

King seeking sinners

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[0 : 00] The reading comes from Luke chapter 19, beginning at verse 1, and this can be found on page 1058 of the Church Bibles. He entered Jericho and was passing through, and there was a man named Zacchaeus.

He was a chief tax collector and was rich, and he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today. So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.

And when they saw it, they all grumbled, he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, behold, Lord, half my goods I give to the poor.

And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. And Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

[1 : 13] For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Well, good morning. It's great to be with you. If we haven't met, my name is Benji and I'm on staff here.

Why don't I lead us in a prayer as we begin. Father, we know that Satan prowls like a roaring lion, seeking people to devour.

And he would love us this morning to be hardened to your word, distracted from it and unmoved by it. Father, please, in your great kindness, would you thwart his schemes?

And would you prepare our hearts to hear about your most precious, glorious and loving son?

Amen. What does the kingdom of God look like when it comes?

Singapore recently had a conference called Kingdom Invasion Conference. And it promised various things such as power, manifesting the kingdom of God in our midst, great works of healing, miracles and prophecy.

[2 : 23] It was in 2022. I didn't go. So I'm not sure. But is that what the kingdom of God looks like when it comes? Power, societal change, upheaval politically.

Or perhaps it looks like the global ending of injustice. No more poverty. An eradication of illness. And you would be forgiven for perhaps if you took a cursory read of the Old Testament, thinking that that is what the Old Testament is predicting. Daniel 7, predicting the end of oppressive nations. Isaiah 25, predicting the end to death itself. Isaiah 35, a glorious city of perfect peace and everlasting joy. You could well be forgiven for thinking that is how the kingdom of God should come. But what does it actually look like when the kingdom of God breaks into earth? When heaven meets earth?

[3 : 29] What does it actually look like? And this is really important for us to grasp. Because if we have a wrong idea of what the kingdom of God looks like when it comes, well, we might think we've missed it.

We might even feel like God has somehow missed us out. That we haven't experienced the kingdom at all. And our initial readers would have been longing to know the answer to that question. Under Roman occupation, a conquered people taxed to an inch of their life, often by their own, lacking a land, lacking a king, lacking a kingdom. If you'd asked them, what does the coming of the kingdom of God look like?

They would have been able to give you a very straightforward answer. Self-determination, obviously. The removal of the Romans, obviously. The return of our land, obviously.

All by their warrior king, Messiah. And for all the reasons that we've said before, as you read your Old Testament, we could forgive them for thinking so.

[4 : 35] Their defining historical event, after all, that Jan was learning about last term was the Exodus. Literal freedom from slavery. Crushing of their oppressor. A land, a king of their own.

We could well understand, therefore, why they might be expecting the same to happen again. Why they might be expecting Jesus to do the same thing. And we've been seeing in this section that Jesus has told them that, in a sense, the kingdom is both here and not here.

Remember, Andy's helpful A, B, and C. If you have a look with me, back to 17, chapter 17, verse 21. This is Jesus' answer to what the kingdom of God, when it comes, will look like.

So, beginning at verse 20, the kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed. Nor will they say, look, here it is or there. For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

And, of course, as they hear that answer, they might well be bewildered. How? The kingdom is in the midst, yet unrecognisable.

[5 : 42] God's kingdom has broken in, yet you're not going to be able to recognise it, all of you. How is God's kingdom both here and not? How is it that we can see it and not?

Well, Luke's section is essentially an answer to that question on entry into the kingdom and what does the coming of the kingdom look like? And it culminates in this story that we've just had read to us in Zacchaeus.

And on your handout, there are three points, and that's what we're going to be following this morning. And the first point that Luke wants us to see is that Zacchaeus is a textbook conversion. A textbook conversion. In other words, if you want to know what the coming of the kingdom looks like, it's Zacchaeus. A textbook conversion. And he's carefully constructed this narrative to summarise and show this textbook conversion.

A textbook coming of the kingdom of God. So let's go through the verses together. Starting again at chapter 19, verse 1. He, that is Jesus, entered Jericho and was passing through.

[6 : 54] And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowds, he could not.

