D 1990. *New Testament Introduction*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Hamm D 1988. Luke 19:8 Once Again: Does Zacchaeus Defend or Resolve? *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107(3):431–7.
- Hendriksen W 1973. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Just AA (ed.) 2003. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. III. Luke*. Downers Grove: IVP. Logos Research Systems Edition.
- Keener CS 1999. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Lane WL 1974. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Lenski RCH 1946. *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.
- Lenski RCH 1961. *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.
- Lenski RCH 1964. *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg.
- Liefeld WL 1984. Luke. In FE Gaebelin (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 8:797–1059. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Loewe WP 1974. Towards an interpretation of Lk 19:1–10. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36(2):321–31.
- Marshall IH 1978. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- McNeile AH 1980. *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Morris L 1974. *The Gospel According to St. Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- Newman BM and Stine PC 1988. *A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*. New York: United Bible Societies. Logos Research Systems Edition.
- Nolland J 1993a. *Luke 9:21–18:34*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Nolland J 1993b. *Luke 18:35–24:53*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Nolland J 2005. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Oden TC and Hall CA (eds.) 2005. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. II. Mark. Downers Grove: IVP. Logos Research Systems Edition.
- O’Hanlon J 1981. The Story of Zacchaeus and the Lukan Ethic. *Journal for the study of the New Testament* 12(1):2–26.
- O’Toole RF 1991. The Literary form of Luke 19:1–10. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110(1):107–16.
- O’Toole RF 1992. Zacchaeus. In DN Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:1032–3. New York: Doubleday.
- Paul A 1970. La guérison de l’aveugle (des aveugles) de Jericho. *Foi et vie (Cahier biblique 9)* 69:(3)44–69.
- Perkins P 1995. The Gospel of Mark. In LE Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 8:509–733. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Plummer A 1982. *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Ravens DAS 1991. Zacchaeus: The Final Act of a Lucan Triptych? *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41(1):19–32.
- Reiling J and Swellengrebel JL 1971. *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*. New York: United Bible Societies. Logos Research Systems Edition.
- Simonetti M (ed.) 2002. *Ancient Christian commentary on Scripture*. *Ib. Matthew 14–28*. Downers Grove: IVP. Logos Research Systems Edition.
- Stein RH 2008. *Mark*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

- Strauss ML 2002. Luke. In CE Arnold (ed.), *Zondervan illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, 1:319–515. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Strauss ML 2007. *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Swete HB 1977. *Commentary on Mark*. Grand Rapids: Kregel.
- Talbert CH 2002. *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. Macon: Smyth and Helwys.
- Tannehill RC 1986. *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts. Volume 1: The Gospel According to Luke*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- Tannehill RC 2005. *The Shape of Luke’s Story: Essays on Luke–Acts*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.
- Turner DL 2008. *Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Wessel WW 1984. Mark. In FE Gaebelin (ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 8:603–793. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Wilkins MJ 2002. Matthew. In CE Arnold (ed.), *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, 1:3–203. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.