

When Love Comes to Town

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 March 2024

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] So perhaps if you have your Bibles, you can turn with me again to Luke chapter 9.

We're thinking a thing today about what happens when love comes to town. You may or may not be aware of the fact that the Irish rock band U2 have recently completed a 40-show residency in Las Vegas, drawing from their extensive back catalogue.

One of the songs they played a number of times was one that they recorded with B.B. King called When Love Comes to Town. It's a really good song, a tale of mistakes and regrets, of fighting and drinking and broken promises with the refrain, I did what I did before love came to town.

With the intention that when love comes, when true love comes, there's hope. There's a promise of fresh start. There's a promise of new beginnings.

Thinking about that this week, this could be Zacchaeus' song. Zacchaeus came up that tree full of regrets, relationships that had been broken, an emptiness and a longing in his heart, a man who'd been chasing the almighty dollar and had come up empty.

[1 : 2 3] But then when Jesus, the King of Love, came to his town, there was hope. As he jumped on that train, his life was transformed. His story, Zacchaeus' story is a beautiful story.

It's full of hope. It speaks to us again, as we've heard so often in Luke's gospel. There is salvation for people society regards as outcasts.

That's good news. Think about Jesus' story. Here is Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, to demonstrate saving love for sinners.

But here in Jericho, that salvation, that love, that grace becomes really personal to a blind man and then to Zacchaeus.

And as we hear this story, we're invited in also to think about how that relates to our story. From God's word, as the gospel comes to us, as God's love comes to this town and to this place, how do you and I respond?

[2 : 3 3] We're going to think about this story really simply. First of all, we're going to think about the man that we're introduced to. We're going to think about Zacchaeus here in the first four verses.

But we're also going to place him side by side with the blind man, because Luke records not just one, but two Jericho stories. And there's an invitation to us to compare and to contrast these two very different figures.

First of all, to think about their status. Zacchaeus. Okay, so in the society of their day, they would both be considered outcasts and outsiders, but for very different reasons.

For the blind man, it was because of his circumstances. He was born blind. Zacchaeus, it's very different. He is an outcast because of his choices.

We're told in verse 2 that Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and was very wealthy. He got rich through corruption. He got rich through cheating.

[3 : 35] He got rich with deliberately siding with the enemy government, the Romans. He has chosen this way of life to be immoral, to be unclean, to set himself apart from religious society.

By human standards, neither of them would be considered likely candidates for God's love and God's favor. But God loves to dazzle with his grace.

I want us to think about the desire that we see in them both as well. One of the striking things about the blind man is he sees with clear vision because he cries out, Son of David, have mercy on me.

I know you're God's promised king. Have mercy. Zacchaeus is less clear. Look at verse 3. He wanted to see who Jesus was. So he's not as clear, I don't think, but still he obviously recognizes Jesus is significant.

Jesus is special. And we need to understand that whenever we catch a new understanding of who Jesus is, when we find that desire in our hearts to know Jesus, that's not a human thing, that's a God thing.

[4 : 55] And that's what we see here, this desire given from God that makes him want to see Jesus. Luke also reminds us that for both of these men, there was a barrier to overcome.

Last week we saw the blind man, he's rebuked. Those leading the procession, listen, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus is too busy for the likes of you. What happens for Zacchaeus?

Verse 3, he wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he couldn't see over the crowd. Now, there's a physical barrier. If people were kindly towards Zacchaeus, if they thought well of him and he was little, polite society, you would make a way.

Here is a society deliberately giving Zacchaeus the cold shoulder because of the way he has been treating them, because of the choices he has made. You are not welcome. You shall not pass.

This is what Zacchaeus discovers. In a little way, this reminds us of how the world often works. And we see it in our own day. The world we typically divide, don't we, into them and us, those who are like us, those who are not like us.

[6 : 03] We hear a lot today about tribalism, don't we? Some are included, some are excluded. And if you're not part of our tribe, then we're going to shout you down, we're going to shoot you down.

How different is the message and the beauty of King Jesus? He is a king for all and a savior for all. In the gospel, all barriers are taken down so that we are all one in Christ Jesus.

One other thing as we compare and contrast these two figures, we sense urgency. When the king of love comes to town for Bartimaeus, he keeps shouting, Son of David, have mercy on me.

