

Are you found?

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Date: 17 November 2024

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[0 : 00] We'll catch up on that minute after the service with the person sitting next to you. Some of you might not have been in a church before. In case that's you, you're welcome. You might be wondering, what are we doing now? What's this bit?

Well, at our church, we believe that God speaks to us through the Bible. When it was written, God inspired people who wrote it down. And so this is also God's message for us today, because His Holy Spirit is still working to help us to hear it today.

So we're going to spend some time trying to understand the passage that has just been read for us. And we need God's help for that. The Bible tells us that. So before we do it, we're just going to pray. Let's pray together. Thank you, Lord God, that you have not left us alone. Thank you that you have told us who you are.

Thank you that you have told us who we are and what is going on in this world. Please, would you help us to listen and understand. We know we need your help to see the truth in a world which is cloudy sometimes.

[1 : 06] And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Just want to ask you a very simple question this morning. Are you found? I don't know if you've heard this story before, the one that we've just read.

Maybe in Sunday school, if that's the thing that you know about, the story of Zacchaeus who climbs a sycamore fig tree. Or maybe in RE. This is one of the ones that kind of gets wheeled out, isn't it? There's so much going on. Why is he short? Why does that matter? What's the thing with the tree? Why are the crowds so gnarly?

And what in the world was said at that dinner table that makes Zacchaeus suddenly start giving away all his money? You know, Jesus explains the entire story in 12 words right at the end. He says this, That means that Jesus, who is God's promised king and saviour, has come to rescue people, to find people.

[2 : 15] That's a big claim, isn't it? What does it mean? We're going to find out. I've got a confession to make. I think I'm getting old.

And here's how I know. This week I lost my phone. Not just once, but several times. Just help me here.

Can you put your hand up if you lost your phone this week? Yeah, good. Don't worry. You will. When the time comes, you will. And you kind of get into a panic when you lose your phone, don't you?

Not just because it costs a lot of money, but actually because there's a lot of you in it. Isn't there? Or your social media contacts. Maybe your credit cards. Your calendar.

Your music. It's like a little box that Apple has designed to keep yourself in. Isn't it? It's a bit of a scary thought. Other phone brands are available, I should say, because this is online.

[3 : 16] It's a bit scary. But the good thing is if you've lost your phone, then you might find out what I found out not too long ago. And it is that on every little phone, there's a find me function.

Did you know that? There is it. Thank you. Yes. I did know that. Funny that that's the youngest voice. Because phones can't find themselves, can they?

That much is pretty obvious. So the maker has designed them with a little beacon, a little tracker, so that you can find them. Something that says, I need to be found. Every phone has one.

So when your phone's lost, you can find it. Look, here's what you need to know. In that way, at least, people are like phones. We all can't find ourselves.

We all, spiritually, have a little find me function that was put there by the designer, by the maker, whether you know it or not. And we need to be found.

[4 : 17] And that's really what we see in our passage today. We see Jesus in action, finding people. Let's have a think about Zacchaeus.

Can't help but notice him. Zacchaeus was a very little man. And a very little man was he. Do you know that song? It's all over YouTube.

No. No, it's not. It's not all over YouTube. Zacchaeus was short. But do you know what's more important about Zacchaeus than the fact that he was short? He wanted to be found.

Can I just have a short person to volunteer? Yeah, okay, Josie. Great. Can I just have some tall people volunteers, please? Sorry, Charlotte. You're not tall yet. Come on.

All right. We can do George. Yeah, we can definitely do George. Can we have some other tall people? Yeah, if you can stand just in the corner there, that would be wonderful. Thank you, Steve. That's great. I need a few more, maybe two, three more people.

[5 : 19] Come on, guys. It's not difficult. All you have to do is admit that you're tall. Yes, Tash. Great. Tash and Matt. Oh, yeah. And Mark. Fantastic. Okay, I think that will do. Now, what you need to do is put Josie behind you and sort of stand in front of her.

Yeah? Okay. That is fantastic. Now, I'm looking around the room for Josie. Am I going to find her? Is she going to be seen?

No. Not like this. Not like this. Thank you. That's all I wanted you to do. That's wonderful. Have a seat. Now, you see, that is what Zach is worried about.

That is what Zacchaeus is worried about. He's in a crowd and he's short. And he wants to be found, but he's not going to be, is he? And the thing is that Zacchaeus wasn't just physically short.

That's not how the Bible works, you see. God doesn't just like pointing out that people are slightly shorter than other people. That's not really why this detail is here. Luke, who wrote this down for God, is telling us that Zacchaeus is not just short physically.

[6 : 24] He is short in other ways as well. He was short of love. And he was short on goodness.

He wasn't loved. And he wasn't good. He was lost, to use Jesus' words. How can I say that? What do we mean?

Well, did you notice that at the beginning we read that Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector? Now, tax collectors might have been Jewish, but they worked for the Romans. And the Romans were the invading and occupying army.

So if you were Zacchaeus, you were a collaborator. And what the Romans said to their tax collectors was, I want this much in tax from this area that you're in charge of.

