

The Salvation House

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] I wonder if you could pick that up and turn to what Jacqueline just read for us on page 878, Luke chapter 19. As you're doing that, let me pray. Pray for us.

Lord Jesus, please give us an increase of your grace that we could truly hear your word. And that your word in our lives and hearts might continue to bear forth the fruit of salvation.

As you intend, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well now, the next five Sundays, six Sundays, including this one, we're going to hear messages from the third of the four evangelists, the four gospel writers.

And each of these evangelists, though, give us a portrait of Jesus. And Luke's portrayal of our Lord throughout his gospel is that Jesus is this spirit-filled evangelist, gospelizer, who brings good news to the big world through this little Israel.

And our story today, as you've heard read, is that of Zacchaeus. And it's between, actually, four stories. Two on the front end and two on the back end. And in chapter 18, it's a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector regarding prayer.

[1 : 26] So there's some similar hints to today's story. But also a blind beggar who, like Zacchaeus, wanted to see Jesus. And after the story of Zacchaeus in chapter 19, there's a parable of ten minas, which is money, regarding the fruit of faith.

And then, finally, there's this triumphal entry that follows our story today, which is a procession a little bit like, but larger than the one with Zacchaeus. So there's just two aspects that I want us to kind of draw our attention to today in this reading.

One is a kind of a procession to this tree. And the transformation, then, is the second one that actually happens in Zacchaeus' life in his house. And this story that we heard today is a very well-known one since Sunday school, but it's more than a children's story.

Jesus isn't a nice man showing compassion to the tax man. Jesus is better and bolder than that. Jesus is the Savior of the world.

And the title of this sermon, as Jeremy's given it for all these sermons throughout these next five weeks, is the Salvation House. Jesus brought salvation to a house and to a person in Jericho.

[2 : 38] But not only to this house, as we'll see over the next five weeks, we'll have these themes of a house, which there's a hole and a center and someone is forgiven, where life is brought to a house and joy as well.

But one thing to focus on is all six of these sermons are going to take place in a house. And how did Jesus bring this salvation, this joy, this forgiveness, this life, wholeness to these people?

Well, Luke tells us here, which is a major theme in the gospel, that Jesus came to seek and to save those who were lost. So look with me, then, at this story in these two dimensions.

At a procession of Jesus to a tree and the transformation of Zacchaeus and his house. So first, the procession of Jesus to this tree.

Now, after the third and final foretelling of Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus strides into Jerusalem with a big following or procession. He enters and passes through Jericho.

[3 : 38] And it's not kind of a casual procession, but very, very intentional. Jesus had his traveling companions, including his 12 disciples, and word got out about Jesus.

Jesus, and the people of Jericho, Jericho is kind of like this Palm City or Palm Springs or Palm Desert, maybe kind of a Las Vegas. Well, these people turned out.

And surprisingly, a man named Zacchaeus, we'll call him Zac for short, he did too. He was small in stature. Which may explain why he ascended that tree, but also, as we heard, was also to hide, to be somewhat undercover.

But don't you find Zac just a little bit intriguing? Not because of his size, his climbing skills, or his ability to race ahead, but the other details that are given to us. Zac is a chief tax collector, a rich and filthy one.

Here's another detail, though, that you might not know about Zac. His name means just one, or pure one. When you think about that.

[4 : 43] Well, Luke could have left out the name of this rich tax collector, just like he did the blind man that Jesus stopped to see and heal on his way into Jericho.

But Luke didn't do that. Right? Well, Zac, this guy who is named as this pure one, the righteous one, is anything but that.

Tax collectors, and especially chief ones, were by no means righteous. Zac was hated and hurting, even though he was rich. Zac was really effective, as well as really isolated.

But this little man is no more casual in his interest of Jesus than Jesus is casual in his procession, actually, on the way to Jerusalem for his death and his resurrection. So why does Zac go up this tree?

Zac wasn't looking to have a kind of a selfie with Jesus that day. Right? He wasn't visually stimulated and in that kind of a culture.

[5 : 44] He wasn't there for kind of missing out on the big event of the day. Or he wasn't playing Pokemon Go. Verse 3 reads this. Zac wanted to know, who is this Jesus?

Not just, what does he look like? Maybe he wondered, will he heal someone? Will he tell some great parable? What happens next is quite fascinating.

Jesus, the one who seeks and to save those who are lost, came to this place. And he looked up, and what did he see in that tree? Was it kind of a hybrid of someone like Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump?

That doesn't work for you. Well, was it kind of a Danny DeVito? Well, Jesus says this. Zac, hurry and come down, for I must stay.

I must stay at your house today. So, what did Zac do? He pulls out his iPhone. Right? Looks at his calendar. And he notices that his schedule's full.

[6 : 53] And he says, well, do you think you could meet me at the synagogue down the street tomorrow? I hear that they're really good at spontaneous hospitality. No, that's not what Zac said.

But he may have thought something like this. Well, I haven't raked the courtyard, I haven't dusted the furniture, and I haven't stoked my fireplace yet. Since I haven't had guests from the time I became a chief tax collector.

Money hasn't exactly bought me love or friendship. I don't know what he thought, but here's what Luke tells us. He says that he hurried and came down and received Jesus joyfully.

