

Zaccheus

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[0:00] Our gracious Lord, we thank you that Jesus taught that your word is true. And Lord, when we discern your truth, your word promises that we can be free.

! Free to know you, free to worship you, and free to walk with you all the days of our life. In the genuine hope that those who remain faithful will be in receipt of life forever with you.

Lord, we long for that, and we pray, Lord God, that you would keep us faithful as we study your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. Amen. So, in Luke's Gospel, chapter 19, the last verse that Anthea just read to us is this. Today, salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

[1:11] I think this passage is remarkable. It is, of course, historical. It's not a parable.

This confrontation, this conversation between Jesus and the funny little man Zacchaeus actually took place in history.

And I think this narrative answers three really important questions for us. The first question is this. Who did Jesus come for? What kind of people is Jesus in the world for? The second question is to do with those of us who consider ourselves to be believers.

And it's this. What do I need to do to get closer to God? And the third question is a question for churches today in the 21st century, and very likely in every century prior to that.

[2:22] And that is, what are we like? This morning there might be, I don't know, 80 of us gathered here in church. You add together all the other churches in Clevedon, you're probably going to get a total of 800 people from this town who worship God on a Sunday morning, as an average.

Some Sundays we do a bit better, some not so much. But there are 23,000 people living in this town. What is their view of us?

So let me try and answer those three questions in relation to the passage in front of us. Firstly, who did Jesus come for?

I wonder if in your heart, maybe deep in the recesses, there are questions like this that float around. Am I good enough? Will Jesus really be interested in someone like me?

I have a shocking history, and I'm not quite sure whether Jesus came for people like me. Am I religious enough?

[3:47] That is to say, is God just an idea in my head? Or is he a living reality in my life?

God just an idea in my head. God just an idea in my head. It's a very subtle difference in some ways. But if God is an idea, a bit like Star Wars, you know, the kind of force in the universe, impersonal, but kind of there.

I think in the New Testament, people who I'm thinking of in relation to this question are what the New Testament calls God-fearers. They've got a rough idea about God.

They even come to church. They might even say prayers, very likely in some kind of emergency situation. Religion, I think, is the enemy of faith.

Because religion is about an idea, and religion is obedience, reverence to this idea, to a certain way of worshipping, but there's no personal relationship with God.

[5:07] And I wonder if you ever have doubts as to whether or not you trust enough.

Jesus said once, in a memorable little section of Mark's Gospel, he said this, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to that mountain over there, go throw yourself in the sea, and it will be done for you.

I don't really think that God wants people like us to make cosmetic changes to the universe. But what I do think is, and this is true in the Bible, that mountains ironically represent two things.

The first thing they represent is obstacles, quite naturally. You want to go on a journey, and you come across a mountain, you've either got to schlep all the way up it, or you've got to burrow through it, or you've got to build a road on it, or whatever.

They are a problem. And friends, I get the sense looking at you that you're human beings.

[6:21] And human beings have things in their lives that get in the way. I wonder if somebody asked you, you know, if you went to see a spiritual director or one of these types, and they said to you, so what's the blockage in your spiritual life, Mike?

I'm not going to tell you. But of course there are blockages. There are old habits. There are old thoughts. There is my predilection to very quick judgment, judgment.

We are a very visual society, aren't we? We make judgments about people simply on the way they look. And I remember saying to our church, in the church I was at, I remember saying, do you know Andrew?

So I said, Andrew, I said, that bloke who wears an anorak. Person knew immediately who I was talking about. We make judgments about people.

But am I trusting enough? Do I, to quote Dr. Tozer, lean on the wind of the Holy Spirit and know the presence and the power of God in my life?

[7:46] We don't know very much about Zacchaeus, but the Bible tells us three things about him. In verse 2, we read there's a man, as Jesus was passing through Jericho, there was a man by the name of Zacchaeus.

We know his name. We know that he was a chief tax collector and he was wealthy. And we also know that he was a small man.

That's why he had to race ahead of the crowd and climb up into a tree. My obsession for alliteration wants to say that he was little, he was loaded, and he was loathed.

Three things. And those are true of him. And listen, so, the fact that he was little, physically little, I think just doesn't mean necessary, people who are short of stature.

See, I think Jesus came for people who aren't just small, I mean, he certainly did come for people who are small, he came for people who are big, but he came for people who have felt belittled in life.

[9:03] Have you been through an experience in your life that's made you feel small? Has made you feel humiliated?

See, Jesus came for people like you. What we know about Jesus was he had a load of money and the Bible never ever, last time I heard Simon give a message, he made this point very clearly.

That money in itself, wealth in itself, is not sinful, but the big problem of it is it can become an unhealthy priority in your life.

I was reading some research this past week and what the research showed is that when it comes to wealth, there's a kind of tipping point. And beyond that tipping point, when we become very, very wealthy, it doesn't do us any good at all.

