

Luke 19:1-10

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[0 : 00] Well, as Will said, through August we have family services and we are in Luke's Gospel. And today we're going to look at this key event, the conversion of Zacchaeus.

Jesus is marching up to Jerusalem, but he has to come to Jericho before he turns right up the hill to Jerusalem. And as he passes through Jericho, he meets Zacchaeus.

And the great beauty of this story is that we don't have to interpret it, that Jesus makes clear what the meaning is and what's really going on. If you look down at the end in verse 9, Jesus says, Today salvation has come to this house, since Zacchaeus is also a son of Abraham.

And then here is the key phrase, For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. So two questions very briefly.

What does it look like when Jesus is seeking the lost? And what does it look like when Jesus saves the lost? Question one, what does it look like when Jesus seeks the lost?

[1 : 08] Well, we seek Jesus. That's what it looks like. We begin to seek Jesus. So if you look down in verse 3, we are told that Zacchaeus was seeking to connect with Jesus.

And it's almost funny. I mean, here is a guy who is very wealthy, but he's blocked by the self-righteous crowd that hate him.

And he's small, and he forgets his dignity and scampers up a tree so that he can see Jesus. And it's not just idle curiosity for Zacchaeus.

He has heard that Jesus welcomes bad people. Jesus even has a tax collector as one of his 12 disciples.

And Zacchaeus may be saying to himself, I'm so sick of my life. Is there any possibility that Jesus may welcome me? As Will pointed out, Israel was under foreign occupation.

[2 : 12] And the way the Romans squeezed the Jewish noses into their ownership was they pushed, they squeezed taxes out of them. And they appointed local Jewish people to be tax collectors, knowing that they would steal money for themselves during it, because they had the backing of the Roman overlords.

It's not possible to imagine a more deeply despised group of people than tax collectors. And Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector and rich.

And perhaps Zacchaeus comforted himself with the thought when he started out in this job, because money does give you this sense of raising you up above your circumstances.

It gives you just a little step up so you can look down on other people who don't like you. But it wasn't working. The comfort in his money was emptying day by day.

The power to buy had left him separate from his community, separate from his ethics, and spiritually empty. And even though in Jericho Zacchaeus is the last person that you would expect to be seeking Jesus, he is.

[3 : 30] And that's proof. It's proven by the amount of trouble he goes to get access to him. And there are likely people in our lives as well, who you might say, that's the last person who would be seeking Jesus.

But they may well be. And you may well be. And so Zacchaeus is willing to go to any length. He turns his back on the ridicule, climbs up the tree, because he's seriously seeking Jesus.

But when we come to verse 5, there's a reversal. We ask the question, well, who's really seeking whom? In verse 5, without being asked, Jesus stops under Zacchaeus' tree.

Without being asked, Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name. And without being asked, Jesus offers himself as a guest to Zacchaeus. And I think it's in that moment that all that Zacchaeus had been looking for in money begins to look pretty dull.

He's confronted with the sheer kindness and grace of Jesus. And the invitation of Jesus and the kindness of Jesus to Zacchaeus puts Zacchaeus in the immediate place of decision.

[4 : 48] Hurry, come down. Now, today, says Jesus. Because when we realise that Jesus is seeking us, he always calls on us for an immediate response, to open ourselves to him, even our home, to trust all that we have and all that we are into his hands in some way because of his sheer kindness and grace.

And this is why Jesus says, I've come from heaven. I have come to seek and to save the lost. He is marching up to Jerusalem and within days he will be crucified.

But here in Jericho, he stops one person, a person who does not deserve his kindness, who does not deserve to be saved, a person who is lost because Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost.

This is the great good news of Christianity. It's not that God is lost or God is hiding and we need to go on a long search to find him.

It's that in Jesus Christ, God has come to search for us and to save us. He's seeking those who are very far away to bring us home.

[6 : 05] He's seeking to make enemies into friends and into family. And that's what it looks like when Jesus is seeking us. Well, secondly, what does it look like when Jesus saves the lost?

Do you know there are 78 search and rescue groups in British Columbia, up and down the coast? And this last year, 2022, they found and rescued 1,500 separate people.

In COVID, the year before it went up to 2,100, more people got lost in COVID. And I think there's a sermon there. The search and rescue people say that their work has shifted over the past couple of years from searching to rescuing.

Because it's one thing to find someone who's lost, it can be a whole different thing to bring them home. Even when you find someone, it can be quite a dangerous thing to rescue them and bring them home.

And Jesus' view is that all are spiritually lost. And most people are vaguely offended by that idea and have no idea that they are lost.

[7 : 15] And much of what drives us is the desire to not panic to face up to the fact that we're spiritually lost. And what marks out Jesus from every other Christian, from every other spirituality and every other religion, is that he does not come and offer us a map to find our way home.

He comes to seek and to save us and to bring us home, to rescue us from sin and from death, to find us, to put us on our shoulders, put us on his shoulders, and to draw us home to the joy of heaven.

This very great big idea of salvation is not just reserved, though, for what happens when we die. It comes into our lives now with very practical results.