So they had to pay a set amount, the tax collectors. And what the Romans also said was, anything you get on top of that, you can keep. So you can imagine what happened.

[7 : 24] Zacchaeus goes out and he collects a little bit more than he's really owed. A little bit more. A little bit more. And in the end, he's rich. And then he pays the taxes to the Romans.

So you can imagine what people thought of him, can't you? He's a collaborator. He's an extortionist. He's getting rich off other people's backs. He's probably literally taking food out of the mouths of children.

He wasn't good. And he stuck out for the wrong reasons. He wasn't good and he wasn't loved, but he wants to be found. In fact, he wanted it so badly, he does two things that no Jewish man will ever do.

He ran. And he climbed a tree. That is a complete social no-no. If you're a Jewish man in that time. It's a little bit like, just imagine you're at the school fireworks.

Right? And just as the big show is about to start, the headmaster pelts across the playground and finds the biggest tree and he climbs it. Because he wants the best for you. A bit funny, isn't it?

[8 : 33] Well, everybody's laughing at Zacchaeus. Exactly like you'd be laughing at the headmaster, right? The ones who weren't picking up things to throw at him. That is. But Zacchaeus wants so badly to be found that he doesn't care.

He doesn't care. His find me function is showing, isn't it? Don't worry about it. See, if you want to be found, then just like Zacchaeus climbing his tree, you have to be willing to stick out in public.

You have to be willing to look a little bit silly. You have to be willing to be out there. Kind of like Asha did in the pool just now. There has to be a point at which you say, my pride is less important than being found.

That's sticking out for the right reason, isn't it? Sticking out for the right reason. Zacchaeus knew how badly he needed to be found. That's why he did what he did. That's why he ran and he climbed

his tree.

Do you know that you need to be found? But Zacchaeus isn't the only one in the story, is he? Did you know?

[9 : 43] I'm just going to flick through these slides. Did you know what the significance of that date is? I'd be really impressed if you know. Really impressed. Any ideas?

Okay, here's what it is. National Short Person Day. True. True. There is a day for appreciating short people.

Not at all patronising, is it? Not at all. That is the significance of December the 22nd. It also happens to be my son's birthday. Coincidence?

I don't know. Anyway, what I want to tell you is that the crowd in this town, Jericho, would not have been celebrating National Short Person Day.

They would not have been celebrating it. No, they hated Zacchaeus. Did you notice that? He wanted to see who Jesus was, verse 3, but because he's so short, he can't see over the crowd.

What do you think the crowd were doing? Keeping him down.

[10 : 50] No, they hated Zacchaeus. And do you know what? They didn't much like Jesus after this either. Did you notice that? Now, verse 7, All the people saw this and began to mutter, He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.

Now, Jesus wasn't planning to stay. If you look at verse 1, it says he was passing through. He was passing through. And what does that mean, that he was passing through? Well, it probably means that he's actually turned down the local offer of hospitality.

The important people in the town probably would have got together and said, come to a banquet. We want to hear more. We want to know more. And Jesus would have said, no, actually, I'm just passing through. And then what does he do?

He turns aside from his path to go to the house of this man, Zacchaeus. So they're starting to not like Jesus either. Do you know what the crowd would say to Zacchaeus?

I think they would have said, boo. Cancel the imperialist oppressor. I think that's what they would have said. Because that's what Zacchaeus was. He was an oppressor, wasn't he?

[11 : 55] An abuser. That's what he was. In fact, if you were in Israel and Palestine today, where we know the situation is very sad, if you were a collaborator, one way or the other, you wouldn't be in a crowd.

Do you know why? Because the chances are you'd never get out of it. You'd get a knife stuck in you long before you made it up the tree. So not much has changed, has it?

So here's the question. Are the crowd found? Just imagine for a moment the person that you most dislike. The person who stands for you, for everything that you don't like.

Maybe even hate. It's a strong word. I don't know. Maybe it's the school bully. Maybe it's a particular sleazy politician that you have a problem with. Maybe it's a friend who's cheated on you.

But just picture that person. Because that's whose house Jesus just went to. And you know what we'd like Jesus to say to those people, and to Zacchaeus?

[13 : 11] What we'd like them to say is, I'm calling you out on your abuse. Come down here. Face the consequences. Spend the rest of your life making it right.

Then I might come to your house. Then you might get baptised. Does Jesus say that? He doesn't. We know Jesus loves the weak and the oppressed, don't we? That's what we expect from him. Did you know that Jesus loves the oppressor as well? Does that make you a little bit angry?

A little bit uncomfortable? Made the crowd angry, didn't it? They don't like Jesus. See, Zacchaeus definitely has his problems. There's no denying it. But every crowd has the same problem that this crowd here has too.

Because we all like to get together as humanity, don't we? And point the finger at someone else. And say, they're bad. And in here, what are we saying?

[14 : 15] I'm good. They're bad. And that's what they were doing to Zacchaeus. The church is just as bad sometimes, isn't it?

