

Luke 19:1-10 "Jesus Meets the Bad News Bears"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We're going to look at Luke 19 this morning, and there's a well-known story in Luke 19 of Jesus and a wee little man who climbs up a sycamore tree.

I'm not singing, cried enough. Now, kids, does anybody know who this story is about? You can say it. Zacchaeus, that's right.

This is a good one if you like drawing pictures of what we're talking about. This one's kind of a fun one to draw. But before we get into the story itself, I want us to look back where we've been the last few weeks.

Jesus has been encountering some people on his way to Jerusalem. This is at the very end of his earthly ministry. He's going to the cross, and he's talking a lot about eternity and about his kingdom, what it means to be in his family.

[1 : 09] In a sense, you can think of Jesus in Luke chapter 18, where we've been. That's page 877 of the Bible in the pew in front of you, 877 if you want to look at these stories for just a second.

Think of it as Jesus drafting a team, so to speak, that will show everyone really clearly what team Jesus is like, what his kingdom is characterized by.

That's kind of what he's doing as he goes through this. So imagine that draft scenario if you're a sports fan, and you're picking teams. You've all done that, right?

Jesus picks first, beginning of chapter 18. With the first selection in the Luke 18 eternal kingdom draft, Jesus selects a widow, one being treated unjustly, but God's on her side.

Well, the next team is up, the other coach says, I'll take the obvious first pick, give me the Pharisee. I'll take the Pharisee on my team, that's tough to beat.

[2 : 15] You can't really compete with the Pharisee. Jesus, why don't you take two picks to kind of make up for it? And Jesus says, okay, I'll take the tax collector and the little children.

That's what happens next, right? Those are the ones that Jesus welcomes to him. But the other team adds the rich young ruler, looking pretty strong here on the other side.

Now we've got religious and social and political power all coming together. We've got influence happening, quite a team developing. Jesus, you can have two more to make up for it.

And Jesus selects a blind beggar. So now we get one more this week. Blind beggar was last week.

We got one more chance, Jesus. You're going to need to round this team out a little bit. We need a quarterback. We need somebody with some spiritual clout going on here. Jesus, what do you think this team is missing?

[3 : 17] And Jesus says, I'll take another tax collector. Oh, are you kidding me? We've already got one of those. See, it's the upside down, unexpected nature of Jesus's kingdom, isn't it?

The blue chip prospects are out. They're going to be suiting up for the fighting Pharisees team over here. You like that? I worked hard on that. They're over here.

And the ones who got cut from their middle school football team, they're on Jesus's bad news bears. If you've ever seen that film. A widow, two tax collectors, some little children, a blind beggar. What is Jesus trying to show us here? What's he doing? Let's follow the story of Zacchaeus this morning. We'll end up back at the roster of the bad news bears, but let's walk through this passage together.

Verse 1. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

[4 : 30] I want you to imagine this morning that you're Zacchaeus. You're a Jew who has gotten rich off of your former friends and neighbors and your former employees.

So none of them like you anymore. Most of your friends these days live out of town. They work for Rome. You're not wanted anywhere.

Socially outcast, spiritually left out, behaving immorally for a living. Always hanging out with Gentiles. But you've learned how to work the system.

And how to make a lot of money. Then Luke tells us something unexpected. Zacchaeus was curious about Jesus.

And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowd, he could not because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him.

[5 : 32] For he was about to pass that way. Zacchaeus was seeking to see who Jesus was. I wonder why.

Luke doesn't explain directly and completely. But why do you think you'd be interested if you were Zacchaeus? It could be Zacchaeus had started to feel unfulfilled by all his money.

He had this sense that something else of value and significance was out there. And he felt that gnawing sense of emptiness that many of us have felt at the top of our profession or the peak of our success in life and just empty.

It could be Zacchaeus felt lonely and left out. I mean, you look at the text. Sure, he was short. But wasn't there somebody in all of Jericho who cared about him enough to let him kind of slip in up to the front of the crowd where he could see if he wanted to so badly?

Apparently, nobody around cared enough about Zacchaeus. No one wanted to do him any favors. Perhaps Zacchaeus felt convicted in his heart over his dishonesty, his thievery, his mistreatment of others.

[6 : 59] I mean, he knew this was against God's law, right? He'd grown up a Jew. He knew better than this. But it had been a long time since he cared about God's law.

Well, rumor had it there was this new teacher who had a spin on God's law and spoke of forgiveness. Maybe you felt one of these things in your own life, that gnawing emptiness, that painful loneliness, deep conviction.

