

Luke 19:1-10 “Hide and Seek”

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Date: 10 December 2023

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

Everybody getting excited for Christmas? Yes. Yes. Woo, that was an easy answer, right? Yeah. Yeah. This morning, we are going to talk about a Christmas story, okay?

Okay. About a very tiny person at Christmas named Jesus. That's right, Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus, Christmas story about Zacchaeus, right?

Not what you expected? I know that it's a Christmas story, Zacchaeus' story, because I saw Zacchaeus in a Christmas tree on the way in this morning.

Can you look up there? You see that? Did anybody see that in the Christmas tree by the nursery?

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Zacchaeus climbing up in a Christmas tree. That's how the story goes, right? No.

Oh. Well, you should look for that tree on your way out today, okay?

[1 : 0 0] And Miss Angela gave me a very big book. Did you know Zacchaeus was a very small person like many of you? But I have a very big book about this very small person.

That's pretty cool, huh? We can look at that later. But I wanted to read Zacchaeus' story from the Bible instead, okay? Can we do that together? Do you think some of you, maybe some of you older kids, help me read this story for us?

You want to help us, Cooper? Let's see. We'll let you read a couple verses first, okay? It starts right here. This is Luke chapter 19. You can turn there in your own Bibles if you'd like.

Starting at verse 1. Just read a couple verses. I'll help you out. He entered Jericho. He entered Jericho and was passing through.

And there was a man named Zacchaeus. And he was a chief tax collector and was rich. Very good. So what that means is that Zacchaeus had gotten a lot of money stealing it from other people.

[2 : 0 2] How do you think they felt about that? Yeah. Do you think they liked Zacchaeus very much? No. No. Nobody really liked to be around Zacchaeus.

Okay. Does somebody else want to read a couple verses? You want to try for us? Go ahead, Caroline. Where do I start? Right here at and. And chief tax.

And he was. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowd, he could not because he was small.

Oh? In? In? In? Stature. Stature. Very good. So what did he do, Lily? Can you read at verse 4?

So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him. For he was about to pass that way.

[3 : 0 9] And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down, for I must stay at your house today. One more. So he hurried and came down and received him joyful.

So Zacchaeus was excited for Jesus to come to his house. But what did all those people who didn't like Zacchaeus think? Were they happy about that? Should Jesus be with Zacchaeus?

When they saw it, they all grumbled. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. And what happened when Jesus got to Zacchaeus' house?

Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Will you read the last verse for us, Cooper?

For the son of the man came to seek and save the lost. The son of man came to seek and save the lost.

[4 : 2 0] Do y'all like that story? Who in that story came to seek and find Zacchaeus? God. Yeah, Jesus did.

That's right. When nobody else was looking for Zacchaeus, Jesus was looking for him, wasn't he? Have any of y'all ever played hide and seek? Yes. Yeah?

Okay. Y'all pretty good at hide and seek? Yeah. I bet some of you are really good hiders, aren't you? Yeah. You know what? On my computer, I have a game of a class dojo. A hide and seek game?

A dojo. And it's also like a thing that teachers use in high school. I go to Challenger Elementary if you don't know that. That is so helpful. And you love to play that game, don't you?

And Dojo Islands is the game. And there's this little board that says hide and seek. And if you go to it, it starts a game of hide and seek. You can play hide and seek in person. You can play hide and seek on the computer at your school.

[5 : 15] It is a great. And I bet, have you ever had a really good spot and you've stayed there so long that maybe you started to feel kind of alone or uncomfortable. Maybe it got dark.

And you kind of started wanting for somebody to find you so that you wouldn't be alone anymore. Yeah. Yeah. That's kind of how Zacchaeus felt. Zacchaeus was feeling alone.

Nobody wanted to be with him. He was feeling lost. And he kind of wanted somebody to find him. Didn't he? He was looking for Jesus. And the Bible says Jesus came to seek.

He was the one counting, right? He came to seek and to save the lost. He came to find us and rescue us so that we will never, ever, ever be alone in the dark again.