In fact, a lot of very, very wealthy people, very depressed or very controlling, unhappy people, trying to work out their lives in the light of their wealth.

[10:16] That is a very challenging thing. And Zacchaeus had that. He was a tax collector and the tax collectors collected tax on behalf of the occupying Roman government.

And they were paid by commission. So not only did they pay a high level of tax, actually, the people in Judea at the time, but on top of that, Zacchaeus added an extra 10%, which he stuffed into his back pocket.

Little wonder he was hated by his Jewish compatriots. He was regarded as a traitor, as a quizley, as somebody who definitely could not be trusted and certainly could not be liked.

And the likelihood is there were people around who disliked Zacchaeus so much they really secretly would have liked to have killed him. He was loathed.

He was loaded and he was little. I want to say to you that if you're the kind of person who feels belittled, then Jesus is for you.

[11:44] I want to say to you, if you're the sort of person who's struggling with wealth, and I know we'd all like the experience of struggling with wealth so we could prove the Bible true. If you're struggling with it, Jesus is for you.

If you're wondering, well, does anybody really love me? I mean, that is such a profound existential question. Does anybody really love me?

You say to yourself, well, I have a wife, I have a husband. not every home is a place of marital bliss. If you're feeling that nobody really loves you, then Jesus is for you. The second question that this passage raises is a really important question.

And it's really for people who think they've crossed the line and are believers. And it's this, how do I get closer to Jesus? I mean, very figuratively, historically, in reality, in this story, Jesus, Zacchaeus, runs ahead of the crowd and does this kind of comic thing.

[13:06] He climbs into a tree. I can, I mean, I would have loved to have been there just to hear what the other people in the crowd were saying when they saw him stuck up this tree.

And Jesus comes along and in the English translations of our Bible, it really doesn't kind of make this clear enough.

In verse 5, we read, Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.

what the English translation at this point misses is this truth that the Greek word literally means Jesus fixed him with a stare.

Something far more profound than just looking up. It was something intentional. And I think this is probably poetic, but nevertheless I'm going to say it.

[14:13] I have the feeling for the first time in his squalid little life, Zacchaeus experienced the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And something changed.

Come on to that. This is a remarkable story. a little loaded and loathed man who was deeply distrusted and hated by the crowd.

Jesus, out of all the crowd, fixes his eyes on this person and basically invites himself round for tea. How amazing is that? You want to get closer to Jesus. One thing this story tells us is you don't become a Christian by effort.

You become a Christian by the grace of God. We just sang about it. Amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a soul like me and like some of you. Grace means God loves you even though you don't deserve it.

[15:30] Did Zacchaeus deserve God's love? I don't think so. And none of you do because all of you are what the Bible calls sinners.

I hate to tell you that but it's true. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. You see I've said this many many times but there are basically two ways to do your life.

One way is to do it with God. The other way is to do it to quote Frank Sinatra my way. You have a choice. God's not going to bamboozle you into it.

Michael's not going to bamboozle into you. Simon Dorrance is not going to bamboozle you into it. It is your choice. And you can make that choice today.

If you're a God fearer take your sunglasses off and look at the reality of the God of love shown to us in Jesus Christ.

[16:48] If you want to get closer to God it's going to take some effort on your part. It's not going to take effort for you to become a Christian. I just told you why that is. But once you are a follower of Jesus how many of us became Christians years ago?

A friend of mine said to me not that long ago he said the only reason I still go to church this is a man who's been to every crusade on the planet definitely saved guy really really passionate about his faith.

faith. He said to me and given millions by the way to churches he said to me the only reason I still go to church is because I couldn't face the criticism of not going.

Does that sound healthy to you? Somebody shout no. how many of us talked to you a little bit about this last week how many of us have just got stuck stuck in our faith stuck in our worship stuck in our attitudes and today Jesus looks up into your tree and invites you to come on down and walk with him.

And then there's this very ugly understandable but third question that Jesus addresses and it's this what are we in the church like?

[18:27] What does it tell us? It tells us in verse number nine verse nine I think it says this sorry it's verse seven all the people saw this that is Jesus talking to Zacchaeus and began to mutter he has gone to be the guest of a sinner this this is amazing amazing that Jesus would talk to somebody like Zacchaeus the crowd quite rightly were a little indignant about it and they started to what?

