

Zacchaeus - The Little Man Who Began To Grow

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[0 : 0 0] I was looking at different Bible characters alphabetically, and I know that maybe we're stretching it a wee bit, the last one we looked at was the letter U, but we could have looked at Vashti, who was the queen, and Exerxes, who was a king, but here we come, I didn't go there, and there's another couple of letters that we don't have, so here we come to the final one, to Zed, to Zacchaeus, and this of course is the little man who was always known as the wee man who climbed up the tree, the sycamore tree, to get a good view of Jesus, now as we know it's normal to see children climbing trees, that's what children do, when I was a boy there wasn't a tree in the area that I hadn't climbed, and it was just what you do, and in fact, no, I still don't climb, but when I walk by, I quite often, it's funny, I look at trees, and I work out how I would have climbed that, it's just something that was always there, but there's nothing strange in seeing children climbing trees, as I say, that's what they do, but if you saw a man or a woman scrambling up a tree, hauling themselves, and pulling themselves up a tree, going right up, you'd be wondering, what are they doing going up there, and I'm sure there were so many people just wondered that when they saw this little man run in front of the crowd, and begin to haul himself up into this sycamore tree, up into the branches of it.

Zacchaeus lived in Jericho, which at that time was a major total collection point for goods going east to west, and west to east, and it was quite a wealthy place, and as a tax collector, we find that he was the chief tax collector, and it was quite a lucrative position.

There was the ability to make a lot of money in that job, but of course tax collectors were normally hated, because for the Jews, the tax collectors worked for the Roman Empire, the Roman system, and they were always a reminder of the fact that the Jew wasn't his own person, that there was always this Roman possession of the land, and also most of the tax gatherers were utterly corrupt, and they normally charged more than they should, and Rome turned a blind eye to that, because as long as they got their cut, as long as they got the tax that was required, they were quite happy.

But most of the tax collectors would charge a little more than was required, and they would pocket that themselves, and so they were despised, because a lot of them were ruthless, and they didn't care whether their families didn't have bread on their table, as long as they got their money.

So they were despised, they were absolutely hated. And to be a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus would have risen to the very top, and no doubt he was getting not only from what he was able to, in a corrupt way, get from others, but he would have been getting a cut from all the other tax collectors.

[3 : 3 1] So he was a very wealthy man, but he was someone who would be absolutely despised, probably had no friends. So here's this man, and this is what the focus of this story is about.

And if you were to look into Jericho that day, as Jesus passed by, and you were to look into every home, and you were being told, somebody from this city is going to have a personal encounter with Jesus, and is going to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ today, who do you think it will be?

And if you looked into all the homes, it wouldn't take you long, I'm sure, to dismiss this man, Zacchaeus. Because, as we say, he was utterly corrupt, he would have been ruthless, he would have been a bully, he would be just not Mr. Nice Guy.

And there's no doubt that you would be sort of saying very quickly, oh well, it won't be Zacchaeus. But one of the wonderful things is that Jesus, in his saving power, is able to save those that we so often write off.

And in fact, we would say Zacchaeus would be one of the hardest to gain for the kingdom, because Jesus himself had said that the rich, those who were rich, how hardly, he says that those who are rich shall enter the kingdom of God.

[5 : 08] In the previous chapter, in chapter 18, he says in verse 24, we didn't read there, Jesus, looking at him with sadness, said, how difficult it is for those who are wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And you say to yourself, well, why is that the case? And I suppose it is that wealth can often give a person a sense of security.

And certainly spiritually, we would say a false sense of security. Because if we don't have needs, if we aren't feeling that we're needing anything and that everything is there and everything is provided for, it doesn't put that urgency of dependence upon others.

And so that is one of the reasons that Jesus was saying that. That it's difficult for a rich person. Well, here it is. And it's amazing that it's really following on from what Jesus says about this rich man, that he saves this very rich man who had got his riches in the most corrupt way.

Or I would imagine most of his riches. Salvation, as we know, cannot be purchased. People with wealth can purchase most things, but they cannot purchase salvation.

[6 : 32] Many of the best things in life, of course, you can't purchase. Best things in life are free. But the greatest gift of all, the greatest thing that we can ever have is the salvation of our soul.

And we've got to remember that you cannot buy it, you cannot earn it, you cannot do anything in order to get it. It is a gift. And the thing that we have to do is to go to the giver and ask for the gift.