Because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him. For he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.

So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.

This is a textbook conversion. First, we arrive at Jericho. Back in verse 1, the site in Joshua as the people entered the promised land brought down the city walls by prayer alone.

But what we're going to see is that Zacchaeus basically encapsulates every single character that we've already seen in this section, beginning at Luke 17 all the way through to Luke 19.

[8 : 04] He encapsulates every character. Of course, most obviously, Zacchaeus was a tax collector, which we saw three weeks ago. And not just any tax collector, but a chief tax collector.

But the tax collector who went away justified. But of course, Zacchaeus is also, in a sense, isn't he? If you remember right back to the first sermon in the series, the leper, one of the ten lepers.

He would have been ostracized from society, hated and ostracized, likely when he's trying to get in and amongst the crowd to see Jesus. Well, you can well imagine why they haven't let this little man in.

They could have done if they wished, but they didn't. Of course, Zacchaeus is also like the child who receives the kingdom. Did we notice that Zacchaeus is described as small in stature, which is a polite way of saying small.

But it could also be translated as he was small in maturity. And it is a deliberate play on words by Luke. Like Zacchaeus is like a child.

[9 : 09] And we notice that Zacchaeus, what does he do? He receives the kingdom joyfully. And just like the children are encouraged, as an example, they received the kingdom in 18 verse 17.

And he is, of course, also the rich man, isn't he? The rich man who received, who was told by Jesus, give away all of your wealth. And he went away sad because he had a lot of money.

But this time Zacchaeus does give away all of his wealth. Half of my possessions I give to the poor. And if I've defrauded anyone, I will restore it fourfold. And is he perhaps also the persistent widow who pursued the judge for an answer again and again and again?

Zacchaeus pursued to see Jesus' face, even if it involved running and climbing a tree. In other words, Luke is bringing all of the themes that we've seen from this section, all of the characters, and he's forcing them into this one story of Zacchaeus.

In other words, Zacchaeus is a textbook convert. If you want to understand what the coming of the kingdom looks like, well, it looks like Zacchaeus.

[10:23] That's point number one, a textbook conversion. The second point is a contested conversion. A contested conversion. So whilst we've seen that Zacchaeus presents a conversion, I can't do the French accent, par excellence.

Is that a good example, I think is how you translate that. From the section's perspective, he encapsulates all the characters that Luke wants to draw our attention to, but he's also at pains to show us that this is a contested conversion.

Now, of course, the hints of this are obvious from the first few verses. Chief tax collector and was rich, i.e. hated, utterly hated. We've already seen, haven't we, the Pharisee's attitude three weeks ago to the tax collector.

He thanked God that he was not like this man. So here is Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and was rich. And the crowd, understandably, had no interest in helping him get to the front.

And with the crowd to see Jesus, verse 4, have a look down with me. So what does Zacchaeus have to do? He ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus, for he was about to pass that way.

[11:34] And when Jesus came to the place where Zacchaeus was, he stopped. Verse 5, did we notice this? And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.

So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. Jesus, in other words, stopped the entire procession, the enormous crowd, to look up at this man and say, I need to ditch all these people and come in to eat with you.

You can imagine the horror. Jesus knows this scumbag's name. He stopped the entire procession just to speak to him. And then the urgency of Jesus, I must come to your house today.

Why is this man getting such special treatment? Doesn't Jesus know who he is? And we see the response in verse 7. And when they saw it, they all grumbled.

He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. Now we're going to come to Jesus' response later. But it's worth just noting why Luke has put this here for us this morning.

[12:49] When I first ever, when I taught this passage historically, I basically skimmed over this. I hadn't noticed it before. But a friend of mine who knows Luke much better than me pointed this out to me.

That this, if this really is a textbook example of the coming of the kingdom, well then Luke also needs us to understand that a textbook coming of the kingdom will be contested.

A textbook coming is a contested coming. And it also helps us understand 17 verse 21 again. You have a look back with me at 17 verse 21.

17 verse 21. Nor will they say, look, here it is or there. For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. It helps us understand how the kingdom of God can be in the midst of us.