grumble do you find that you are the kind of person who is too quick to judge you know the weird thing is I've seen research done on this that a lot of people try church according to Rachel Wolfe that's her name Rachel Wolfe says that at any one time if any of you were to invite one of your not Christian friends to come to church maybe they're going through a hard time whatever if you invited them apparently 74% of them would respond warmly to an invitation next issue is what happens when they get here I think listen I've spoken I couldn't tell you how many church weekends I've spoken at and every one of them when I say to them so what to the people in this particular church what would you say your strength is do you know what they all say we're friendly at St. Grotti's how do you know that well we all know each other good for you I was always keen when I was in local church ministry to talk to the people who came twice try and find out what is it that's a stumbling block for them and do you know what a stumbling block is it is people who grumble what is it they don't like they don't like the fact that they kind of feel even if it's not quite true they kind of feel that we bear the kind of characteristic of judgment that somehow something pervades from us that is a sort of holier than thou righteousness remember in the new testament there was another tax collector who was a praying man and he prayed a prayer and basically he was looking at sorry this was a pharisee and he was looking at a tax collector saying I thank you lord that you didn't make me like that person maybe you should ask yourself if I were to pray a prayer like that who would be the person that I would have in mind when I say to myself I'm glad you didn't make me like that lord it's not a bad question to ask too often in our churches we model a kind of ham superiority that unbelievers I mean the one thing I've discovered about unbelievers and I've had a lot to do with them is this they can see through us very very quickly what's natural behavior to us I've always noticed this that in churches I mean part of the joy of being in a church I would say one of the primary reasons that I do like Christ's church is because I like the people who come here at least the ones I know okay and what's the danger of that that all I do at the end of the service is go and seek them out and catch up with them etc etc imagine you come here for the first time and nobody talks to you why because we're all enjoying fellowship I can't answer the question without being judgmental myself in asking what are we like I see some good things who did Jesus come for well the Bible tells us very clearly it's people who are lost lost in life lost in their walk with Jesus lost people who can't find a way out of their issues their baggage Jesus said didn't he thank God he said this it's not the healthy who need a doctor but those who are sick the problem is it takes honesty does it not to admit that this is and particularly men how many men in our community would put off going to the doctor put it off put it off put it off until they diagnosed with something horrendous [24:09] Jesus came for the lost and in one way basic premise of the Bible is we're all sick that we all need to be rescued because of our innate self-centeredness but the great news is this is a story of transformation it's a story that reminds me and reminds you that however lost I feel our God in the person of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit is in the matter of transformation of changing you from the inside out listen to this this is the tax collector speaking right he says 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 I mean I you know math isn't my strong point but the bottom line is it doesn't sound like he's going to be left with too much does it in a moment this man's life this man's heart was changed Zacchaeus didn't know anything about the cross he didn't know anything about the sacrificial death of Jesus he didn't know any of that didn't even know about the Holy Spirit but one confrontation one conversation with Jesus and he's changed Zacchaeus was a sinner and my goodness he knew it Zacchaeus climbed a tree the Lord whom we worship was nailed to one Deuteronomy chapter 21 the writer of the book of Deuteronomy says this cursed is he who is hung on a tree

Jesus was cursed by simply by the fact that they crucified him God's love is not some sentimental rose tinted love it was a costly sacrificial and excruciating love see from his head his hands his feet sorrow and love flow mingle down did air such love and sorrow meet and thorns compose so rich a crown those amazing words of the dissenter Isaac Watts he went to a wonderful school do you know what Isaac Watts' school was called it was called the academy of dissent I should have gone there listen my friend if you are a God fearer you have an idea about

God but you don't have a personal relationship with him maybe this morning the Holy Spirit's going to whisper in your ear and ask you to make that leap of faith to take an idea and to make it a reality

in your life I wonder if you're ready do you remember Johnny Cash he did a song we did several as a matter of fact but he did this song and he said this put your hand in the hand of the man who's still the water put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the sea I wonder if those of you who are still lost in life are going to stretch out and reach out to Jesus and metaphorically put your hand in his that God will cease to be an idea for you and become a reality for you

I wonder if those of you who are stuck in your faith and you put up a good show to confuse people and to hide it from people but actually you cannot hide it from God man looks at the outward appearance God looks at the heart listen to me Jesus said in John chapter 6 whoever whoever whoever comes to me I will never drive away today salvation has come to this house Jesus said to Nicodemus Jesus because this man too is a son of Abraham he's a Jew for the son of man came to seek and to save the lost how grateful I am

[29 : 22] God God in his grace and his mercy took a moron like me and invited me into a relationship with him I read those words now and I I get a lump in my throat because I'm not sure that there were many people who were more lost than me when God revealed himself I pray today dear friends this may be true for some of you let's pray our father we thank you for this dear man Zacchaeus Lord a man who had so many impediments to get past in his life and a man who must have had deep insecurities about his height about his wealth and father you know we're not making excuse

Lord but we're human beings we have things that get in the way get in the way of our work get in the way of our marriages get those of us who are blessed enough to have one get in the way of relationships and Lord thank you that you always look beyond that that Lord however wretched we feel however the world looks at us Lord we're amazed that when you look at us you don't see our problem you don't see us as a problem you see our potential so Lord in your grace in your sovereignty and in your power we plead with you speak to us today speak to us Lord that we may hear and do what it is you call us to do pray Lord that today may be the salvation for many of us in this church in Jesus name we pray and the people who agreed said together Amen Amen.