

The Mission of Jesus

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: 04 January 2026

Preacher: Chris Lowe

[0 : 00] I am told that the Australian outback is a very very dangerous place on earth, although I've never been. Temperatures can reach into the 40s and water is scarce.

! And if you drive through the dry red centre of Australia you take gallons of water with you, every spare your car needs and a satellite phone. If you break down you never leave your vehicle and wander off because if you get lost in this vast place your chances of survival are virtually nil. Which is why the story of a man called Ricky McGee is so remarkable. In 2006 Ricky McGee was travelling from eastern Australia, 3000 miles through the outback to start a new job in the west. He can't really remember what happened but driving along a remote highway he recalls meeting a group of men, hitchhikers, so he thought. Quote, The next thing I remember I woke up and I was face down in a hole with a bit of plastic thrown over me with some rocks and some dirt and everything thrown on top.

And what basically woke me up was there was four animals scratching at the plastic trying to get at me. Ricky had no idea where he was. Truth was he was hundreds of miles from anywhere he was bang in the middle of the Tanami Desert.

[1 : 19] Quote, So I walked for about 10 to 11 days passed out a few times on the way from heat exhaustion, lack of water. Eventually Ricky found a dam and he overturned a feed trough for a shelter and picking leeches out of the dam and trapping frogs and grasshoppers.

Quote, I ate just enough to stay alive and just hoped and prayed that someone would come along and find me. Over the next 12 weeks, 12 sevens are 84 days, his life gradually ebbed away. He shed half his body weight. He ended up so worn down he could only stumble for a few hundred meters or so each day to gather anything he could before he collapsed.

Hopelessly lost, helpless to save himself and slowly dying. Until late one afternoon, one day, farm workers on a remote property spotted a thin figure stumbling out of the bush.

And he was found. Mark Clifford, farm manager, he was just a walking skeleton. And yet miraculously, unexpectedly, he was found.

[2 : 31] They took him back to the farmstead. They wrapped him up. They called for help. The helicopter arrived, picked up Ricky, transported him to the Royal Darwin Hospital, where bit by bit his death to life recovery continued.

And with his strength returning, the local radio station interviewed him. This three months in the outback, lost, desperate, dying man, now found and saved. They interviewed him, keen to get his side of the story.

And his comment, just beautiful. I just hoped and prayed that someone would come along and find me. I feel like I've been born again. With a massive smile on his lips.

That story, because our passage this morning, Luke 19 verses 1 to 10, seems much less dramatic than that.

But it is, in fact, an even more amazing real life rescue story. Love us to see that. About a man named Zacchaeus. Who was himself hopelessly lost and dying.

[3 : 34] And yet in a life changing personal encounter, he is found and he's saved. And this moment in the ministry of Jesus is not just a one off story to wonder at from afar like Ricky McGee.

But rather in these verses, what Luke shows us is the very heart of the mission of Jesus. And the very centre of what Jesus came into the world to do.

And as a one off today, at the beginning of a new year, what we're meant to see here is the life saving, life changing impact of Jesus.

Which is the very, very best news in the world as then, so now. For us personally, for me personally. For me, and for Orchard Park and for our world.

So, with me together, would you look at this remarkable story under two headings. Here's the first one. The first nine verses. This is about the salvation of the lost.

[4 : 32] And that's what's going on here. The salvation of the lost. See how this works itself out. In 19 verse one, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through and a man was there by the name of Zacchaeus.

Not just any man. He's named and he's known personally. Zacchaeus, verse two, who was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. Which sounds good at first glance.

That's a top job and decent savings. But it's not good. As a tax collector, this Jewish man had betrayed his people. Working for the Roman occupiers, collecting taxes from his own people. He was a collaborator. A traitor. And more than that, as with other tax collectors, he's a cheat. We'll see later on in the story. It's how he makes his money. He screws his own people for more than he should with a bit of state power behind him.

And in the eyes of those around him, Zacchaeus is unclean. An outsider. Hated. Almost untouchable. I watched a film, probably 10, 12 years ago, about the liberation of the Netherlands in 1945.

[5 : 42] And during World War II, there were some Dutch women who decided desperately to collaborate with the Nazi occupiers. And they became mistresses to high ranking German officers.