And yet people won't see it. But Zacchaeus is the textbook case of the kingdom coming. But people will reject it. They won't say, look, here's the kingdom.

[13:49] No, instead, they will grumble. In fact, it will be contested and opposed by some. Zacchaeus is a textbook coming of the kingdom.

But the coming of the kingdom is a contested one. Now, this, to pause to think just briefly about application, is enormously reassuring for us to see.

Because if the coming of the kingdom is contested, it means that therefore we shouldn't be surprised when to the world Jesus' kingdom, us as Christians in other words, doesn't look that impressive.

We shouldn't be surprised. And when we see claims potentially of great powerful movements of God's kingdom coming, well, we can be reassured that no, a contested conversion is a textbook conversion.

A person coming to Christ is the coming of the kingdom. And that will always be contested, always represented as weak by those who don't see it.

[14:56] Now, we've shot through those two points, and we're going to spend most of our time on this third point. It is finally, though, point number three, a radical conversion, the conversion of Zacchaeus, a radical conversion.

Of course, as we see these two points, that it is just people like Zacchaeus being brought into the kingdom, little people like Zacchaeus, we might therefore be tempted to think the coming of Jesus' kingdom is weak and a bit pathetic and a bit maybe even just deflating.

Is that really what the coming of God's kingdom to earth looks like? But Luke wants to show us that this is a radical conversion, a powerful conversion, a kingdom conversion.

Let's start from the beginning again. Chapter 19, verses 1 and 2. He entered Jericho and was passing through, and behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

It's difficult to overestimate the level of hatred that Jews would have had for Zacchaeus. It really is. First, let's think about it.

[16:07] He was one of their own. He was a Jew himself. And so he, too, was under Roman occupation. But instead of joining in resisting that occupation, he joined their side.

Rome exacted punishing taxes on the occupied Jews and Zacchaeus was the one who made sure people paid it. Yet it's worse because he would also add his own fee on top.

And so not only would he help the Romans who were suppressing his people, but he would also make himself rich off their misery. And it's clear, isn't it, from the details, Zacchaeus had no qualms about this whatsoever.

He was the chief tax collector and was rich. I don't know if that means the senior partner tax collector, equity partner. I don't know what the terms are, but you get what I'm saying. He was the best, the most senior.

In other words, he has done this for a long time and he's good at it and was rich. In other words, he has thoroughly embezzled his own people and he is thoroughly embedded in his sin.

[17:18] He's defrauded many and was happy to do it. It's hard to think of an equivalent for us today. In my city, Liverpool, which, of course, you can all tell by my accent, obviously, it's impossible, I don't know if you knew this, in any shop in Liverpool to buy a copy of The Sun.

I don't know if you may know this. That's because in the aftermath of the Hillsborough crisis, where 69 fans were crushed to death in a stampede due to overcrowding, The Sun published a couple of articles claiming that Liverpoolians then stole from and urinated on the dead bodies of the victims. Now, these claims were proven unfounded and, needless to say, it produced enormous animosity and anger.

So then imagine, in that aftermath, the hatred if the editor of The Sun suddenly decided to show up at a Liverpool FC fan meet. We can well imagine how that might go down and the level of hatred. A betrayer and an abuser using their agony to wrongly sell some papers.

[18:29] And that hopefully will give us a sense of the level of hatred that would have been directed towards this little man. And, of course, in the Christian world, I'm certain that all of us could well imagine that a particular person, we don't have to name anyone, but who came to church and would give us pause.

And we might stop and think, really? Them in church? Why on earth would they be here? What are they doing here? That is exactly the sentiment of the crowd.

What is Jesus doing with him? Does he not know who he is? And yet, for some reason, and we're not told why, Zacchaeus is seeking Jesus.

Do we see that in verse 3? And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowd, he could not. Because he was small in stature.

We're not told why, but the crowd clearly shuns him. And rightly so, they're probably thinking, there's no way I'm letting this man through to the front. So he runs. And in those days, you do not run.

