

## WHICH GOD?

Joshua 6:12-21

Luke 19:1-10

For fifty “Pastor Points”, and I know that’s what most of you live for, for fifty “Pastor Points” tell me who is the most hated, most despised, most detested person in the history of Georgia.

Correct answer: General William Tecumseh Sherman. Some have called him Sherman the pyromaniac, and for good reason.

During the civil war or the uncivil war or the war between the states or whatever you want to call it-----on November 15, 1864 as he started his infamous march to the sea General Sherman gave orders to Capt. O. M. Poe to "thoroughly destroy Atlanta, save its mere dwelling-houses and churches." The destruction by fire, as was expected, spread until the defenseless city was almost entirely reduced to ashes. Scarcely any structure was spared. Only about 450 buildings escaped this ruthless burning, among them many churches, which in those days generally stood apart from other buildings. More than 4,000 houses, including dwellings, shops, stores, mills and depots were burned, about eleven-twelfths of the city. Sherman himself noted the rising columns of smoke as he rode away from the city. Sherman stated, "Behind us lay Atlanta smoldering and in ruins, the black smoke rising high in the air and hanging like a ball over the ruined city."

General William Tecumseh Sherman, the most hated person in Georgia history, and for good reason, he destroyed everything in his path.

Well, almost everything. You might be interested in this civil war tidbit. Sherman, years before the civil war and burning of Atlanta, had fallen deeply in love with a “Southern Belle”. Yeah, the “southern girls with the way they talk they knock me out when I’m down there.” Or so says the song. Anyway, the Southern Belle I’m referring to was named Cecelia. Cecelia’s brother, Marcellus, was attending West Point Military Academy in 1836, when she went up to attend the dances. And who should fall hardest for the dark-eyed beauty but her brother’s roommate, William Tecumseh Sherman.

The daughter of a wealthy Augusta cotton merchant, Cecelia met Sherman’s advances plainly: "Your eyes are so cold and cruel," she is said to have told him. "I pity the man who ever becomes your foe. Ah, how you would crush an enemy."

Sherman is said to have responded, "Even though you were my enemy, my dear, I would ever love and protect you."

Pretty syrupy, wasn’t it! Need some pan cakes for the syrup?

The romance, though, was not to continue. Cecelia met and fell in love with Charles T. Shelman. Shelman would build his wife a beautiful white home with six Doric columns atop a bluff overlooking the Etowah River in South Carolina. They called it Shelman Heights.

Ironically, in 1864 Sherman arrived at Shelman Heights. This time he was a major general at the head of an invading army. When the home was brought to his attention, Sherman decided to see what it had to offer despite the fact it was slightly off his course.

Riding up to the gate, Sherman and a fellow officer were met by an elderly black slave who was lamenting their arrival. "I sho'ly is glad Miss Cecelia ain't here to see it with her own eyes," he is said to have uttered repeatedly. "Miss Cecelia?" Sherman is said to echoed, "Not Miss Cecelia Stovall?" Well, yes, but she was now Mrs. Shelman. Sherman was just requesting to be received by his former belle when the servant informed him that Captain Shelman was in the Confederate Army, and that Miss Cecelia had refugeed. This aged servant was the only one left to take care of the place. Sherman then left a written message that still remains in the family today.

Before riding off, Sherman made sure that everything that had been taken was replaced, and he made sure guards were left to stand watch until the entire Army passed through.

To Joe, Cecelia's faithful servant, Sherman said, "Say to your mistress for me that she might have remained in her home in safety; that she and her property would have been protected. Hand her this note when you see her."

And when Cecelia returned to her unharmed home, she read: "You once said that I would crush an enemy and you pitied my foe. Do you recall my reply? Although many years have passed, my answer is the same. I would ever shield and protect you. That I have done. Forgive all else. I am only a soldier. Wm. T. Sherman"

I tell you these Civil War stories to serve as a backdrop for our first scripture lesson for today. I tell you about Sherman's destruction of Atlanta to introduce the destruction of another city, the city of Jericho. I tell you about Sherman because there is a biblical figure who matches him for violence and destruction.