They turned their backs on their people and gave their lives and their bodies in exchange for a bit of security. Until the Allies drove the Germans out. At which point, Dutch celebrations moved over into anger.

A kind of betrayal and anger at these women. They were dragged roughly into town squares and their heads grabbed and their hair sheared and hacked off. And then spat on by the mob and left alone because of what they'd done.

That is not far off Jewish attitudes towards Zacchaeus. Morally corrupt, dirty, guilty, shame on him. He's lost.

He's so far from God. This chief tax collector. And wealthy too. Wealthy too. Wealthy too. Wealthy too. Which because here in Luke's Gospel, wealth signifies deep spiritual danger.

[6 : 48] And when you're devoted to your money and not God. When you spend cash on yourself like a rich fool. When you won't care for the poor as God commands. Woe to you who are rich, says Jesus.

So far from God. And so lost, therefore, this sinner as they call him in verse 7. Because he really is. Like every human being by nature. Like you and me. And yet here in this story so obviously and extremely so.

Not lost in the Australian outback. But spiritually lost. He's a cheat. He's self-obsessed. He's sometimes uncaring. He's disobedient. He's guilty before God.

He's far from God. Cut off from God. Both now and into eternity. This man, Zacchaeus. Hopelessly lost. And yet as Jesus passes through Jericho, do you see what takes place?

[7 : 50] Just follow this through with me. Notice how Zacchaeus firstly seeks Jesus earnestly. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through and a man was there by the name of Zacchaeus.

He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. Now, verse 3, Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. Which is a first step back to life. Don't actually know what's going on in Zacchaeus' heart here. Had he simply heard about Jesus and was interested? Was he desperate for mercy and forgiveness? We don't know. But Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. But because he was short, he could not see over the crowd.

He's a short man and they're in the way. They're an obstacle. Maybe they won't let him go to the front. Get away, you sinner. But he's on a quest now and seeking. And so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way.

It's not very dignified that. I guess people might laugh at him and mock him. What are you doing up a tree, grown man? What are you doing going along to church on Sundays?

[8 : 55] But when you realise you need to encounter him, you don't mind. Zacchaeus seeks Jesus earnestly. Next, verses 5 and 6, he welcomes Jesus gladly.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus. He knows his name, by the way. And we'll come back to that. Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.

I think you're meant to imagine up the tree. Me? Stay at my house? What kind of grace is this? And obeying Jesus instantly, Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

The word welcomed is received. In Luke's Gospel, you open your home and your life and you receive the kingdom of God.

You welcome Jesus as your Lord. You become his disciple. And he, entering your life and your home, if you like, accepts you. You're not far from God anymore.

[10:00] He's come near to you. There's friendship and fellowship. There's forgiveness and acceptance. And Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus gladly with joy.

So much joy in the Gospels when ordinary people discover that he has come for me, to forgive me, even me. But it's not all joy here.

Because in verse 7, all the people saw this and began to mutter, he's gone to be the guest of a sinner. And a few chapters back, it was just the religious professionals muttering and complaining about Jesus who forgives sinners.

Now it's all the people who just can't stomach the scandal of Jesus acting like this towards those who are lost without him. But Zacchaeus keeps going.

He seeks Jesus earnestly. He welcomes Jesus gladly. Lastly, he changes his life radically. Look at verse 8.

[11:02] Look at verse 8. But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Look, Lord, I call you Lord. And so 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.

When you receive Jesus gladly as Lord, this is what happens. And this is real, joyful repentance. He's not showing off Zacchaeus.

He's not trying to earn his friendship with God. His heart has been changed. And this greedy and wealthy man now becomes compassionate and generous towards those around him, to the poor.

And he resolves to pay back those whom he's cheated, four times the amount. That's way more than necessary. But he knows that he's done wrong. And he wants to put things right in his life.

He's meant to read that and go, That's so good. I knew a man 20 years ago who became a Christian and almost overnight he stopped speaking crudely with sexual references.

[12:07] I know a couple 15 years ago who were living together and sleeping together. They both accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and they knew it was time for their lives to change.

They didn't wait a year or two or three to get married, saving up for the big occasion in the right venue. They quickly organised a low-key affair. They got married in a side chapel of a church within a month, gladly putting life right, radically.