You know, that's one of the, you can hear that over and over and over again, but to understand it, it's one of the hardest things to grasp. That salvation is free.

It's not up to our doing. It's not dependent on who we are or what we've done or any of these things. It is a gift from God.

And we have to go to the giver and ask. That's all we have to do. Our part is the asking. Genuine, sincere asking for this salvation.

[7 : 32] And the grace of God in salvation can break through all the barriers. It's amazing. There's no impossibilities with God. God can save anywhere and anyone apart from into a lost eternity.

He can't save in hell, but He can save on earth. As long as there's life, as long as there's the breath of life within a person, the Lord is able to save.

And He can break through where there's wealth or hatred or self-seeking or where there is drug dependence or alcoholism or prostitution or any of these things.

The Lord's grace can reach through and break through and reach and change and transform people. Amazing. No wonder it's called Amazing Grace.

So here we find Jesus on His way to Jerusalem to die. And He had told that in the previous chapter, chapter 18 and verse 31. And He was telling them there about His death and all that lay ahead of Him.

[8 : 35] And there was a huge, we mustn't underestimate, the burden that would be in Jesus' heart. because He's traveling up to Jerusalem to die. And He knew that what He had to go through, what He had to suffer, what He had to bear upon Himself was so awful, we get a little picture of the weight and the burden in the Garden of Gethsemane when under the pressure of what lay ahead of Him, He sweated as it were drops of blood.

He was in so much anguish, anguish, there was so much pain in His heart, so much weight, the burden that was bearing down upon Him. So Jesus was carrying this on Him as He made His way up to Jerusalem.

But the wonderful thing is that as He was going to die, He knew that His death was accomplishing this great salvation. And as He said at the end of, at verse 10 in chapter 19, He says, The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

So here He is, He's on His way to die, but He's still saving. That's what He's doing. At the end of chapter 18, we read of Him opening the eyes of the blind man Bartimaeus and saving him.

And now here in chapter 19, at the beginning, we read of the Lord saving Zacchaeus. And of course, this is the great message of the Gospel, that the Lord Jesus has come to save sinners.

[10 : 08] And again tonight, as we did this morning, I want to commend the Lord Jesus Christ to you as a Savior. If you don't know Him as Savior, I would ask you tonight to ask Him to be your Savior.

That is how you have to come to know Him. The one who saves you. And if tonight you don't realize that you need saving, you don't feel that you need saving, you need to go to the Lord and say, Lord, please open my understanding, open my eyes to see, help me to lay hold upon this, that I need, I need this salvation.

Well, here's Jesus and He has entered Jericho. And as usual, there's a vast crowd following, and there's Zacchaeus, the wee man. And he wanted to see Jesus.

That's what it tells us in verse 3, and he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowd, he could not because he was small of stature. I don't know why Zacchaeus was wanting to see Jesus, but I would imagine, everybody knew of Jesus, but I would imagine part of why he wanted to see Jesus is that as people talked of Jesus, the Pharisees, as they talked about Him, and as they found fault with Him, one of the things he said was he was a friend of publicans and sinners, or a friend of tax gatherers and sinners.

And the tax gatherers didn't have friends. And so, there's no doubt, but Zacchaeus would be saying to himself, I must see this man. This man is a rare specimen, because he's actually labeled as a friend of tax gatherers.

[11 : 57] I've heard that he goes and he eats with the tax gatherers. And we don't hear of any of the religious people going to do that. So, there's no doubt, but that this would have raised within Zacchaeus' mind a desire to see Jesus, who He was.

And you know, one of the things that we have to lay hold of, if as Christians, is that although the saving of souls is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is the church's directive to go and to make disciples, to go and to share the gospel with others.

And here we have the difficulty. On Wednesday, we were looking at the verse that is saying that if we are a friend of the world, we cannot be a friend of God.

That idea. And so there has to be a form of separation in the Christian life. But we have to be very, very careful what that separation is.

That separation is not that we remove ourselves from society and that we become somebody that doesn't mingle with the rest of society. It is absolutely imperative that the Christian is part and partial of society and acts within society as both salt and light.

[13 : 25] That's what we're told. And we cannot act as salt and light if we are not involved with society. And so it is very important that we lay hold upon what the Bible says, that we are in the world but not of the world.

