

Lost and Found

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[0 : 00] As children, our favourite game was hide and seek. All the children in our street would get together. We'd be given one minute to hide, and then one of us would be given 15 minutes to find everyone.

! We'd hide in trees and bushes, under cars. The last found was the winner. However, the old St. Vincent Street Church was a great place to play hide and seek.

Many good evenings were spent by young people and not-so-young people finding ingenious places to hide in all its nooks and all its crannies. When it comes to God, do you play hide and seek?

For your whole life, you've hid from him. Perhaps it's by distracting yourself with the pleasures of society, or by searching out new philosophies, or perhaps it's just shutting your ears to him.

Whenever your conscience grumbles, or you get the feeling that there must be more to life than this, whenever someone speaks to you about Jesus, you shut it out because you're hiding from God.

[1 : 16] But all the time, he's seeking you. He has not given up on you, and you know it. Your conscience will not be quiet, no matter how hard you try.

Those questions about purpose and meaning and certainty still come. No matter how hard you try, you can't stop God from seeking you out. The message of today's sermon is this.

Stop hiding. Stop hiding. Even though God knows where you are, let him find you. The game is over.

God always wins. He always does. And when he finds you, and you have found him, you'll question why you spent your whole life, up till now, hiding from him.

In Luke chapter 19, verse 10, Jesus summarizes his meeting with the tax collector Zacchaeus by saying, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

[2 : 21] Here's a man, Zacchaeus, he'd spent his whole life hiding from God. But now as Jesus passes through, he gives up hiding, and he goes looking for Jesus. But what Zacchaeus didn't know was that all the time, Jesus had been looking for him.

Jesus had come for people just like Zacchaeus, not just to find them, but to save them from their empty way of life, to shower his mercy upon them, and to freely give them eternal life in him.

If you'd asked Zacchaeus after he met with Jesus, how he felt, he'd say to you, I can't believe I spent my whole life hiding from Jesus.

Being found and being saved by Jesus, even though it's cost me much, has made my life worth living. I want us briefly to consider two things this morning.

First, Zacchaeus seeks Jesus. And secondly, Jesus seeks Zacchaeus. Are you playing hide and seek with God today?

[3 : 30] You can't run away from him. It's time to stop hiding. Start seeking him instead. First of all then, Zacchaeus seeks Jesus from verse 1 through 5.

Zacchaeus seeks Jesus. Over the last few weeks of studying Luke 18, we've learned of the kind of people upon whom Jesus showers his grace and salvation.

Well, there's a tax collector of the temple. There's infants brought to him by their parents. There's disciples who've given up everything to follow him. And there's a blind man who cries out for his mercy. All of these people stopped hiding from God and sought God out on his own terms.

They found him. And in finding him, they found salvation. Jesus now is going to Jerusalem, where, as we know, he will suffer and die on the cross.

As he passes through towns and villages, crowds throng him. Having witnessed Jesus heal a blind man on his approach to Jericho, one can imagine the crowds are getting excited.

[4 : 35] They're being whipped up. Because news of Jesus and his exploits go before him. Now, Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in the region. He wasn't just a normal tax collector.

He was the chief tax collector. In the Jericho of Jesus' day, tax collectors were hated men. Jericho was situated on a strategic trade route into Jerusalem, an easy place to tax travelers and traders.

Tax collectors in those days collaborated with the Romans in collecting taxes for them. But in addition, they would charge an excess to fill their own pockets. But in what was a first century pyramid fraud, the tax collectors paid their taxes to the chief tax collectors, who again charged the tax collectors excess.

So, tax collectors weren't just collaborators. They were liars and cheats who got rich off the back of the poor, and chief tax collectors were the worst of the worst.

Zacchaeus' name means pure or innocent. Remember, you've got to work out what Yachin's name means. But Zacchaeus' name means pure or innocent.

[5 : 52] But he was very far from being a pure and innocent man. He was a traitor, a thief, and a liar. As the text tells us, he was rich. Crime paid for this man.

Earlier in Luke 18, Jesus had met a rich young ruler who was the definition of pure and innocent. A leader among the Jewish people, and a righteous man according to the law.