Do you remember when you were just a wee little snotty nosed kid at church going around your Sunday School room with your pants flying at half mast?----- Do you recall the Sunday you got to act out the walls of Jericho falling down? You really liked to march, didn't you? Lifting those knees high, swinging those arms back and forth. You marched around Jericho seven times until every last part of the wall came down. Yes you did. As if you had been there on the day the walls crumbled down.

But now you've grown up or grown out or both. And now you've read the rest of the story about Joshua and the Israelites capturing Jericho. And now you wonder why they ever included the story in those Children's Bible story books because the story is a horrific story, a violent story, a brutal story, and all in the supposed name of God. You wonder about including it in Children's Sunday School lessons because now you know what happened after the walls came down.

Listen to it.

Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and----both men and women, young---- young and---young and old, oxen, sheep and asses, with the edge of the sword.

That's more violent than Gen. Sherman. Even Sherman didn't kill the women and the young and the old. Even Sherman refused to destroy his old girlfriend's place. But not Joshua. Not Joshua and his trips. Everybody was killed except Rahab the harlot and her family and the only reason they weren't killed is Rahab helped the cause.

And please don't miss verse 24, "And they burned the city with fire, and all within it."

Another pyromaniac, this one supposedly under the direction of God. Supposedly God wanted this done to the women and the young and the elderly. And some Christians say they believe all the Bible. And some Christians say the Bible is inerrant and infallible. Don't believe it. Don't believe it even for a second. Rid yourself of the false idea that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. Believe that and you set yourself up to be unchristian because this text has nothing of Christ in it whatsoever.

Here's what you need to do if you want to find out what God is like. Read Luke 19:1-10.

Listen to how it starts. "He entered Jericho"----underline that---"he entered Jericho and was passing through."

Now who was it that was passing through Jericho? Ironically, it was a namesake of Joshua, the Joshua who when he passed through Jericho supposedly followed God's orders and massacred them all, men and women, young and old. But now in this text Jesus is passing through and Jesus is Joshua's namesake. The Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua is Jesus. So juxtaposing our first scripture lesson with our second scripture lesson we've got two people with the same name, but---but there's where the similarity stops. There's a world of difference between what Joshua did in Jericho and what Jesus did in Jericho.

You've already heard the worse that General Sherman Joshua did. Now look at what Jesus did as he passed through Jericho.

Luke 19, verse 2. There was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector. Not just any tax collector, mind you, but the chief tax collector. We're talking big boy, numero uno boss, top of the org chart, many people reporting to him. Powerful person-----and rich to boot. If alive now, Zacchaeus would have received the same tax cut Donald Trump and Bill Gates and all the other unbelievably rich people recently got handed to them. Zacchaeus would have been one of the few that got the tax cut that didn't need it.

Remarkably, rich Zacchaeus was curious about Jesus. Now that's unusual, but it happens every now and then. You would have thought Zacchaeus would have been out on his big yacht on the sea of Galilee or maybe entertaining at his pad the movers and shakers. You would have guessed Zacchaeus would have been taking a dip in the hot water at the spa or maybe even nursing a glass down at the good old boys club. You would have thought Zacchaeus might be

contemplating how to invest his money or what foreign status signifying foreign items to purchase. But no, there it is in black and white in verse 3, “he sought to see who Jesus was.”

But there was a problem. Nobody was letting Zacchaeus move to the front where he could see. And because he was as short as Napoleon the only thing he could see from the back row was-----well, use your imagination.

So Zacchaeus runs. He runs on ahead. Zacchaeus was not a person to accept no, to accept defeat, easily. He was used to having his way. So he runs. But evidently he didn't run fast enough because we are told that even after running ahead he still had to climb-----for fifty more pastor points what kind of tree did he climb?

