

# AM Luke 18:18-19:10

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Date: 26 May 2024

Preacher: Rev Duncan Peters

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 2 : 30 ] Thank you.

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[ 5 : 00 ] Thank you.

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Thank you. Thank you.

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[ 8 : 59 ] Thank you. Thank you.

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Thank you. Thank you.

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Thank you.

[ 13 : 33 ] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. The crowd. So verse 4 tells us that he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him. For he was about to pass that way.

[ 17 : 21 ] Now that tree, it's a sycamore fig tree. It's not like sycamore trees here. It's a different kind of tree. It's got low branches and big leaves. So easy to climb and also the big leaves.

You can sort of hide behind them. And I think Zacchaeus' actions betray his desperation to see Jesus. I need to understand a little of the culture of that time and place.

And that Zacchaeus' dignity was at stake. Now in Western culture, respectable grown men might run for exercise.

Or to catch a bus. Or just, you know, for the fun of it. They might even occasionally climb a tree.

For exercise, to get a good view. Or just because they enjoy climbing trees. But in that culture, powerful men of status did not run. It was beneath their dignity.

[ 18 : 24 ] And they certainly didn't climb trees in public. Now sycamore fig trees have low branches. So they're easy to climb. And they've got big leaves to hide behind.

And Zacchaeus doesn't want to be seen. Because what he's doing is not very dignified. Just to illustrate that, Kenneth Bailey, in his commentary on this passage, tells a story about John Badeau. John Badeau, who was one time US ambassador to Egypt. And John Badeau once climbed a tree in the back garden of the ambassador's ward residence to fix some lights for an embassy garden party.

And this became known. And caused such a stir in Egypt. That sometime later, when the ambassador was having an audience with President Nasser, who was President of Egypt at that

time, the president asked the ambassador if it was true.

He'd heard this extremely unlikely story that the ambassador had climbed a tree. And it just seemed unbelievable. And so he wanted to check the truthfulness of this story with the ambassador himself.

[ 19 : 39 ] Because in that part of the world, both now and back then, powerful men do not climb trees, even in the privacy of their own back garden.

So, Zacchaeus is so desperate that he's willing even to climb a tree to see Jesus. But he doesn't want to be seen. He wants to be hidden.

He wants to do it unnoticed. But when, in verse 5, we read that when Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today. How does Jesus know Zacchaeus' name? And his desire to see Jesus. Well, it might be just miraculous, supernatural knowledge. Jesus often knew things, supernaturally.

That's one possibility. Or it may have been that the crowd had spotted Zacchaeus in the tree and were ridiculing and shouting abuse at him. And so Jesus would have heard his name in the abuse and also would have perceived Zacchaeus' desperation to see him.

[ 20 : 53 ] So either of those is possible. But Jesus says, I must stay at your house. It's kind of Jesus' destiny to do that. It's in God's plan and purpose for Jesus to stay with Zacchaeus.

And so Zacchaeus hurries down and welcomes Jesus joyfully. Well, in verse 7, we read that when they saw it, they, that's the people in the crowd, all grumble.

They began to complain. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. Now, the crowd, and the crowd would have been a Jewish crowd, their expectation would have been that Jesus would either ignore Zacchaeus or maybe give him a lecture.

Something like this. Zacchaeus, you've betrayed your country. You've betrayed your God. You've oppressed people. You're a traitor. What you need to do now is to give up your job, go to the temple in Jerusalem for purification, and then start keeping the Torah, the law given through Moses.

But instead of doing that, Jesus, there and then, invites himself to Zacchaeus' house. Jesus does not condone Zacchaeus' sins, but he reaches out to him in love.

[ 22 : 19 ] Now, Jesus has already reached out to an oppressed person, like blind Bartimaeus, the blind beggar on his way into Jericho.

But now also Jesus reaches out to the oppressor. Now, we live in a judgmental age. Someone can say something wrong, a wrong thing on social media, and they are shamed and denounced.

They become a social pariah. They're an object of hatred. If you say the wrong thing, if you're part of the wrong group, if you're an oppressor or perceived to be an oppressor, then so often there's judgment for you without mercy in our own society.

And it wasn't so much difference back then. But by contrast, Jesus reaches out to the oppressor with mercy.