Zacchaeus was entirely as rich as that young rich man, but the comparisons all stopped there. Zacchaeus was hated by the people and was anything but righteous.

Now, we don't know what prompted Zacchaeus to go looking for Jesus. We don't. Perhaps it was a matter of curiosity. Everyone was talking about Jesus.

And you know, even if they won't admit it, many people in our society are curious about Jesus today, especially when they see the effects of his work in the church. Maybe you're curious about Jesus today.

[6 : 55] You've heard about him from others. They've got something you don't have. And although you wouldn't say it to them, you're jealous of them, and you want it for yourself. Or maybe Zacchaeus went looking for Jesus because he really was so very unpopular that he was searching for some kind of belonging.

Every human being wants to belong. Zacchaeus belonged to no one. Everyone hated him. They made him feel like he was a traitor to his own people, that he did not belong among them.

And again, maybe today, you're looking for genuine belonging in life. Social media friends, you know they're not real friends.

In what is a very lonely society, you want to belong. Or perhaps Zacchaeus, rather, had heard about Jesus' previous interactions with tax collectors.

After all, one of Jesus' disciples, Levi, or Matthew as we call him, had been a tax collector before he was a disciple. Furthermore, just a few verses before this, Jesus had commended a tax collector for calling out to God for mercy.

[8 : 08] Maybe you've seen and heard of how Jesus has made a difference to the lives of your friends. Friends just like you, with similar backgrounds and similar issues.

And you think to yourself, if Jesus can change them, maybe he can change me too. Or maybe it's just because, for all of Zacchaeus' wealth, he had come to realize that money's a very fickle master and a desperately unfaithful friend.

Zacchaeus thought that wealth would satisfy him, but it hadn't. There was something fundamental missing in his life. Howard Hughes was one of the richest men in the world.

He was once asked, just how much money is enough? To which he answered, just a little more. For all his wealth, Hughes died a very unhappy man indeed.

And perhaps you're like that too. You've got a bucket list in life, and you've ticked basically everything on it. You thought it would make you happy. So you've got a home of your own.

[9 : 14] You've got a family. You've got a career. You've got security. You've got pleasure. But it's still not enough. There is something missing from your life.

Something fundamental. You can't put your finger on it. And you're curious. Could Jesus be that missing piece? Now, Zacchaeus was a very small man, which of course gives rise to our children's hymn.

Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up into a sycamore tree for the saviour he wanted to see. Small man syndrome is when someone feels inadequate by their small size and overcompensates by becoming aggressive, controlling others.

Perhaps Zacchaeus had small man syndrome. He felt inadequate. He looked down on, literally, by everybody else. He longed to be accepted for who he was.

Again, perhaps you're like that today. Whether you're tall or whether you're small. Whether you're fat or whether you're thin. You just want to be accepted for who you really are. Not for what you pretend to be on social media.

[10 : 29] So any or all of these reasons might be why Zacchaeus climbed up that tree. And any or all of these may be reasons why you are seeking Jesus today.

You've been hiding from him your whole life through. It's long enough. It is time to climb a sycamore tree as Jesus passes by. Perhaps that's why you're here today. Perhaps you come to church because this is your sycamore tree.

It's where you get a chance for whatever reason to see Jesus for yourself. Some or all of Zacchaeus' reasons might be yours today. You've climbed the Crow Road sycamore tree to see Jesus for yourself.

Zacchaeus' life was changed that day and you will not be disappointed by the Jesus you are so desperately seeking today either.

When you find him or rather when he finds you your life will never be the same again for not only has Jesus come to seek the lost he's come to save the lost.