[19:37] And you can imagine you would have robes down to your feet. And he's hitching up his robes, making a total prat of himself. And he's running down the outside of the crowd. No entry, no entry, no entry, no entry.

Just met with shoulder after shoulder. Until eventually, out of desperation, he spots a tree. And hitching up his robe, I don't know why it's a sycamore tree, by the way.

But commentators, there was one commentator who spent 10 pages writing why it's a sycamore tree. But anyway, hitching up his robe, he begins to scale and shimmy.

And it's a ridiculous image. You imagine the city CEO in a big crowd, I know, around Bank Station, just taking off his designer Tom Ford suit jacket, throwing it to the floor, and shimmying up a lamppost.

It's a ridiculous image. I mean, you can imagine the braying and the crooning of the crowd. Oh, you can't pay your way through this one, can you, Zacchaeus? Laughing at him.

[20 : 34] Too little to see are you, Zacchaeus? Mocking him. You can almost imagine the money bags falling out of his pockets as he's climbing up and up the tree. And the crowd were probably loving the sight of this villain making a fool of himself.

And really, we've got to ask ourselves, what is Zacchaeus' endgame in all of this? What is he hoping is going to happen as he's shimmying up this tree? All we're told in verse 4, so he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him.

Just to see him. And we don't know what his endgame was, but we could well imagine that he's not really assuming that much more could happen. All we're told is that he wants to see him.

It's not even likely, is it really, that Jesus would even look at him. If you're, I don't know if you've ever been in a crowd, maybe at a festival or a music conference. Music, it's not called a conference, is it?

Gig? Festival. Goodness gracious, thank you. You're a music festival. The one thing you probably don't do when surrounded by people is stop and look up. That's a very strange thing to do.

[21 : 46] There's lots of people all around you, budging into you. I don't know. I've never looked up when surrounded by crowds. So Zacchaeus probably isn't holding out much hope that Jesus is going to stop and look at him.

And yet, suddenly, verse 5, when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus.

And you can imagine the stunned silence that followed. The crowd realizing Jesus knows this scumbag's name.

Jesus knows his name. And imagine Zacchaeus. He just wanted to get a glimpse of Jesus. And suddenly, the whole crowd has gone silent. And Jesus has stopped. And he's looking up at him. And he knows my name. He knows my name. And not only does Jesus know his name, the shock grows. When then Jesus calls to Zacchaeus.

[22 : 49] And have a look down with me in verse 5. Hurry and come down. For I must stay at your house today. So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.

You can imagine the shock and anger beginning to rise in the crowd. As Jesus commands him with authority. I must stay at your house. And leaving the crowd.

Imagine the adulation. Imagine the potential for rubbing Jesus' ego that this must have been. Of people calling his praises. From one side to the other. Standing room only.

And Jesus goes, yeah, enough of that. Zacchaeus, I need to eat with you. Pushing the crowd to one side. Metaphorically speaking. And entering the house of this sinner.

Now. But then look at what happens. When this man, Zacchaeus. Meets Jesus.

[23 : 50] Verse 8. And Zacchaeus 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 I'm not an accountant. Thank goodness. I'll be a terrible accountant. But it doesn't take an accountant to work out, does it?

That he is bankrupting himself. Half of my possessions gone. And then to restore fourfold. I'm not very good at math. But I think it's obvious, isn't it?

That he is bankrupting himself. And just imagine for a second. This is what we mean by a radical conversion. Think of all the years that he must have spent running after money.

All the people that he embezzled. All the people that he mistreated. All the things he was willing to forego for riches. The love of his family and friends. The respect of his neighbours.

[24 : 50] Just being a decent citizen. He's willing to forego all of that to pursue money. And clearly he was very good at it. Chief tax collector and was rich.

The reputation's gone. Repressing his own people for it. And then suddenly one encounter. Just one. With the Lord Jesus.

And his whole life. Is ripped apart. And reformed. A man who spent his entire life running in one direction. Forsaking everything for this one goal of wealth.
And he meets Jesus. And he gives it all away. Is anything more powerful.
More impressive. More glorious. Than this. Here we see exactly. What the coming of the kingdom looks like.