My life's not the way it should be. Something that made you say it's at least worth exploring Jesus. I think the context of this passage especially indicates we should consider another possibility.

In the midst of any or all of those emotions that he was feeling, it seems quite likely that chief tax collector Zacchaeus would have known that this rabbi was different from all the others when it came to tax collectors.

You think he'd heard? That there was a tax collector, Levi, one of the close associates of this Jesus? In fact, that Jesus was known for hanging out with tax collectors?

[8 : 18] That he even told stories about tax collectors being the ones who were in with God? This was unheard of. If I was a generally despised and unwelcome tax collector, such a unique person would interest me.

Who is this Jesus? What does he have to say to someone like me who the rest of the religious leaders seem to have written off, but apparently he hasn't?

So for some combination of reasons, Zacchaeus is interested in Jesus. I assume for one reason or another you are too, being here today.

Maybe you just want to see what all the fuss is about. Maybe there's another person that you want to please and they want you to be here. Or maybe you've heard about the grace of Jesus, that he offers relationship with the holy God of the universe to the least deserving, to people who could never earn it.

That he claims that he is the way and the truth and the life for eternity and for people whom everyone else has written off. He apparently doesn't.

[9 : 34] He offers eternal life and you're one of those people and so you're here. Let's see what happens as Jesus passes the sycamore tree.

Well, actually, he doesn't pass it, does he? Jesus has this knack for stopping for the most unexpected people.

Verse 5, 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.

Jesus calls him by name and he invites himself into his home. This is remarkably unusual. This would never happen. And Jesus says on top of that, It's really important.

I must stay at your house, he says. Of all the houses in Jericho, I must stay at your house, Zacchaeus. It's our first indication here that Jesus is an even better seeker than Zacchaeus is, isn't he?

[10:44] Isn't that true for us? And isn't that such good news? That God knows us? And that he pursues us way better than we do him?

Jesus is coming into Zacchaeus' home and he tells him he's going to stay at his home while Zacchaeus is still sitting up there in the tree, awkwardly, kind of looking down.

Did I get caught up here? And Jesus says, Hey, I'm coming into your house. We're going to have fellowship. We're going to have relationship. It's this glorious picture of the grace of Jesus that meets us where we are and doesn't leave us where we are.

More on that in a bit. But Jesus meets Zacchaeus in the middle of a messy life where Zacchaeus has very little sorted out and Jesus invites himself into that mess, that confusion, that curiosity that Zacchaeus has.

You know, he may be doing that with you this morning. He may be even more eager to know you than you are to know him.

[11:56] You don't have to figure everything out first. That's not how it works with Jesus. His grace is so big that you can come with your mess, with your persistent questions you still have, with your ongoing struggles that you haven't sorted out yet.

You can come to him and he's big enough and his grace is enough to handle it. Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. So, verse 6, he hurried and came down and received Jesus joyfully.

The first indication that Jesus, having met Zacchaeus where he was, doesn't leave him there. Let me suggest to you, remember, you're Zacchaeus, right?

Try to feel what he's feeling. Just imagine, Zacchaeus probably hadn't had a lot of house guests recently. Certainly none who were Jewish. No rabbis over for dinner in a long time in Zacchaeus' house.

Said too much in this culture about your relationship, who you were to be with a despicable tax collector in that kind of intimate setting. But Jesus doesn't hesitate, does he?

[13:11] He enters in and Zacchaeus is overjoyed. Jesus doesn't leave him alone. The first big change that we see for Zacchaeus is that he has a relationship and it brings him joy.

Relationship with Jesus brings joy, deep joy, especially into a tired life. I didn't say constant happiness where everything works out all the time and always goes your way, but joy.

Most of us know what it's like to live with little or no joy. Even after you've met Jesus, many of us know the drudgery of living life without relying on him.

You can talk to anyone in this room, but it's a big part of my story. I've been in the church my whole life. Living in the church and trying to keep up the appearance that you've got things together all the time is exhausting.

Yes? Pretending you don't struggle deeply and you can handle things on your own is burdensome. Trying to be good enough day after day after day becomes often joyless drudgery.

[14:30] Don't tell me that it doesn't because I know better. It can be hard. In fact, I think the most exhausting part for me that I've experienced at different times in my life is trying to pretend you have joy when you don't.

That's an exhausting thing to fake, isn't it? I'm joyful, but I'm not. But knowing that Jesus is good enough for me that He actually takes my burden and frees me from that to live and to love, there's so much joy there, isn't there?