We have to stick our hands up and say that. The church is just as bad. And do you know what? If you follow Jesus, you might get similar treatment. And the problem is, of course, that we're judging. We're judging other people. And if we're judging, actually, we've taken God's job. Because he's the judge. And that means that we're in trouble.

Do you know why? Because the world isn't really divided into good people and bad people. Yes, there is good and there is evil. But beyond that, there's just people.

And all of us have some good. And all of us have some bad, don't we? So when it comes to God being the judge, we all have stuff we'd rather not think about.

[15:19] But we're all happy booing other people. In other words, we're all part of the crowd. Aren't we? We're lost in the crowd.

And that brings us back to our question. Are the crowd found? You see, if you are lost in the crowd, and lots of us feel like that, we can't get away from it, then to be found, you have to get out of the crowd.

You have to get over thinking, I'm okay. You have to recognise that we are all part of the problem.

You have to ignore the people who are pointing their fingers at you.

You have to get out of the crowd. And you have to climb the tree. So we know about Zacchaeus.

We know about the crowd. Finally into this mess comes Jesus.

Doesn't he? Jesus who says, I've come to seek and to save the lost. And what does Jesus do?

Jesus finds us.

[16:25] Jesus finds us. Zacchaeus wanted to know, didn't he, who is this Jesus character? That's what we see in verse 3. He wanted to see who Jesus was.

Here's a question. Do you know who the most followed person ever on social media is? Any ideas? Yes.

Absolutely right. Cristiano Ronaldo. Who has a staggering 738.46 million followers. That's CR7.

That's CR7.

And now here's Jesus, who has no wealth, no social status, no social media presence, no title, no global power.

And yet he has the most followers in global history. 2.4 billion. And that's just right now. So it's a good question, isn't it?

[17:27] Who is this Jesus? It's a good question. Jesus finds people.

If you think about Zacchaeus, he'd never have been found without Jesus, would he? He would have stayed at that tree, and then he would have come down eventually, I guess, when the crowd was safely away. And he would have gone home and he would have said to his wife, do you know what? I saw Jesus today. From a distance, he looked like a really nice guy. But what does Jesus do? Did you see? Jesus reached the spot and he looks up and he says to him, Zacchaeus, you're found. Come down. I'm coming to your house. I'm coming into your life. And I'm staying. It's amazing, isn't it?

We can't find or rescue ourselves. Only Jesus can do that. He walks right up to us. And he says, you're found. And he knows Zacchaeus is hated. And he knows he's not good.

[18:36] Does it stop him? No. He says, I'm coming to stay. Which in those days is the biggest mark of social approval you can imagine.

Because Jesus is in the business of finding people. It's his mission. It's why he came. How does he do it? Do you notice at the beginning of the story the crowd are focused on Zacchaeus, aren't they?

They don't like him so they're stopping him getting to Jesus. They're there to see Jesus but now.

But by the end of the story Jesus has taken the hostility of the crowd and he's focused it on himself by inviting himself to Zacchaeus' house.

A substitution, isn't it? And then what does he give to Zacchaeus instead? He gives Zacchaeus the gift of acceptance. And that frees Zacchaeus to change.

This is what Jesus does. He finds people. And when they accept that they are found then he helps them to change. So it's not clean up your life, be a good boy, come back and see me when you've done that and then I'll come to your house.

[19:57] No, God's grace comes before his goodness. Right? And it's his love which we don't deserve that transforms us. And that is the good news.

Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross in our place, his undeserved love of us, his grace to us, comes into our lives, makes its home there with us and then we can change.

So it's not find yourself. It's instead accept that you've been found. Accept that you have been found. You can be found.

You can be showed your place in this world. You can be guaranteed your place in God's family forever. And when you've accepted that you can change. And what a change.

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've cheated anybody out of anything I will pay back four times the amount.

[21 : 07] So here is a man who was once a slave to money. Had no love, had no goodness. And he thought money was going to be the answer. Money would buy him the life, the affection that he wanted and that he was missing.

And now look at the joy and the freedom and the security that Zacchaeus has. He just, he can't, he can't contain it. He has to stand up and in front of everybody show what God has done for him. And that thing that enslaved him that he put all his hopes into money, now he's just giving it away. Jesus finds us. Then we change. Sometimes it's radically and dramatically like Zacchaeus. Sometimes it's gradually and steadily.

But we always change for the better because we've gone from being a lost soul to a soul that's forever found. That's what being a Christian is. See, from a distance, Jesus looks like a really nice guy, doesn't he?

[22 : 23] But up close, it turns out he's the person who finds us and rescues us and gives us a place forever. Now, you've come to church today, maybe for the first time.

So you're saying yes. And you're seeing Jesus for the first time up close, maybe. So the question is, are you found?

Let me pray. Lord Jesus, I thank you so much that you came to this earth for people who are lost. I thank you that everybody who is a Christian here today can say that they were once lost but now they are found. Lord Jesus, thank you so much that we don't have to be perfect, good people before you will come to us.

Thank you that you come to us and you give us love and grace and acceptance and that frees us to change. Pray that you would help us to put our trust in you.

[23 : 37] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.