That's right he climbed a Sycamore tree. He climbed up and sat on the second layer of branches. Not exactly a fifty yard seat or half court seat but he did have a seat. He was in the arena.

As Jesus, the new Joshua, passed by, he looked up at Zacchaeus, the Zacchaeus who though he had not massacred the people had, in fact, harmed them greatly by collaborating with the occupying Romans, and yes even ripped off his own people to his own advantage. Jesus, the new Joshua, looked up at that Zacchaeus. Imagine the look Jesus gave Zacchaeus.-----And then hear Jesus say, “Come down. Come down from that tree Zacchaeus. Thank you for the invitation to your home.”

Well, Zacchaeus hadn't invited Jesus anywhere. Jesus had invited himself to Zacchaeus' pad. Know anybody like that?, someone who has a habit of inviting themselves over. Well, Zacchaeus did not turn down Jesus' self invitation which was Jesus' way of getting his foot in the door, his foot in the door to invite Zacchaeus to a new way of life.

Well, as you would imagine with Zacchaeus being a despised person this self invitation to Zacchaeus' upscale home did not go over too well with the crowd. Why would it? Zacchaeus had harmed them. Zacchaeus had abused them. Zacchaeus had mistreated them. Zacchaeus was the kind of enemy people liked to kill. Zacchaeus is the kind of person for whom the original Joshua would have had no tolerance. And so the crowd murmured-----Let me hear everyone do the best murmur you can.-----And so they murmured, “Look! Jesus has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”

But look what happens. Instead of killing him, instead of burning his house down, instead of killing his wife and children and his elderly mother and father, instead of wiping out Zacchaeus and his family, Jesus transforms Zacchaeus. That is, Jesus did more than enter Zacchaeus' house. He entered his heart and his mind,---and don't faint, he entered his wallet.

Imagine that. Jesus entering a rich person's wallet. When's the last time that happened?

This is remarkable. This is amazing. This is incredible. Be careful. I don't want you to be so shocked you fall off your pew and get hurt.

Zacchaeus raised his own taxes. That's right, he raised his own taxes so as to give a huge amount of money away. Just like that---POOF!---he raised his own taxes so that when all was said and done he had given away half, 50% of all his wealth. Talk about a rich person wanting his taxes raised and to that amount----that's, well it's unheard of.

And to whom did this money go? Who can answer that for 25 Pastor points?

To the poor. The money went to the poor.

End of story? No. There's more.

Zacchaeus after meeting with Jesus, the Jesus who invited himself in---after Zacchaeus met with Jesus he went outside to the crowd who was still hanging around and Zacchaeus gulped.

Everybody do a big gulp.

The crowd was silent.-----One more gulp and Zacchaeus said, "If I have defrauded anybody of anything"----[which, in fact, he had defrauded just about everybody of everything]---  
-Zacchaeus said, "If I have defrauded anybody of anything-----I will restore it fourfold."

Fourfold?! The crowd babbled in disbelief.

[Everybody babble.]

Jesus then walked forward and said to the former murmurers, "This day salvation has come to this house. I tell you, this man is a son of Abraham. The son of man comes to seek and to save the lost."

Two Joshuas. One comes killing and destroying and massacring. The other comes seeking and saving the lost. One comes demolishing. The other sees Zacchaeus in the Sycamore tree and invites himself in, into his heart, into his mind, into his wallet.

Which God do you believe in?

Some people think you can believe in both. That's not true. Believe in the god of Joshua and you'll end up hating and despising and killing the Zacchaeuses of the world. Everybody knew Zacchaeus deserved to be strung up. But not Jesus. Jesus came to save, both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Which God?

Today I invite you to invite the other Joshua, I invite you to invite Jesus into your heart and mind and wallet and life.

Of course, you know Jesus is not the type of person who waits for an invitation. Jesus is the kind of God who invites himself in.

So come on. Get down off the tree. Let's go to your house.