In other words, that the world's ambitions and aims and standards and ethics and all these things which are always changing are not what is at the heartbeat of our lives.

That it is the Christian faith that must be at the heartbeat. And you see, there's always a danger with this idea of separation because two things can come to play.

At one level, there is an idea of separating oneself from the, as we say, the ways, the standards, the attitudes of the world. And that is what we must engage in.

But what is very closely tied and can be, can happen, not saying it does happen, but it can happen, is that that can breed almost a sense of superiority within the heart of the Christian.

[14 : 37] Where they feel that they're a little better. And I know that maybe all of you tonight are saying, oh, I don't feel that at all. But you know, there's something, there's something within human nature that can take hold of the fact that, that we're Christians, that we're in Christ, and that it gives us this sense of security which is a great thing.

But we forget what it was like not to have that. We forget maybe what it was like to be without Christ. And were it not for God's grace and God's mercy, we would still be without Christ.

And we would be in a hopeless, helpless place. And that's what we've got to remember for everybody who's still without Christ, that we must have a heart for them. We mustn't feel above them or superior in any shape or form.

but we must have hearts of love for them and seek to witness to them about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's in our relationships at home, at work, in leisure, in the community, wherever we are, that we must bring the Christian life into play.

And this separation that we're called to display is the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. In other words, as you live out your life, you're not to try and mould your way to be exactly the same as the world, to have the world's ways and standards and such like.

[16 : 18] Because if you're not distinct, then that witness isn't there. How should, what should we be like? Well, the Bible tells us very simply that the fruit of the Spirit should be in evidence.

We should be people of love and of joy and of peace and of long-suffering and of self-control. These things should be becoming, as we saw this morning in the Sermon on the Mount, the first part is about Christian character, the second part is about Christian conduct.

And the conduct flows out from the character. And so our character ought to be becoming more and more and more Christ-like. And as it does, that is what impacts society as salt and light.

And we are to engage with society as salt and light. It's a huge responsibility. But that's what the Lord requires of us. This, the distinctiveness of being Christians.

is the first part of the world. So, here is Zacchaeus and he wanted to see Jesus but he couldn't because of the crowd. They were in this way. And it's amazing how often when we want to see Jesus, when any person wants to see Jesus, things come in the way.

[17 : 41] If you're here tonight and there's been a growing desire within your heart to come to become a Christian, you say, you know, I really want to become a Christian.

The moment you say that, whether it's in your own heart or not, the alarm bells go off in hell. And Satan will do everything in his power to prevent.

And supposing tonight you're there saying, you know, I really need to get right with God. I can't leave this on any longer. I really have to, I have to be serious about this.

I have to, it's time that I became a Christian. You'd be quite sure that as you're saying that, there'll be other thoughts going on saying, oh yeah, that's fine, but hold on.

You know, remember, there's certain things you've got to do first. Remember, there's places you're going, there's so, you don't, hold on, hold on, don't commit yet. You've got to sort of do these things first and then you can become a Christian.

[18 : 41] Well, that's not the way it works. But you can be quite sure there will always be obstacles put in your way if you are serious about seeking or finding or giving to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, anyway, Zacchaeus wasn't going to be put off. So he runs ahead and he climbs up this tree so he'd be able to look down on Jesus as he passed by.

And you know, in a sense, Zacchaeus up in that tree looking down on Jesus is also a picture of the sinner who is looking down on Jesus. Because, you know, if we're outside Christ, one of the things that keeps us outside Christ is our own self-righteousness of thinking that we're good enough in and of ourselves.

And we tend to look down. You might not say to yourself, you say, I'm not looking down on Jesus. Well, you are. If you're trusting in yourself, and Jesus said that about many of the religious people of the day, that they trusted in themselves rather than trust in him.

And so, so often, if we are trusting in ourselves somehow hoping at the end of the day that our own goodness, that our own whatever we've done in this life will be sufficient on that great day to stand us in good stead with the Lord, then we're looking down on Jesus.

[20 : 03] We're passing judgment on Jesus. We're saying that God, God didn't need to do what he did in sending his son Jesus to save me. I'm all right. No, we're not.

And so, Zacchaeus is a picture of the sinner looking down on Jesus. But as, as Jesus stops and passes, he passes, passing by, he stops. And he looks up through the branches and through the leaves of the tree, the sycamore tree.