Isn't that awesome? That's why Jesus came to be born at Christmas to seek out Zacchaeus and you and me. Isn't that wonderful? I love that Jesus loves us like that.

[6 : 16] Can we pray and thank Jesus for that? Jesus, thank you for how much you love us, that you never leave us alone, but you come and you find us no matter where we are.

And we're thankful for that. And we pray that we would, especially this Christmas, rejoice that you were born to save us. Thank you so much.

And we thank you in your name. Amen. All right. Now you can go back to your seats and get to listen more about Zacchaeus and Jesus unless you're going to kids' worship.

And if you are, Miss Katie will meet you just out the back of the sanctuary. There she is walking right out the back middle if you're going to kids' worship. Let all of them make sure they find the right place.

We are discussing this Advent season why Christmas.

[7 : 26] Reasons that Jesus tells us why he came and was born. Last week, we saw Jesus came for fulfillment, right?

For fulfillment of all of the Old Testament promises, the requirements of God's law. Jesus came to fulfill. This morning, in that last verse of Zacchaeus' story, Jesus explains that he came to seek and to save the lost.

That statement of purpose in coming is actually here an explanation of how salvation came to such an undeserving person as Zacchaeus, someone you might not have thought Jesus would come to. He was a spiritual outsider, a social outcast. And how could he become an insider in Abraham's family? Finally, this passage says, because Jesus came to seek and save lost people just like him. That's why I mentioned hide and seek to the kids. In some ways, God and people have been playing this game for a very long time.

[8 : 50] Just think back through the Bible story with me for a minute, okay? I'm gonna mention a few stories where we see this, people hiding, God seeking. But you can probably think of others.

You can send them to me later and tell me all of the good examples you can think of. But all the way back in the garden, this starts. When sin first enters the world, what happens?

Adam and Eve, in their sin, immediately try to hide from God, don't they? It's the very nature of sin to separate us from God.

They try to sow fig leaves for themselves to cover themselves and it says they hide among the trees. But what happens when they're hiding? God comes and he asks the first question recorded in the Bible.

It's in Genesis 3 at verse 9. What does God say? Where are you? You ever played that game with your kids? And you walk around, you already know where they are.

[9 : 55] Where are you? Where are you? God, knowing exactly where Adam and Eve are, calls them out, seeks after them, and so begins a game, if you will, that people in God have been playing to this day.

Hagar is Sarah's servant who gets run off in utter despair after having a child with Abraham. She is helpless.

She is hopeless. She is in the wilderness, face down to the ground when God comes and finds her, restores her, because she says, he is the God who sees me.

When no one else seemed to see her or want her or care about her, Yahweh did. David thought he had hidden from God after committing adultery with Bathsheba, murder of Uriah.

It seemed as though his sin had gone unnoticed. He'd gotten away with it. But God sent the prophet Nathan to David to expose his sin, eventually to restore him, rather than leaving him distant from God, in his sin, God comes after him.

[11 : 20] Maybe the most famous person to run distant from God is the prophet Jonah. He famously ran the other direction when God called him to the Ninevites and thought he would hide from God in the belly of a ship until God chased him down and sent a storm and eventually rescued Jonah by sending what?

A whale that brought him back to God's path to the Ninevites. The prophet there serving as a picture of God's people who had also lost God's heart to be a light to the nations.

In fact, God's people wandered so far from him and his design for them that they were taken into exile out of the promised land, scattered across the Middle East for decades.

A lot of dark days, a lot of lost people, but what did God do? God came and gathered them again, didn't he? He brought them back from the nations and he planted them in Jerusalem again.

Time and time again, see? The hound of heaven has pursued his people, has won them back to himself, has not let them go. And all of that through the whole Old Testament leads, of course, to the coming of Jesus, the first Christmas.

[12 : 42] God breaking in and dwelling among us so that we can see most clearly and vividly that seeking heart of God. It's actually embodied as the Son of God himself lives among us, among people who've been so far away in so many ways.

And we see and we say, yes, this is what God is like, isn't it? God with us. He's always said this was what he was like, that he would seek after us and be with us.