I know a woman a few years ago who turned to Jesus Christ and said, I commit to repaying the government the benefits that I shouldn't have taken. That's real, like a radical change.

As it was for Zacchaeus. You think what a day for him. What an unexpected day. He was lost. He was a sinner, far from God, cut off from God, hopelessly lost and now Zacchaeus has been saved. saved. In verse 9, Jesus speaks to Zacchaeus and for all the mutterers to hear, Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham. What a massive thing.

[13:30] We sin, we suffer, we will die and then we will face the Lord Jesus Christ on the future day of judgment along with all people. On that day, the day of judgment and beyond that day, for the unforgiven, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth outside the kingdom of God, Jesus says. There will be destruction. We need saving from that. Jesus declares here, salvation has come for Zacchaeus.

His stealing and his greed are wiped out and forgiven. He has nothing to fear on the day of judgment. He will be in the kingdom of God. He will be safe with his Lord forever on that day. He's saved.

But the blessings of salvation for Zacchaeus are not just future, something very now about the salvation he has. I must stay at your house today, says Jesus. Verse 9, today salvation has come to this house and the forgiveness of sins today. A restored relationship with God today. Adopted into his family, you're a son of Abraham today. A new joy today. A new freedom and power to obey Jesus Christ today.

Zacchaeus in this story is a changed man in the here and now. He has been born again today. And this is what's going on here.

Verses 1 to 9, in this personal encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus, what happens? The salvation of the lost. He's a real man like us, a rotten man, utterly lost.

[15:22] And he, even he, is saved personally and powerfully through the Lord Jesus Christ. You and I are meant to hear this, this ancient story, this truthful thing that happened.

We are meant to be drawn in, you know? Can you connect yourself with Zacchaeus? I mean, if I can ask, do you know what it is to be morally compromised or dirty or guilty and shame on you? Do you know what it is to be greedy, tight with what you have, mean and uncaring towards those around you? If I can ask, is there stuff in your life, public or secret, even from the past couple of weeks, that means that the title sinner sticks to you?

Or do you ever secretly wonder if you're too far gone beneath the nice front that you put on? And could God really come close to and save someone like you? This is for you.

Zacchaeus receives salvation. So can you. Or another angle. Do you see how gladly Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus?

[16:49] See how freely he gives his money away. How straightforwardly he sees what he's done, what's wrong, and he makes it right. He just does it. Does that not grab you?

And make you think that's right, of course. Or do you hear the announcement of Jesus, salvation had come, and does it remind you of how wonderfully safe and secure we can be restored to God? Should make you think of that. The story of Zacchaeus should draw us in. I want to be like that and him. I need to be like that. I know what this is about in my life.

The story of Zacchaeus is for us. And here's the massive reason why. The reason why what happens to Zacchaeus here is for us.

The salvation of the lost. Is because this is not just one story. This is just not one side bit of what Jesus has come to do. But rather the salvation of the lost made fleshy and real in Zacchaeus.

[17:56] That is the mission of Jesus. That the salvation of lost individuals is the very heart, the very centre of what Jesus came to do.

And it is what we're about here at St. John's in 2026. And you see that in verse 10. So finally look at this. Jesus has entered Jericho.

He's called Zacchaeus and stayed at his house. Zacchaeus has welcomed him and changed his life around. And Jesus says in the verse before. Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham.

And now sort of standing back if you like. Jesus proclaims. For the son of man came to seek and to save.

The lost. That's a mission statement. We know what those are. That is a summary of what a company, an organisation is here for.

[18:51] Starbucks. To inspire and nurture the human spirit. One person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time. That's a mission statement. It's lovely. But whatever. Jesus Christ, son of God, what is your mission?

Why did you come down to us? Why did we just celebrate Christmas? Why take to yourself a human nature in the womb of a virgin? Why did you come to grow and live and suffer and die on a cross and rise again?

What did you come for? Why did you come to make a human nature in the womb of a virgin? The son of man came to seek and to save the lost. That is his mission. He did not come to reward the righteous.

He did not come to advise the ignorant. He did not come to make society a little bit better. Like a heat-seeking missile, Jesus came into the world as a saviour seeking the lost.