[25 : 49] And it is not. Weak. A radical. Conversion. It looks like. Turning people from one direction. To another.

In just one encounter. With Jesus. It looks like. Zacchaeus. But of course. There is also one other person.

That this shows us something deeply profound about. Which is the Lord Jesus. Because what does it say. About the heart of our saviour. That he would stop.

In the middle of a crowd. And look up at the most wretched. And foolish of sinners. And say. You. I want to eat.

With you. Many people that. I've pastored with. And done ministry with. Have said a variation of something along the lines of. Well Jesus could never love me.

[26 : 46] Jesus could never forgive me. Oh Benji. You have no idea. What I've done. You have no idea. How far I've walked away from Jesus. You have no idea.

The kind of things I've thought. And said. And done to other people. Well. This is the Jesus. Who stops in the middle of a crowd. Looks up. And says. Zacchaeus.

I must eat. I must eat. With you. No. This is not. A weak coming. Of the kingdom. This is the Lord Jesus Christ. With a heart for sinners.

Bringing radical change. So as we close. This whole section. This whole section. Is essentially explaining. As we've said. 1721. That the kingdom is here.

And not here. And Zacchaeus. Is the perfect illustration. Of that. In one sense. Zacchaeus looks like nothing at all. A horrible little man.

[27 : 42] Who's had a revelation. Conversion. But in another sense. It is a radical. Conversion. Because if we look. With the eyes of the kingdom. We will see something.

Magnificent. We will see the kingdom. Of Satan. Plundered. A sinner redeemed. A life. Radically transformed. And justice. Brought to the oppressed.

Anyone that I have mistreated. I restore fourfold. And we also see. How this kingdom comes about. Last week. The emphasis was. As we.

If we remember. To last week. That only Jesus. Can unblind us. To see this kingdom. But now. We see a fuller. And potentially. More nuanced view.

As we close. Just to notice. Two details. The first. Is to notice. In verse. Three. That Zacchaeus. Was seeking. Jesus. And then.

[28 : 38] To notice. In verse. Ten. That Jesus. Was seeking. Zacchaeus. 19. Verse 10. For the son of man. Came to seek.

And save. The lost. Now. How that works. With Jesus's sovereignty. Over blindness. I don't know. But one thing. Luke wants to make. Absolutely clear.

Is that. If we seek. Jesus. Whoever we are. Even. Zacchaeus. Well. Jesus is seeking. You. Jesus is seeking.

You. And all of us. Who are Christians. In this room. Are testimony. To the fact. That Jesus has found us. And that the kingdom. Has come. And that lives.

Have been transformed. And that radical. Conversion. After radical. Conversion. After radical. Conversion. Has been won. By the Lord Jesus. And if we aren't a believer.

[29 : 32] Well then. Obviously. The implication is. Well you can. Find him. He is not difficult. To find. He is seeking. You. So as we close.

What does the kingdom. Have looked like. Well two applications. For us as we close. The first. Major application. Is to reassure us. Reassure us. That the kingdom. Does not look like. Great powerful miracles.

And healings. And prophecy. But that the kingdom. Looks like. Sin is coming to Christ. It looks like. The many examples. Of it. In this room.

The second thing. Is to say. That. It. Won't. Necessarily. Look like. Giving away. All of your possessions. Staff team.

Were very wise. And pointing out. To me. That. Benji. Are you saying. That repentance. Looks like. Giving everything away. And in a sense. No. And in a sense. Yes.

[30 : 26] Because for Zacchaeus. His idol. Was clearly money. So for him. To turn away. From it. Was giving everything away. For I don't know. What it might be. For us. In this room. And maybe it is money.

Maybe it's something else. But the secondary application. For us. Must be to see. That to follow Jesus. Is going to take everything. But that he. Is certainly. Worth it.

Why don't I close us. In a final prayer. Lord. We thank you so much. For this wonderful picture. Of Zacchaeus. And for what we see. About the Lord Jesus. His heart. For us. Father.

Please. Would we continue. To run to him. If we are yours. And would we seek him. If we are not. Amen.