Yes, God with us, Emmanuel. And Jesus shows us, for example, with the woman at the well. And we saw this recently in the Gospel of John, in her story.

She's not looking for Jesus at all, is she? In fact, she would rather her sin not be exposed any more than it already is. She's ashamed of it. But Jesus gently and persistently exposes her, reveals himself, and rescues her and her village of undeserving Samaritans.

The seeking God has come as a man into the darkness of our world and our hearts to look for the lost. Jesus says, if you will, ready or not, here I come.

[14 : 04] And the light of the world shines in to find us good news of great joy for all people, a savior, the light coming into our darkness.

It keeps happening with the Apostle Paul who's hiding from Jesus in a little bit different way. He's intentionally hiding as far away as possible from Jesus in his religious zeal, his obedience and persecution of this church.

But Jesus finds Saul on the road to Damascus in the midst of his self-righteous pride. His pride, the light shines and it humbles him and it saves him and then sends him on his mission, doesn't he?

Zacchaeus is not the only example of this hide-and-seek narrative in God's word. People keep hiding. God keeps seeking and now here at Christmas, grace keeps winning in Jesus.

Jesus. People hide from God in many different ways, don't we? I want you to think about that for a minute, what it looks like in your life.

[15 : 20] We were created to live close with God. That's what he made us for, to know him personally, to trust him deeply, to obey him consistently that this was what life was to be about.

To know and love him. It's where we belong, so to speak. So being lost, then, is really any way and any time that we are distant from God.

When you drive around a city in India, as I've had opportunity to do recently, you can feel a spiritual darkness. Everywhere you look, Hindu temples, some really big and fancy, some as small as dog houses with little statues inside.

Hindu gods and goddesses, idols that you can stop by and ask for help. It's easy to assume when you're there that their idols are different from ours.

but when you listen long enough to why, for example, some of these Hindus have recently been persecuting the Christians around them, you'll actually realize it's not much about the little statues.

[16 : 45] That's really not, it's not the, it's not primarily religious, their reasons for doing that. they're motivated by a desire to keep things in life the way that they are, to maintain their political control, their social power, their economic success, all of those things so that they can keep their lives going the way that they enjoy and have the things that they want so that they can feel fulfilled.

now those idols, I'm very familiar with those. I recognize them. I see those same ones on the streets of Huntsville.

I'm thinking that that's where I'm going to find life apart from Jesus by controlling my body and how I look, by maintaining my possessions and not letting anything in life that I like change.

I want life the way that I want it and it makes me feel good, right? I know that idol. We bring those idols into this sanctuary on Sundays, I dare say.

See, just like some of these biblical characters we've talked about, we can hide from God in a lot of places. We can hide from God in our selfish pursuit of success, can't we?

[18 : 13] All the while thinking that what life is about is actually getting enough and having life work well enough that I'm happy and significant and don't really need to depend on God or be close to Him day by day.

Fine if you want to, but maybe I'll be good enough, I won't really need that. We can be lost or distant from God in our depression. perhaps still driven by our deep shame, we might despair of His care, of His presence with us, even of His existence.

Many of us regularly hide from God in our work and busyness, don't we? We're just so caught up with thinking about other things and focused on what we're scrolling through all of the time, there's too much else to think about to really focus much on Him.

Did you know you could hide from God even in church? That's a big way that Paul did it, right? You can come in this building and plenty of people are very regular at doing that, at going to church, but they are very distant from God because church, for them, is actually a place of religious performance where maybe if I do enough and do well enough and look good enough, I'm yet again affirmed in the fact that I don't really desperately need to draw near to God to have a relationship to day by day actually know Him and depend on Him.

I can just go do that church thing every once in a while and I'll look good. How about you? How do you sometimes feel lost, distant from God, alone in a dark world?

[20 : 09] Are you either intentionally or maybe accidentally hiding from God, secretly longing to be found, wanting someone to show up and break into the struggle that you actually feel but often try to cover up?

I'm convinced that's how Zacchaeus felt. It says he wanted to see Jesus, at least from a hiding spot in the sycamore tree.