So you see, though, Jesus is not nice, but he's better. And he's about to give Zac more than his money could have ever promised, his aspirations could have ever achieved, and as the security of his home ever provided for him.

Jesus entered Zac's life through his house like no one ever before or since. It's just step through the doorway of Zac's life and into his heart.

[8 : 02] In fact, Zac's heart became Christ's home, his permanent residence that day. And isn't this just the way Jesus works, operates, ministers?

You don't have to know him that much before you find out when you open the door just a little bit, he's right there. Not to condemn, but to convert.

Bring comfort. Jesus is just that compelling. His gracious and merciful way grips our hearts. And Jesus knows that it must be that way, even if we're not so sure.

So that's Jesus' procession to Zac at the tree that day. But something more than just a procession happens. The transformation of Zac follows. And Jesus' presence and conversation with Zac radically transforms his life.

It wasn't enough for Jesus just to pass through or pass around Jericho. And we've all participated in some kind of passing through or parade or procession from time to time.

[9 : 16] And while nice and sometimes celebratory, events like this aren't really that life-changing. But in this case, as is in our case as well, transformation begins at Jesus' insertion and assertion into our life.

It's never an intrusion, though. And this procession is a prelude to a big change in Zac's life. It's not the procession, though, but it's the person who brings about this change, Jesus Christ.

And until that day, Jesus walked through Jericho. Zac had only heard about Jesus, maybe. It was all hearsay up to this point. Right?

It sounded pretty good to him, probably. Jesus taking on the religious authorities. Jesus taking in the sick and the sinners. And maybe Zac wondered, did he have a chance?

But something better than chance happened to Zac that day. Mount Baker-sized change came to Zac when Jesus called him by name.

[10:22] Now, Zac encountered Jesus. First hand, he got to know Jesus. Jesus revealed himself, revealed God, revealed the Lord to Zacchaeus.

And Jesus gave Zac more than a chance. Jesus knew Zac better than he knew himself. And Jesus is just like that, isn't he?

He's not nice. He's far better. And he'll show interest to scoundrels and swindlers like Zac and everyday sinners. Well, not only did Jesus know Zac better than he knew himself, but he wanted Zac.

He wanted Zac as much as anyone else that day. He didn't want him more than anyone else that day. But he wanted Zac as much as anyone else. And so Jesus seeks Zac out.

Zac thinks he's seeking him from a distance, arm's length. But it's Jesus the one who's seeking. And Christianity is God seeking us out. From the time of Adam and Eve, way back in Genesis.

[11:27] I don't know if you remember back in Genesis after the fall. But the words to Adam and Eve of God were when they sinned, where were you? He sought them out.

And we're no different. Right? Jesus says to us, like Zac, I must stay in your house today. I must reside with you.

And we can say yes or no. But even though he wasn't walking through Jericho again, Jesus, Jesus will keep walking through our life. The grace of God opens us up to the Son of Man who seeks us. We think we're seeking him, but all along he's actually seeking us at the right time. Now when our seeking meets Jesus' seeking, transformation takes place.

And transformation is salvation. Verse 9 we read, Today salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

[12:33] And this salvation is faith. It is in keeping with repentance. It is the kind of faith that produces fruit. And look at Zac's response.

Here's the fruit. Love of money and possessions is transformed then into love of God and others.

Zac says something shocking and easy to miss. He says, you see it there?

I give. The only thing that he gave before this were tax assessments and grief. But now he's not just giving money. He's giving his goods.

His house became a free thrift store that day. No more defrauding, but restoration. And not a kind of a tit for a tat. Four times he actually gave back, which was the custom, the prescription of the law.

Well, following Jesus transformed and freed Zac up. Most of the time we hold back from this kind of freedom.

[13:33] Right? We measure our giving. We ask, how can I give? Or how can I possibly do this? But I think the question is not a how one, but a who one. Who is doing the giving here?

It's Jesus giving through Zac. Who do we give to? Anyone in need. No strings attached. Who did Jesus die for? Everyone.

No strings attached. Some might say, Zac, have you lost your mind and your money? Well, actually, he was lost before, just like the sheep and the coin and the sons in chapter 15 of Luke.

But lost doesn't mean disoriented or downcast or even disconnected or missing or forgotten. Lost means alienated, out of sync with the Lord.

All bad news. No good news. Walking with Jesus looks like, then, the life and the generosity of our Lord. A cross-shaped life which proceeds to us from our Lord.

[14:44] But also from us to others. Salvation is a grace-filled life. It is for us. But then it is from us as brother to brother and sister to sister.

That's the salvation that was brought to the house of Zacchaeus this day. And so what do we do with this? What do we do with this story? Maybe what it does for us or what it does to us is we think differently about who we are and how it is that we act.

It trains and transforms our identities to become more like that of Jesus Christ. And when we do that, we know that Jesus then comes to seek and save the lost.

And we become members of this house of salvation. It changes our identity, who we are, and the way we treat those who are coming to and fro and in and out of our lives. And once we know who Jesus is and we know who we are, this household of faith comes to birth. It is what we call the church. It is the family of God.

[15 : 53] And yes, then, the life of Jesus to us and for us then flows from us and through us and in those around the world in which we live.

Amen.