Have you felt that difference? And knowing I live in union with Him safe in His grace that I'm beloved even in my failures on the joy of that.

That's joy you can only find in Jesus. Only in relationship with Him can that be true. Only by knowing Jesus do we find that joy that we've looked for in so many other places.

And Zacchaeus finds that. Jesus doesn't leave us where we are. Alone. Exhausted. Joyless.

[15:49] Verse 7, others start grumbling about the sinfulness of Jesus' new friend. And meanwhile, Jesus is transforming Zacchaeus.

Verse 8, Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor and if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

What in the world? What's happening here? The thieving tax collector who we all know is used to scheming how much he can take, is scheming now how much he can give.

What's happened? We don't get all the details of his conversation with Jesus, but his response to the good news you can't miss, can you? This is not like Zacchaeus.

This is how the grace of Jesus works in our lives. Jesus meets us where we are, but as we get to know who he is, we're not the same person anymore.

[16:52] The only explanation for this radical change in Zacchaeus is that he no longer finds life in the same place, does he? The money he hoped would make him happy and significant, but you can have it.

He now has a better source. Everyone can see it. So when the value of Jesus comes home in your heart, people will see a change.

That's what his grace does. Some of you have shared with me an instantaneous change, freedom from the need for drugs or alcohol or pornography or something like that when Jesus came into your life.

And then sometimes the impact of experiencing the grace of Jesus works change in us over time and it attacks even more acceptable idols that are every bit as wicked.

Most of you know I'm a sports guy, which means that I used to play sports and now I watch others play sports. That's what that means. But most of you don't know the version of me whose emotions went up and down based on the results of the game.

[18:12] I mean, I still enjoy a good game, don't get me wrong, but I don't find life there like I used to. In fact, I remember being in India last fall and just so excited about what God was doing there that I genuinely, I nearly forgot Clemson was even playing and I honestly struggled to care about the game when I did remember.

Another subtle one where Jesus is still practically working on my heart is food or better, comfort eating. where do you go when you're getting overwhelmed or discouraged?

How do you soothe your anxious heart? We all go somewhere. Food has often been a go-to for me and often one that I have used to avoid needing and resting in and rejoicing in Jesus.

and go somewhere else to take the edge off. And God is teaching me that repentance, real, true repentance can actually look like walking away from the donut and actually turning to Jesus for a few minutes and receiving comfort from Him and acknowledging to Him that I need Him rather than trying to ignore that and find comfort somewhere else.

And it really is fuller and longer lasting comfort that I find in Jesus. For some of you it may be food. For many of you it is sports.

[19:57] But there are other things. Where is the glory of Jesus' grace displacing in your heart another source of life?

And where does that still practically need to happen in your heart? Where does the glory of knowing Him and being freed by who Jesus is need to push out another place that you run for comfort in your pain?

What a beautiful thing when Jesus helps the money addict become generous like we just read. When He helps the sports addict become reasonable.

The food addict become self-controlled. the success addict become content. Whether it happens overnight or whether it happens over 50 years.

It's beautiful what He does. And that those things happen not because we one day figured life out. That's not how it works. It's not what happened for me.

[21:03] I didn't one day decide I've got my stuff together and I'm going to live the way I should. But it happens because we're so full of Jesus that we don't need to draw life out of anything else.

Indeed Jesus says here's what's happened. Verse 9 Today salvation has come to this house since He also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

This is what salvation looks like Jesus says. Certainly not that Zacchaeus has earned it but that Zacchaeus is demonstrating true faith which always has new life as a part of it.

Something else that's more valuable than what I used to value. Zacchaeus knows and loves the one whom to know is life itself is fullness of life and freedom and joy.

Today salvation has come to this house. Yes salvation Jesus Himself has come to this house. Never has it been more true than it was this day with Zacchaeus.

[22:18] When Jesus walks into your life salvation safety eternal security present fullness is yours.

Knowing Him is what makes all the difference. It can happen today. It's not complicated what happens with Zacchaeus. You can trust Jesus right now and know a fullness of life that you have

never known before and that's possible only because that's why Jesus came.

I love the conclusion of this passage. It reminds us that it's a story about Zacchaeus but the point is really all about Jesus isn't it? That's the main point. He came to seek and to save the lost.

Zacchaeus was seeking who Jesus was but Jesus is such a better seeker. He knew who Zacchaeus was. He was beyond that.