For Zacchaeus, he keeps on climbing. He ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way.

When was the last time you climbed a tree? Some of us, maybe it was last week. Some of us, it may have been in the last century. For Zacchaeus, I can guarantee as an adult male in this society, he has not done this since he was a little kid.

[7 : 16] But now, as the only way to see Jesus, he ignores the stares. He ignores the shouting and the insult. He needs to see Jesus today.

Now, why does Luke paint these two Jericho portraits for us? It's to help us to see in stereo. Can you see in stereo? I'm not sure you can. When two outcasts seek Jesus, and both of them discover that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

Verse 10, that's his mission. That's Jesus' mission. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Now, some important lessons to learn before we move from here.

So, we said this last week, and we'll keep saying it for as long as the Bible says it to us. No one is beyond God's grace. Zacchaeus' testimony. Yes, I was rich, but I was a religious and moral wreck.

I had no care for God. I had no care for other people. I wasn't interested in worshiping. But, God in his grace, his love reached for me and rescued me.

[8 : 29] These two stories side by side tell us our circumstances, whatever those circumstances might be, are no barrier to God's grace. Our choices, as foolish, as bad, as sinful as they may have been, are no barrier to God's love.

The background that we have, the baggage we carry into this building, no barrier to mercy and grace. So, no one is beyond God's grace.

I think the other thing we need to hear from the beggar and from Zacchaeus is, take your day of opportunity. They had one shot to meet Jesus, and they took it.

He was passing through their town. He would go to die on the cross. He would shortly ascend to heaven. This was their one shot, and they didn't miss it. If today you hear God calling to you, if you hear God by his grace drawing you towards Jesus, his Son as Savior, if you hear the call of the gospel, if you're sensing and experiencing God's love in and through the Lord Jesus, don't ignore that.

Don't wait for another occasion, because Jesus is too important for that. What is the gospel?

[9 : 56] What is it that we are invited to believe? The gospel tells us that God is our holy creator, and he has made us for life with himself.

But each and every one of us, we have sinned and separated ourselves from God. And we stand under God's judgment.

And one day we will stand before him to give an account of our lives to him. And because that's true, our only hope is God's grace in what God has done for us in Christ.

That God in Jesus became a man, and he lived a perfect life of obedience. And he engaged in this great search and rescue mission, taking on himself at the cross all the sins of all those who'd ever turned to him, dying on a cross as a substitute to be punished for us.

And Jesus now calls us to recognize him as Lord and Savior, to understand that his resurrection that third day is proof that God accepted his sacrifice.

[11 : 07] And that his justice has been satisfied. So we are called to repent of our sins, and to trust in Christ, to receive forgiveness and eternal life.

And to understand that all of that comes to us not on the basis of our moral standing, our personal merit, our religious performance, but because of God's grace.

Having thought then about the man Zacchaeus, let's think about the meeting as we find it here in verses 5 to 7.

Again, to read God's Word is to discover that God loves to meet people, to call people, to save people in surprising places. People from surprising backgrounds in surprising places.

Remember the call of God to Moses in the wilderness, in the desert area, as a shepherd, calling to him from a burning bush.

[12 : 11] Or Jonah, encountering God's grace and salvation through the belly of a whale. And now we come to Zacchaeus, who meets his Savior while perched in a sycamore fig tree.

It's a wonderful reminder that God loves to save, and there's no barriers to when and how he will do that. Maybe some of us can relate to that in our own stories of how we came to faith.

I remember praying and coming to faith in the back of an Audi. This is a very revealing meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus. In verse 5, what do we learn about Jesus?

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.

Two things to notice about Jesus here. First, his complete knowledge. Jesus isn't from Jericho. He's passing through Jericho, but he'll look up a tree and know Zacchaeus.

[13 : 18] We sang Psalm 139, which spoke of God's absolute knowledge. There's no place to run or to escape from God's knowledge. For the people of God, that's a great comfort.

Zacchaeus is discovering Jesus has the knowledge of God. But also think about Jesus' will when he says to Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today.

Jesus is saying, this is God's plan. That I welcome you, Zacchaeus. That we share a meal as a sign that you are entering into fellowship.