And the crowd turns against Jesus. Perhaps they had been hoping to give Jesus hospitality. But now the focus of their bitter opposition turns from Zacchaeus onto Jesus.

[ 23 : 34 ] He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. Jesus freely and voluntarily draws the crowd's condemnation away from Zacchaeus onto himself.

And we see in that a microcosm of the gospel where Jesus Christ bears the suffering of others. As Isaiah 53 verse 4 says, that surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering.

And he does that for Zacchaeus. But Zacchaeus' response in verse 8 is that he stood and said, to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.

And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. Now this is not a miracle story, like when Jesus heals the blind, or people who are disabled or sick in some way, or raises the dead, or when he wields his authority over nature, like calming the storm.

And yet, a transformation takes place in Zacchaeus' life that is nothing short of a miracle.

Zacchaeus goes from someone who wanted, who had this driving ambition to get rich, even at the expense of principles and public esteem and the well-being of others.

[ 25 : 04 ] He goes from that to someone who is now generous and eager to put right any financial wrongs he has committed. There is a revolutionary reordering of Zacchaeus' priorities, of what is important to him, of what he loves most.

His new generosity in restoring what he has extorted from people will cost him financially. He will become poorer. But he has been found and been saved by Jesus Christ.

And so money just isn't so important anymore to him. And in Zacchaeus, we have a great picture of repentance. Repentance means turning.

It means doing a U-turn in your life, from following the idols of your heart, to following Jesus Christ in the way of God. Now, in the church, there's sometimes confusion about this today, about how we should deal with people who maybe are living questionable lifestyles or lifestyles that don't conform with biblical teaching.

And there are two wrong approaches. The first wrong approach is the moralistic approach, which is that, first of all, you need to clean up your life and then God will accept you and we in the church will welcome you.

[ 26 : 33 ] Many of the Pharisees that we meet in the Gospels, they had that attitude. First of all, you need to clean up your life and then God will accept you.

The second approach is the opposite, that God accepts everyone as they are and so there's no need to change anything. Just be who you are. That's also a wrong approach.

And we see that Jesus Christ's approach was that he welcomed sinners. He ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus says, come as you are.

But he doesn't let you stay as you are. He calls you to repentance. He calls you to turn. And we see that repentance, that turning in the life of Zacchaeus.

Well in verse 9, Jesus says to him, Today salvation has come to this house since he also is a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

[ 27 : 40 ] So salvation comes in, with and through Jesus Christ coming to Zacchaeus' house. Salvation is one of the big themes of Luke's gospel.

It's much more emphasized in Luke than in the other gospels. In the beginning, in Mary's song, after the, you know, she's been told that she's going to give birth to the Messiah.

She says, My spirit rejoices in God, my saviour. And then a bit later, in Zechariah's song, he speaks of salvation from our enemies. And then how God is going to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

And then when Jesus is born, the angels announce to the shepherds that today, in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. A saviour has been born.

And then a bit later on, when Mary and Joseph take the baby Jesus to the temple, they meet Simeon. And Simeon takes the baby Jesus in his arms and says, in prayer to God, My eyes have seen your salvation.

[ 28 : 55 ] Salvation in Luke can include healing of the body. In fact, in the passage we read in chapter 18, verse 42, when Jesus says to the blind man, Recover your sight, your faith has made you well.

It's literally, your faith has saved you. And that occurs in a number of places where healings, physical healings, happen. So salvation includes physical healing of the body.

And it can also, in the passage about the rich young ruler, the first bit we read from chapter 18, when the disciples ask, Who then can be saved?

It has the same meaning as inheriting eternal life and entering the kingdom of God. Those are just three ways of describing the same thing. Well, Jesus says, Today, salvation has come to this house.

In the person of Jesus. As Jesus enters the house, salvation comes. And Jesus' mission is to seek and to save the lost. And for Zacchaeus, salvation meant, first of all, forgiveness in the present, here and now.

[ 30 : 10 ] He was forgiven. His sins were forgiven. And also the promise of future salvation in the age to come, in the resurrection.

It was also a salvation from greed, from the love of money that bound Zacchaeus. He had been freed from that. He had been saved from that.

And salvation also involved restoration to the family, the people of God. Jesus says, This man too is a son of Abraham.