He'd have been able to get up there. He'd also been able to kind of stay hidden. I think in part, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus because he'd heard that this rabbi was different, specifically different toward tax collectors.

None of the other religious leaders gave them the time of day. They didn't want to be anywhere near Him. They certainly would not have been caught in their presence in their homes but I think Zacchaeus had heard about this Jesus.

Apparently, one of his disciples was a tax collector. Rumor had it that he was all the time eating and drinking with tax collectors and other sinners and so Zacchaeus heard that and he had been left out and hated and sent off as unclean for far too long.

[21 : 35] I think he was interested in someone who wouldn't treat him that way. Sure enough, he meets Jesus and Jesus not only comes to his house, Jesus brings salvation to his house, doesn't he?

Because, good news for lost, desperate, hiding Zacchaeus, Jesus came for people just like him.

Y'all, I hope that you don't think Jesus came for Zacchaeus and not for me. I hope you don't hear Jesus came to seek and save the lost and think, well that's good for them out there somewhere.

Friends, this is good news for us. Wherever we might be hiding from God, however we're experiencing that distance from him this morning, however we are lost, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

He wants to bring you back close to him. He says similar things in other places. Mark, chapter 2, Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners and the religious leaders say, why is he doing this?

[22 : 47] They didn't understand and Jesus said, here's what you need to understand. Those who are well have no need of a physician. It's those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners.

Jesus came expecting you to need him, not hoping that you wouldn't. That's actually, that would be the danger, not being too bad, too desperately distant from him but in some ways being too good, too confidently close that you don't even think he's necessary.

Are you actively admitting your sin? The idolatry that looks bad to everybody else? Even the idolatry that looks good to other people?

Both of those, are you turning to Jesus to rescue you from both of them, from anything that would keep you from him? He's here for that. He's here to meet you in that moment.

John 12, 46, Jesus says, another way of his saying why he's come, I've come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

[24 : 05] What hope this should give the most discouraged or hopeless of us? You can admit the darkness in you, the darkness around you because that's why Jesus came.

Jesus didn't come to recruit an all-star team. He didn't come to find those who were performing well already who had the spotlight on them and pay them enough to come over and be on his team.

That's not what Jesus did. That's college football. That's what they do. Listen, Christmas is a rescue mission, not a recruiting trip. It's very different.

Jesus came to seek the hiding, to find the lost, to save the sinners. Praise the Lord. You don't have to attract his attention.

Your stats don't have to be good enough for him to pay you to be on his team. It's not how he works. He's come to rescue you. Remember, he's embodying the heart of this seeking God.

[25 : 09] Where does God seek lost people? It's all over the place. God seeks us in the heights of our success and our pride and our self-confidence.

He knows we're lost there and he comes after us and in the depths of depression and despair and discouragement. He seeks those with broken minds.

He seeks those with failing bodies who feel like they can't even keep it together anymore. They don't know how many days they have.

The Christ of Christmas comes to the fields of humble shepherds as well as to the courts of kings and wise men. He comes after all those lost people.

even perhaps especially to those that no one else is looking for or wanting to be with. Jesus comes. He comes for those people. If that's you and you think nobody has ever wanted to come for you, Jesus does.

[26 : 18] He has. He'll come back for you again. He comes not merely to locate people like that but to love them, to rescue them, to bring them home because we are feeling if we're honest most days we're feeling some of that darkness, some of that aloneness, some of that longing for fulfillment and things to be made right and that is where Jesus meets us right where you are in sin, in pain, in emptiness.

Open your heart today to receive him. He has come. It's where he met Zacchaeus. Right? This is the point of this story that Jesus meets Zacchaeus right there.

He seeks him out even better than Zacchaeus is seeking him and that Zacchaeus has money, right? It's one of the very few things we know about him. We know he's short and he's rich.

Zacchaeus had money that he had gotten because he was hoping it would make him happy and significant and what happened is it was leaving him empty and searching.

He was looking for Jesus and then Jesus brings salvation to his house. What happens? Notice. Zacchaeus now has a better source of life, doesn't he?