And he was seeking Him not merely to see Him but to save Him. Now that's good news. Jesus wants not just to have a conversation not just to lay eyes on you.

[23 : 30] Jesus wants to save you if you're confused, empty, guilty. Jesus is here to save you.

It's what He does. It's why He came. Just admit that you're exhausted, running out of gas, looking to be enough on your own has bankrupted you and let Him fill you up.

I remember in grade school doing this team building exercise where they blindfolded all of us and then they took us out into a forest and put our hands on a rope and we were supposed to find our way out of the rope maze.

I hate to be a spoiler but if you've ever done this before it's just a circle of rope that goes around several different trees and just keeps going and so you walk along like that and the whole point is acknowledging that you can't get out on your own and so you win by holding up your hand and asking for help and the facilitator pulls you out and takes off your blindfold and says, hey look, here's the rope maze.

You haven't gone but ten feet. It took a long time for this stubborn, self-sufficient guy to raise his hand. Are you there this morning?

[24 : 52] Are you tired of being stuck? In an unfulfilling loop of life where you've been living there and you just can't get out of it?

You ready to acknowledge your need for help? Jesus came just for us to seek and to save the lost. Isn't that beautiful and so glorious when we see ourselves there? He didn't come to hone in on the holy. but to locate the lost.

He didn't come to sort out the most eligible bachelorette and give her a rose but to rescue the lost princess. He didn't come to build a super team roster of the most qualified people he could find but to display his grace to those who weren't.

Remember that draft board we started with? The bad news bears roster includes widows tax collectors children blind beggars elsewhere we see Jesus include prostitutes demon possessed murderers just a few verses from Luke to that point on your bulletin to show you this consistent heart moving toward the lowly.

[26 : 15] Pray through these this week or discuss them in your connect community this morning but but this list of lowly people is such good news because it means that I could be on that team too.

Maybe I could actually be on Jesus' team if we're honest it's hard to believe that we're so unworthy of that aren't we?

I was talking with a friend this week and just marveling together that often God's grace does seem too good to be true I mean he's holy in that he would choose to be in relationship with repeat offenders who do the same awful stuff again with intentional rebels who willfully turn their back on him and run the other direction with people who don't even love the other people they pick to love much less everybody else and yet he does it seems impossible to us and so Jesus shows us and tells us again yes it's true I came to seek and to save the lost if you know Jesus this morning that's who you were apart from him lost but now found by a God who seeks and saves people like us the weak the foolish the lowly nobodies so that we might not boast in ourselves but boast only in him so that we might go into the world proclaiming not how wise or moral or better than someone else we are but how gracious and merciful and perfect beyond what we can imagine he is a God who seeks out lost people wherever they are and saves them into relationship and joy and life that he created them for what a glorious savior is Jesus rejoice and trust him today one last thing for those of you already living in the joy of relationship with

Jesus we talked last week about Jesus heart in this section being for us to bring others to him for us to show everyone Jesus remember that well this morning I think as we look at this team that Jesus selects he's reminding us particularly not to overlook bringing the least the lost the littlest the lonely and the left out to him we say it this way as a church because we are aware of our own weaknesses and dependence upon God we want to introduce fellow sinners to the great physician in whom the broken and hurting find refuge and a home in other words having been recruited from our lostness

onto Jesus' team he has made us ambassadors scouts if you will who should see the least of these and think

Jesus would want to see them who should see an email like the one that many of you got Friday from Angela and say oh there's there's children on a Sunday morning some of our special children who need care and think yes Jesus would want to see them what a perfect person to show the love of Jesus to who hear about special youth in the lodge on Monday nights and say oh what perfect people for me to introduce to Jesus he would love to meet them and in particular as we see Zacchaeus' story we should remember Jesus' love for the lost should ask if we share it he's come to save the poor and needy yes but also the rich and needy the successful businessman like Zacchaeus who is desperate for true fulfillment the frantic mother of three who is desperate for true rest the wandering young student who is desperate for purpose and meaning in life and they live next door to you they work in the next office and they attend the same class what a perfect person for you to show

[31 : 02] Jesus to he would love to meet them if you see them and realize they're as lost as you once were and still some days feel tell them about Jesus who's already seeking lost people to save he would love to meet them let's pray Jesus thank you thank you for being a better seeker than we are we get so lost and confused in life we get distracted by so many things and you keep looking for us when you find us you save us you don't leave us there stuck you you make us new thank you might we rejoice in your heart might we praise you for loving us like that might we share that heart and love the lost as you have loved us do that work in us we pray in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org for more

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