This is God's plan. This is God's plan. And providence leads to this point. So that as Jesus is walking down this road, Zacchaeus is able to find this tree and to climb this tree, to be up in the branches just as Jesus is ready to look up.

Because Jesus seeks and saves the lost. Jesus seeks and saves the one. And the one. And the one. So that's what we learn about Jesus.

[14 : 27] We also learn some important things about Zacchaeus in verse 6. Notice his response. He came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

Think about his action. Here is immediate response. Now he knows Jesus is a king of grace who would welcome a sinful person like him.

He jumps at the chance to share fellowship with Jesus. Jesus is perfectly holy. Zacchaeus is sinful. We might expect Zacchaeus to quake in terror, but no grace draws him near.

How does he feel? Zacchaeus? We're told he welcomed him gladly. Luke loves to focus on joy as one of the marks of salvation.

Here is an early clue that Jesus has and will save Zacchaeus. He has this joyful response to God's invitation to God's work in Jesus.

[15 : 35] He has this joyful response to God's work in Jesus. He has this joyful response to God's work in Jesus. He has this joyful response to God's work in Jesus. But we also learn something, too, about the crowds, don't we? Verse 7. All the people saw this, and they began to mutter, He's gone to be the guest of a sinner.

Not so long ago, verse 43, We found them praising God. Now they're grumbling and muttering. What's happened? All of a sudden, they're offended by Jesus.

Why? They're offended by His wide-open welcome, by the fact that His kingdom seems too broad to them. They're offended by a Savior who loves the unlovely.

They're offended by grace. So they speak the truth. Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner. Jesus welcomes sinners.

Their problem really lies in the fact that they don't put themselves in that category. Rather, they feel they can stand above those that they regard as sinners in their society.

[16 : 41] The only way to enter into salvation is through the low door of humility to bow down and acknowledge, I need God's mercy because I'm a sinner.

As we consider this meeting as the sinless Son of God welcomes and shares a meal with a public sinner, in our hearts, do we find ourselves glorifying God for His grace?

Or do we find ourselves puzzled or perhaps even grumbling? Jesus would have us to enter into joy, to celebrate this reality, to celebrate the reality of amazing grace.

Because a moment's honest reflection would reveal to us that we can never be good enough for a perfectly holy God. Our only hope of salvation is always to be dependent on the work of God for us through His Son, Jesus.

And as we understand that, then we never stop singing and celebrating. It's as we grasp hold of amazing grace that it gives us hope.

[17 : 52] Hope as we pray for others. Hope as we look to bear witness to God. Here is where we find joy in and through our trials, that there is grace upon grace.

It's this grace that would welcome us into life with God. It represents our great hope and our longing.

Jesus wants us to enter into the joy of fellowship with Him, into His warm welcome. Isn't it amazing that Jesus, the King of love, still comes to meet with His people, still comes to draw near, still comes to invite us into fellowship, would still feed us richly from His Word and by His grace.

That's why we come with open hands. Every Sunday we come hungering and thirsting. To be reminded of the goodness of our God in the Gospel.

That we'd be fed. Every time we open our Bibles, we're invited to receive and to enjoy fresh supplies of grace for our journey of faith.

[19 : 15] Let's think lastly about the miracle. Here in verses 8 to 10. One of the great privileges, I think, of church ministry, or if you've got experience of leading a small group, or for us as elders, as we welcome new church members, is we get to hear people's stories of how God has worked in them to draw them to faith in Jesus.

And it reminds us that God has endless variety. So some of us, it will be because of family influence, or perhaps because of some faithful friends who prayed for us and cared for us and taught us about Jesus.

For some of us, it will be suffering that's brought us to see our need of Jesus. Some of us, it will be through reading books or things on the internet. Others will have had a long search for truth, while some, it's been an instant response to hearing a gospel message.

God is not limited. God loves to save, and He's not limited. I think stories like this are an encouragement to us as Christians. We have a story.

We have a story of God's grace. Every conversion story, no matter how mundane it might seem to us, is a miracle of God's grace. And so we can celebrate it, give thanks, and we can share it with one another.

[20 : 34] Well, here we discover how Zacchaeus' life is transformed by meeting Jesus. Now, we see some evidence, and we hear Jesus' explanation. Here's the evidence of the change that Jesus has brought.