[11 : 39] Zacchaeus seeks Jesus second Jesus seeks Zacchaeus verses 6 through 10 I've always wondered how Jesus knew who Zacchaeus was had Jesus heard someone mention his name or is this just an example of Jesus' deep spiritual knowledge whatever the answer to that it's clear that Jesus didn't just know Zacchaeus' name Jesus knew Zacchaeus' heart Zacchaeus had been hiding from God but God found him Jesus did the most unexpected thing he stopped at the base of the sycamore tree he looked up and said Zacchaeus hurry down for I must stay at your house today literally Jesus says in verse 6 6 having hurried down come today having hurried come down for today in your house it is necessary for me to stay having hurried come down for today in your house it is necessary for me to stay it wasn't necessary for Jesus but if Zacchaeus was to be saved it was necessary for him to spend time with Jesus even here

Jesus is not thinking about himself and what he can have for dinner he never did he's thinking about Zacchaeus Jesus knows exactly what is necessary for us to come to know him and be saved for some all it may take is a brief encounter with the preached word in a sermon for others it may take more time but Jesus knows exactly what is necessary and that is why you are here today the other thing I want you to notice is that Jesus does something no upright of Jew of the day would even have thought of they hated tax collectors and Zacchaeus more than most to them he was unclean and to be excluded shunned none of them would ever have dreamed of crossing the threshold of Zacchaeus' house any kind of association with an unclean sinner like him would have made them unclean also but Jesus the righteous son of God had no such fears to associate with an unclean sinner like Zacchaeus would not make Jesus unclean rather it would make a sinful Zacchaeus clean if any among us think that we are too sinful and too far gone for Jesus think again if any among us think that they have done things which mean Jesus would have nothing to do with them think again because if Jesus can accept Zacchaeus he can accept you there is no one too far gone for Jesus there is no one so hid so securely that Jesus can't find them in their hiding place he came for guilty sinners who know they need him he came for us so

Zacchaeus he immediately comes down from the sycamore tree and joyfully receives Jesus into the house at this those who are watching on grumble saying he's gone to be the guest of a man who's a sinner just the kind of religious response you'd expect from people who don't understand how the grace of God works of how Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost are there any who when they read of Jesus saving those we might not expect him to begin to grumble well if there are we need to repent of our gracelessness remembering that if any are to be saved it won't be because we deserved it but because Jesus in his grace sought us and saved us he doesn't save the deserving he doesn't save those who earned it he saves tax collectors and infants and the blind all the time rejecting self-righteous Pharisees and rich young men came to seek to save the lost those who know they're lost those who know they've got nothing in life to offer

Jesus except their sin their lostness their questions and their shame he saves people like Zacchaeus who came for us one of my favourite films one of my favourite lines from any movie comes from a film called The Imitation Game about how a British intelligence group led by Alan Turing broke the unbreakable Nazi Enigma Code Turing my father once met him was a distant and very effeminate man he was not well liked by his contemporaries and yet one of his female fellow codebreakers said to him this is the line I love it she said sometimes it is the people who no one ever imagines anything of who do the things that no one can imagine it's estimated that Turing's genius in breaking the Enigma code shortened the war by at least two years and saved millions of lives sometimes it's the people who no one imagines anything of who do the things no one can imagine no one imagined anything from Zacchaeus but he did something no one could imagine he stood and said to Jesus behold

Lord the half of my goods I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anything anyone of anything I restored it fourfold as Zacchaeus changed by Jesus made the people of Jericho rich at his expense rather than the old Zacchaeus who at the expense of the people made them poor contrast this with the attitude of the rich young ruler who we looked at three weeks ago who when challenged to give up his goods and give them to the poor was unwilling and walked away from Jesus' side but Zacchaeus also rich was changed by Jesus and gave evidence of that change by giving away more than even what was necessary under Jewish law money meant nothing or little to him now Jesus meant everything again he gives evidence of this by calling Jesus Lord this is a title no religious Jew would have given to anyone because in

[18:12] Adamic it's the name of God clearly Zacchaeus is no longer making an idol of his money he's got his priorities right remember the first commandment I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt you shall put no other gods before me for the first time in his life Zacchaeus was putting God first in his life Jesus put a sinful unworthy undeserving Zacchaeus before the crowd who followed him into Jericho before the other residents of the city and now Zacchaeus did something no one could imagine he perhaps the most sinful and disliked man in all of Jericho put Jesus first in his life and became a law keeper you know when we realise that by seeking and saving us Jesus has put us first we too want to put him first first before our status before our possessions before our careers before our relationships before our pleasures and if anything gets in the way of our relationship to Jesus we let it go for Zacchaeus it was his money so we let it go for us it may be an unhelpful friendship an unhealthy relationship it may be an unhealthy attachment to social media to pleasure or a dodgy unhelpful peer group if we say