And the way salvation shows itself in Zacchaeus, and the way it shows itself in all our lives, is by a change, a transformation, a reconstruction, a remodelling of our lives inwardly and outwardly.

That's why the order of the passage is so important. Did you notice this? That Jesus waits to verse 9 to announce salvation. He doesn't do it in verse 6, when Zacchaeus jumps down the tree and invites him home.

[8 : 38] He doesn't do it in verse 8, when the crowd is angry at Jesus and tells Jesus he shouldn't go home with Zacchaeus. But it's only after verse 8 that Jesus announces salvation.

It's only after there is a clear and radical change in Zacchaeus. Because something has happened in Zacchaeus that makes him a completely new person.

His life has been turned upside down. Instead of being driven by dollars, he's now a man of spontaneous generosity. Not because his good deeds will save him, but the good deeds are proof that he has been saved from sin and from death.

And if you look down at verse 8, I think Zacchaeus uses a word that he's probably never used before. It's the word give. I give. I give. I give. I give. He probably struggled to say it.

I give. Until now it was all I take. The giver, sorry, the taker is transformed into the giver.

[9 : 46] The extortionist is transformed into the philanthropist. And there's extravagance in what he does. You know, the Old Testament commands, give 10% of all you have to the poor.

Zacchaeus says, I'm going to give 50% away to the poor. And in the Old Testament, it commands, if I've stolen something, I make 20% restitution. Zacchaeus says, I'm going to make 400% restitution.

Which incidentally indicates what a wealthy person he was. What has come over Zacchaeus? Jesus says, he has been saved.

He's found something worth more than all the money in the world. It has to do with the acceptance of God, the love of the Father, the welcome of Jesus, the new identity as the son of Abraham, and no one can take it away.

And that's what salvation looks like. It's a new heart, based on the free acceptance of Christ. And it just turns our lives upside down. We're no longer casting around in the woods to find our way back to God.

[10:55] We have been found, and we have been brought home. And it makes a change of values in us. Which means if there is no change in our hearts and lives, in our homes and in our work life, then there is no real repentance, and conversion is not there.

And one of the most striking things about the revolution in our lives is that it shows, not just in the way we treat God, it shows in the way we treat others.

Zacchaeus' new generosity wasn't so much a financial transaction. It wasn't because he'd overstepped the money line. Now he had a genuine concern for the poor.

He was very concerned for those he had defrauded. And where does this come from? It's a joyful revolution, created by the grace of God, taking root in his hearts.

Salvation is nothing but a miracle from God. It doesn't come from our great effort or turning over a new leaf. It comes through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

[11:58] It takes the foolishness of God. Conversion takes bitter people and makes them sweeter. Conversion takes cynical people and makes them humble.

Conversion takes the cruel and makes them gentle. The selfish and greedy and make them generous. It takes the thoughtless and it makes us kindly.

And the key is because salvation is receiving the person of Jesus, as he says in verse 8, Lord, Lord, I give, I restore. I have received Jesus as he really is, as Lord.

And when Christ is Lord, he lays hand on my life so that there are things that I can no longer do and there are things that I need to begin doing. And there may be a radical change overnight, depends what way you're living, but it most certainly will mean an ongoing change as Jesus continues to transform different areas of our life until we go to be with him and enjoy the full delight of salvation. So before I conclude, let me give the kids a minute's warning. Boys and girls, in a minute, just one minute, I'm going to turn around and ask if any of you want to show, oh, that looks beautiful, some of your drawings to the congregation.

[13:18] So how do I conclude this? Well, let's bring Zacchaeus back from heaven, shall we? Let's disturb his delight in heaven and bring him back and ask him two questions.

Okay, Mr. Zacchaeus, number one, that was quite a day when you met Jesus, but was it worth it? That's a very good question, David. Thank you for asking it.

You often ask good questions, not always. Actually, that day, my net worth dropped 70%. But what I gained that day is infinitely worth more.

I came to know Jesus, the Son of God, as my own. I experienced his kindness in a life-changing way. And though I thought I was seeking him, I realized he was seeking me and he restored me. He restored me to community and I've enjoyed his fellowship and his forgiveness all the rest of my life and for the rest of eternity.

[14:24] That's a very good answer. Thank you, Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus, have you got any advice for us here at St. John's? Yes, that's a good question, David. Yes, on that day, there were a lot of people who had written me off.

They thought I was too far gone to be saved. I knew I was a sinner, but I didn't know I was lost. I didn't know there was a God who loved me and was willing to give himself for me.

And my advice to St. John's would be to be more like Jesus than the crowd. Because every church needs to be the kind of place where those who are very far gone can find the kindness of Christ.

Every church needs to be the kind of place that doesn't condemn everyone as a sinner, but holds out the seeking and saving of Jesus Christ so that people might be saved.

I think St. John's ought to be a community of contrast, gripped by the gospel of grace, reaching out with the love of Jesus. Thank you, Zacchaeus.

[15:30] I couldn't have put it better myself. Thank you. Thank you.