Of joy, of significance, of satisfaction and everybody can see it. Nobody misses this in Zacchaeus' life. The guy who was greedy and stealing is now generous and sharing, right?

[27 : 51] Instead of scheming how he can get more, Zacchaeus is scheming how he can give more. Give this stuff to the poor. By the way, four times more back to that guy I took advantage of.

A little bit more over here to them. Give it away. Friends, Jesus meets us where we are. He seeks us out in our lostness but he doesn't leave us there as the same person because we no longer find life and fulfillment in the same place.

Just like Zacchaeus, when we get life and fulfillment in Jesus, we now scheme how to give it to others.

How do we give life to others? As followers of Jesus, we go where he goes. Where does Jesus go? He goes seeking after the lost. We go following him after the least and the lost and the littlest and the lonely and the left out because that's where Jesus goes.

They are on our radar. They are in our sights. We're to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, the kingdom of his beloved son.

[29 : 04] Is that what marks your life? Is that where I'd find you this afternoon? Are you following Jesus toward tax collectors and sinners?

Are you shining light into darkness that you know all too well? In India, perhaps because the darkness is a bit easier to see, Christians are always talking about the urgency and the priority of sharing the light of Jesus with family members, with people in their village, with whoever it happens to be that's right there and some of that, to be fair, is because those people might be ones who would persecute you.

But mostly, it's because there's a new life that we didn't have before that we now have to offer others. We can offer them a relationship with a savior, not a religion of self-performance and working your way up the mountain to the gods.

No, we have something to offer life that is new and so it is an urgent and constant priority for them. It challenged me.

My brothers and sisters, the darkness, the idolatry, as I said, is the same here. It's hiding a darkness, a lostness that we know very well ourselves.

[30 : 40] So the need to follow Jesus towards those who are lost, towards those who are hiding is equally an urgent priority in Huntsville.

Even if the people around you have three kids, two cars, and a middle-class lifestyle, that's not what brings you into relationship with Jesus. We need Jesus.

We need to know of our own emptiness and our need for him. Don't be fooled by external resources. Jesus comes to seek and to save Zacchaeus and he's already wealthy.

That's not enough for Jesus. He's not going to leave Zacchaeus lost in his richness. Jesus came to seek and to save undeserving you and me and he sends us on that same mission.

Why Christmas? Because we and many others hide and need to be found. we and many others sin and we need a savior.

[31 : 53] So Jesus came not just to earth to be born but all the way to the cross to die so that you can know that no matter how far away you are from him, no matter how lost you feel and how impossible it seems that God could even see you because you can't even see or imagine him that you're never too lost and never too far away for him to find you and save you and bring you home.

He sat with his disciples on the night that one of them betrayed him and he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to them as I ministering in his name give this bread to you and he said take and eat this is my body given for you do this in remembrance of me and in the same way after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes you proclaim in fact that your hope is in his dying in your place this is not the table of Southwood or the Presbyterian church it is the Lord's table so if you trust that not because of anything that you have done but only because of his amazing grace that you were lost and now are found then you please come and celebrate him with us this morning if in your heart the verdict is still out on Jesus perhaps you're interested in him it sounds interesting and you're considering that wonderful but you're just not sure yet we're so glad that you are here this morning we're glad that you're able to hear his heart his purpose and why he has come to rescue people just like us we invite you to come forward and back to these tables let us pray to stay with you or to stay where you are in your seats is just fine but we want you to know something that if you stay there while we're celebrating together it's not because we're better than you are it's not it at all we're all hidens we're all hidens who desperately desperately need a God who will come seek after us who keeps seeking us out and keeps setting this table and keeps inviting us back to him he's doing that for you this morning as well let's pray and we'll come celebrate

Jesus thank you that we can now draw near to you would in these moments would you help us to do that in our hearts knowing that you have already come near to meet us that is the good news of Christmas you haven't stayed far away you have sought us out we don't have to climb a mountain we don't have to pass a test we just have to admit that we're lost apart from you that we're hopeless without you and here you are already to welcome us home we thank you for that do that through

common elements remind our hearts strengthen our faith in this truth we ask it in your name amen
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