Jesus comes first in our lives we must take steps to make Jesus first in our lives Zacchaeus did this man no one imagined anything of did something no one could ever imagine and all because Jesus found him in a sycamore tree well having seen what Zacchaeus has done Jesus proclaims today's salvation has come to this house since he also is a son of Abraham Zacchaeus had given evidence of his new transformed life and Jesus says today's salvation has come to this house to talk of Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham is a reference not so much to Zacchaeus as ethnicity as a Jew but to his spiritual state Abraham's called the father of the faithful remember Abraham trusted God when God called him to leave his home and travel to a new land Abraham trusted God even though he and his wife were beyond childbearing years

God promised him a son so to refer to Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham is to refer to Zacchaeus new faith in God a faith like Abraham's it was not Zacchaeus his actions in giving away his wealth which saved him it was his faith in Christ many non-Christian philanthropists have given all their wealth away but it doesn't make them Christians what changed Zacchaeus wasn't the change in his bank balance but the change in his heart but as he had once put his trust in money now he put his trust in Jesus what makes a person a son or daughter of Abraham isn't your ethnicity it's your faith in Jesus then Jesus announces one of his most memorable sayings for the son of man came to seek and to save the lost he came to seek the hidden the lost to save outsiders like Zacchaeus the wealthy who were lost the poor who were lost and when he finds them he changes them he saves them and gives them a new life of fulfillment and hope and satisfaction

Zacchaeus may have started the day seeking Jesus but he ended it realizing that for all his seeking all the time it had been Jesus seeking him and that's the way it is for everyone who is a Christian today it wasn't so much that we were seeking Jesus it was that Jesus was seeking us in an earlier sermon we learn that the title son of man is very significant it is Jesus favorite title for himself and it signifies that Jesus had a very special mission don't have time to prove this from the rest of the Bible but the mission of Jesus is to offer himself in the place of the sinful and the lost as the sacrifice for their sin that's what it means for Jesus to be the son of man that he offers himself in the place of sinful and lost people as the sacrifice for their sin remember he's already in the way to Jerusalem where he will be tortured and crucified dying the death of a criminal on a

Roman cross not as a tragic example but as an offering of sacrifice he's going to die the death sinners deserve to die he's going to be lost so that we can be found he's going to pay the price of sinners like Zacchaeus and like me similar would to that which constituted this sycamore tree would soon have a far more worthy man than Zacchaeus hanging in its branches and on that cross as Jesus hung and suffered he was seeking you in order to save you last month I stood at the end of a harbour in my home village in the north of Scotland Golsby it was a twilight and about 50 yards away I could make out a seal's head above the water something you see all the time up north right and I gently whistled to it the seal immediately went below the surface only to appear a few seconds later about five yards from where I was standing from me to

[24 : 19] Benjamin I was transfixed and as it swam it took a long look at me I could see everything about the seal its whiskers the spots in its back its powerful flippers I could see everything about that seal and it could see everything about me I have never been so close to a swimming seal was it my whispering which drew it to me or was the seal just curious I'll never know because having whistled a few lines from a Sam tune it died beneath the waters and I never saw it again this morning more like that seal our heads poking above the water and we hear a whistle calling to us the whistle is the voice of

Jesus inviting us to believe and trust in him and we draw breath we swim closer until we can see everything about this glorious son of man we see the marks of the cross in his hands and his feet and his side and we can see his loving face and we hear his gentle voice whistling and he calls us by name hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today now you have an option you can do what that seal did to me dive beneath the water and swim away from Jesus again you can go back to living the life you've lived with this world's pleasures as your ultimate meaning and maintain that feeling of unsettled guilt uncertainty in your heart or you can stay listen to the whisper again draw closer to

Jesus come out of your hiding place invite him to be your savior and lord you can put your faith in him like Zacchaeus did or you can reject him like the Pharisees did Jesus knows your name and he knows your heart and today he is calling you to believe in him he can forgive your sin give you hope in life and certainty a belonging and self worth he can change your life will you come out of your hiding place and let him find you today will you do