And that's another theme in Luke. Children of Abraham. In chapter 3, we read of the preaching of John the Baptist. And then we read in verses 7 and 8 of chapter 3 of Luke, that John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the coming wrath.

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you that out of these stones, God can raise up children for Abraham.

[ 31 : 21 ] And Zacchaeus is a kind of fulfillment of John the Baptist's words. Out of these stones, God can raise up children for Abraham. Because Zacchaeus might have seemed as hard as stone, as a rich, greedy, collaborating tax collector.

But God had changed his heart. God had saved him. He is now a true child of Abraham. And then Jesus says that the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

In the Old Testament, which for Jesus and his disciples, that was their Bible. They didn't have the New Testament at that time. In the Old Testament, God is almost exclusively the one who saves. And Jesus claims that he saves. That salvation comes in, with, and through him. Now Jesus' language of seeking and saving the lost recalls, well it recalls his own parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin.

Where the shepherd and the woman in those parables represent God. and Jesus Christ seeks and saves as the shepherd and the woman in those two parables do.

[ 32 : 42 ] You can read those later if you like in chapter 15 of Luke. But also the parable of the lost sheep and Jesus' words in verse 10 here also recall Ezekiel chapter 34 which presents God as the shepherd of his people.

And where God speaks of seeking and saving the scattered and lost sheep. And in the Greek translation of the Old Testament which Luke himself would have used it's the same verbs that Jesus uses here the verbs for seek and save.

And they're used in Ezekiel of God's activity. Let me just read a few excerpts from Ezekiel 34 from verse 11. This is what the sovereign Lord says.

I myself will seek for my sheep and look after them. And in verse 12 I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered.

Verse 16 I will seek for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. And then in verse 22 I will save my flock and they will no longer be plundered.

[ 33 : 58 ] So you can hear the echoes of that in Jesus' words. seeking and saving the lost sheep. Now later on in Ezekiel 34 God speaks of placing David as a shepherd over the flock.

In verse 23 I will place over them one shepherd my servant David and he will tend them he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God and my servant David will be prince among them.

Now Ezekiel lived about 500 years after David the historical figure David so it's not speaking of here of the historic King David it's rather speaking of a future David-like Messiah who will come in still future for Ezekiel Ezekiel writing in the 6th century before Christ.

Now we might think of Ezekiel 34 that it speaks of God the Lord Yahweh as God the Father and then Jesus as fulfilling the David-like figure but it's not quite as simple as that because while David in Ezekiel 34 tends the flock and is their shepherd he is not said to seek and to save the lost sheep that is God's work and so it seems that Jesus combines both the work of God and of David in Ezekiel 34 and as we've noted in the Old Testament almost always the one who saves or is described as saviour is God himself and yet here we see that it is Jesus whose mission is to seek and to save the lost and as so often in the Gospels what's in the Old Testament is exclusively the work of

God we find Jesus doing that work well I want just to sort of wrap this up now in conclusion so we as human beings we are all lost until we are found by Jesus Christ our inclinations are towards evil towards following the idols of our hearts worshipping the gods of money of power of romance success fame celebrity acclaim status gods that all of them ultimately will fail us and lead us to self destruction salvation and you'll never be satisfied seeking after those things and the reason is that you were made for God you were made for relationship with him and without that relationship you are profoundly lost you don't know who you are what your life is for where you are going without God and yet we are told here

[ 36 : 58 ] Jesus tells us that the son of man Jesus himself came to seek and to save the lost and Jesus Christ went to the ultimate lengths to seek and to save us at the beginning of this passage in Luke 19 verse 1 we are told that Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through and we know where he is going we know that he is on his way to Jerusalem and on his way to his suffering and his death there in chapter 18 verse 32 31 sorry we are told that Jesus took the 12 aside and said to them see we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written about the son of man by the

prophets will be accomplished he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and be mocked and shamefully treated and spat upon and after flogging him they will kill him and on the third day he will rise

Jesus Christ died in utter humiliation and agony and desolation on a cross in Jerusalem what was he doing there why was he there but we are told here that the whole reason for his life the reason for his coming his mission his death his resurrection can be summed up in these words that he came to seek and to save the lost and that is good news it's good news for lost people it's good news for you and it's good news for me may God bless his word to us let's pray thank you for holding their