Verse 8, Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.

I'm going to rephrase one of the free church fathers, Thomas Chalmers. He spoke in a sermon in Glasgow City Center about the expulsive power of a new affection. The only thing that can drive out our old loves is the replacement with a greater love.

Well, we can think about it as the explosive power of a new love because grace goes off like dynamite in Zacchaeus' life. Instantly, we see that his idols have been exploded.

Because bear in mind, up until going up the sycamore tree, money was driving his life. He'd been cut off from society, cut off from worship.

[21 : 45] His source of identity and purpose and hope found him money. But now he discovers that Jesus gives him the love of God, an invitation into fellowship with God.

the spell is broken. And he explodes with generosity. We see justice and we see love.

So picture the scene. Normally, if people came to Zacchaeus' tax booth, that wouldn't be a happy occasion. It's never a happy occasion to pay your taxes, but especially if you know that you're going to have some of your money stolen.

But now as people come to Zacchaeus' booth, he's giving it away. I cheated you last week, have four times the amount. He's not greedily grabbing it anymore.

He's gladly giving it. Why? Because Jesus transformed his heart. He's found a greater love. Imagine how different Jericho is going to feel when they hear of what's happening in Zacchaeus.

[22 : 49] Again, I think it reminds us of the power of public Christianity. Here is a man instantly standing up here and now, and he's publicly living out his faith.

And God has always chosen to use that. God has always called his people to have a faith that is magnetic. So that while we communicate the gospel, we understand that some will be repelled, but others will be attracted.

Not attracted to us, but attracted to the Lord Jesus. I think the story of Zacchaeus before meeting Jesus also reminds us about the pool of money on our hearts.

Jesus recognized it as perhaps the greatest temptation to a false kind of worship that we would find our identity and security and happiness in money, in the things that money can buy.

Zacchaeus' story is that money promised much, but failed to deliver. Yes, he had great wealth, but he was clearly lonely and longing and looking for something more. His heart was restless until it found its rest in the love of the Lord Jesus.

[24 : 06] In Jesus, we see there is freedom. Freedom from false worship, freedom from the idols of our hearts. And there's freedom when we understand that Jesus delivers on all his promises.

Jesus says, I'll give you a new identity, a secure identity as a child of God and that identity will never be lost. Jesus says, I'll give you the security that you long for because I'll forgive you.

I'll bring you into the kingdom of God. I'll be with you always. In our quest for happiness, Jesus says, I'll give you joy, the joy of knowing God, the joy of eternal life.

Zacchaeus gets it. So we see this lovely switch. He's no longer worshiping the God of money. Now he's worshiping God with his money. It's the power of transforming love.

And then let's hear the explanation that Jesus gives. Verse 9, Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham.

[25 : 15] But the son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Salvation has come because the Savior has come. Jesus has come on his mission of grace, showing love for the lost, for the outcast, for the sinner.

Jesus has come to make the impossible possible. A couple of weeks ago, we heard Jesus say how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. And those who heard this asked who then can be saved.

And Jesus replied, What is impossible with man is possible with God. Now Jesus proves that he is able to save the rich who have their hearts set on a false God.

It's the explosive power of God's love to break down idols, to break apart hard hearts, to make a person willing and ready to receive Jesus as Savior.

So the son of man has come. Remember that title that speaks of Jesus as God's glorious king. So he has come as God's king of glory and he's turned Zacchaeus too into a son, a son of Abraham.

[26 : 19] He's been brought into the family of faith. If we could ask Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, why did you climb that tree?

Nobody climbs trees. Zacchaeus, why did you answer Jesus' invitation? Zacchaeus, why did you gladly practice generosity and give so much of your money away?

Perhaps he would answer, I did what I did because love came to town. And if we could ask Jesus, why did you stop again to show grace to another outcast?

To ask Jesus, why are you going on the road to Jerusalem to die on the cross? To ask Jesus, why are you still extending grace today all around the world?

His answer, I did what I did and I do what I do so that God's love would come to hearts and to lives because the son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

[27 : 33] If we know that to be true by experience, let's praise God. And if not, let's praise God. Let's praise God. Let's praise God.