He came to win and then offer and give salvation to men and women and boys and girls who are hopelessly lost in their sins on the outside, far from God and facing eternal death.

[20:00] That is the mission of Jesus, both then and today. And it is the news that we and our world need to hear in 2026. You notice it actually in the story.

In Luke 19, Jesus is travelling on the road up to Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem, we're told everything that's written by the prophets about the son of man will be fulfilled.

He'll be handed over to the Gentiles and they'll mock him, insult him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And as Jesus passes through Jericho here on the way to his death, you could think that Zacchaeus is sort of stepping forward and standing out trying to grab onto him.

Except in verse 5, on the way to his death, as Jesus reaches the sycamore fig tree, it's Jesus who looks up. And it's Jesus who knows Zacchaeus by name.

And it's Jesus who calls him and commands him to come down. And it's Jesus who says, I must stay at your house today. It is Jesus who has an eye for this man and on purpose seeks him and saves him.

[21 : 07] As he travels to Jerusalem to die on a cross, sacrificing his life and paying the penalty for the stealing and the greed of Zacchaeus and countless lost sinners like him.

And on the third day, Jesus will rise again. Salvation for Zacchaeus won. Salvation for Zacchaeus won.

Salvation for Zacchaeus. Isn't that glorious? What should we do today at the beginning of a new year? There might be some who are here this morning and you know that right now, today, you are ongoingly lost.

Not like Ricky McGee in the Australian Outback. But you know that you are spiritually lost. And you are far gone. You are far from God and dying without him.

But you are here this morning. And if that's you, would you know that the Lord Jesus Christ, even today, is seeking and saving the lost.

[22 : 40] He's seeking people like you. And so whatever you've done, come to him. Say to him, Lord Jesus, pray.

Lord Jesus, I want to see you and know you. Have mercy on me. I turn to you. Forgive me and save me. It's not an empty prayer into nothingness. Address him.

Address him. And welcome him into your life as your Lord and Savior. And these verses show us that you will receive new life.

Like Zacchaeus. Like millions of people around the world today. A new joy. A new freedom. A new power to live for him.

You will receive salvation now and into eternity. So many of us here at the start of this new year, already followers of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 37] Maybe for months or maybe decades. Is he not a wonderful saviour? Like Zacchaeus, he took you when you were lost and dying in your sins.

He knew your name personally. He knew everything you'd ever done. And yet he sought you out, even you, and he saved you. And right now today you're forgiven, restored, adopted into God's family and you're saved for all eternity.

And all of that is free, undeserved grace from your Lord Jesus Christ to you, a sinner. Do you know that? Two questions.

Having been brought to him, will you live for him gladly this year? Lord Jesus, I welcome you into my house once more.

Lord Jesus, how wonderful to have you in my house and ruling my life this year. I am so glad to follow you. Will you live for him gladly?

[24 : 41] Will you obey him radically? Here and now I turn my back on behaviour that displeases you. With your help, Lord, I will change.

I will give back four times the amount to those I've sinned against. Will you accept his salvation? Will you live for him gladly? Will you obey him radically?

And lastly, will we be a church that lives in and lines ourself up with the mission of Jesus Christ? I don't think we are really, but not an uptight bunch of religious people looking down on the sinners out there, tut-tutting them and saying, stay away.

Instead, moved by this gospel and mission of Christ, will we get out into our homes and our families and our community and our world with this glorious news for all people.

That the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. And as he has saved lost and far off from God people like us, so he offers that wonderful salvation to every single person we know.

[25 : 49] That's the mission of Jesus. And we're a part of it. And we're to go out into the world and continue his work. I'm going to pray and then we're going to sing together.

We praise and thank you, our Lord and Father, at the start of this year. Thank you, that you sent your Son into the world. Thank you that he, the Lord Jesus Christ, came to seek and to save the lost.

Thank you for his power. Thank you for his compassion. Thank you for his death on the cross for us, wiping out our sins. That we might know him and you for all eternity.

Please, for us at the start of this year, undo us and capture us again by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And would you help us please to shape our lives as individuals and as a church around this wonderful mission of your Son. We pray in Jesus' name.

[27 : 06] Amen. Amen.