And there he sees Zacchaeus. And so we find that he looked up and he said, and I would imagine that that look was a very, very powerful look.

It was a penetrating look. And he would have looked at Zacchaeus and he would have looked right into the heart of Zacchaeus. You know, here he is as a good shepherd.

He's looking, he's seeking and saving those who are lost. The look of Jesus Christ is a powerful look. Just ask Peter. You remember when Peter was denying Jesus?

[21 : 05] Denied him once, denied him a second time, denied him a third time. And then a cock crew, there was a crowing of the cock outside, the crocodile outside. What did we read?

That Jesus turned and looked at Peter. That's all he did. Turned and looked at Peter. And Peter saw that gaze, that powerful, penetrating, pushing gaze that went right into his heart.

And what was the result? Peter went out and he wept bitterly. Jesus didn't have to say anything. And I believe there was something of that look in Jesus as he looked up to Zacchaeus.

And very often this is what happens because first there's the look and then comes the words. And very often that is the way the Lord begins to work within us.

there's that pushing look going into our heart which shows us something of ourselves, shows us something of our need of a Savior. For some people it's a violent pushing, for other people it's not so much so.

[22 : 14] But however it is that the Lord looks into your heart and shows you something of yourself, in that showing he is showing you that you need him.

that's what he's doing. He's showing you that you need him. And that's what Zacchaeus was discovering at that moment.

And Jesus then speaks a word of grace and he says hurry up and come down. Hurry up? Why hurry up? Well you see salvation is urgent business.

If Zacchaeus had said at this moment oh no thanks for the invite Lord I just wanted to see you if you don't mind I'm going to stay up here and next time you're passing by I'll come down and see you then.

Or in fact I'll meet up with you. But there wasn't going to be a next time. That was the last time Jesus passed by. He passed by and Bartimaeus took that opportunity before coming into Jericho.

[23 : 20] He's now passing through Jericho and he was never going to pass through Jericho again. He was going up to Jerusalem to die. And tonight Jesus is offering himself because he is not just passing by he is here present in the gospel tonight.

And you might say to yourself yeah I know I'm going to one day I'm going to sort it out. I've been here for a long time and I know I know all about it.

I can tell you know this I could tell people the gospel. I could come to the pulpit and tell people the gospel. I know it know it inside out. I've learned loads of Bible verses. I understand it.

But you still haven't come to that place of believing of accepting because one day you believe you will. Always thinking one day I will.

well maybe one day you won't get the opportunity. We don't know. Well for Zacchaeus this was the opportunity.

[24 : 27] This was the day of opportunity. And then Jesus says something amazing. He says I must stay at your house today. I must not I would like to or I might come along but I must it's definite it's absolute.

it's not that Jesus is just going to nip into his house. He's going to spend a good while with Zacchaeus. He's going to stop. In fact the AV word is abide.

And it's a lovely word. The abiding presence of Christ. And you know when Jesus comes through the Holy Spirit he comes to abide forever. It's not just a wee visit.

He comes to live forever. To stay forever. forever. You're never ever ever on your own ever ever again in life. Always Jesus is there whether you're aware of it or not.

But through the ministry of his spirit Jesus is present with you. The abiding presence of our Lord. And so Zacchaeus comes down and he goes with Jesus.

[25 : 34] And Jesus says to him in verse 9 today's salvation has come to this house. But you know we see the wonderful change in Zacchaeus' life.

And before that just highlight in verse 7 and when they saw it they all grumbled he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. Isn't that incredible?

Isn't it amazing in life how often people will find fault with the good that people do. Very often they find fault because they are judging and they have no idea what they are judging.

Their criteria for judging is all wrong. And very often people make judgments and they don't know the full story. They don't know exactly what's happening. But people do.

They make judgments. And that's why Jesus is always warning. Don't judge. Judge not. He said lest you be judged. So we've got to be careful not to be making judgments because so often we are wrong.

[26 : 39] Haven't you often said that along the way? Oh I got that wrong. I thought it was this. And so often you say oh I feel really bad about what I said or even what I thought.

Because you maybe come to discover that what you thought was completely wrong. Well these people were finding fault with Jesus. And you know we are not too less when we seek to do good and to seek to follow the Lord.

And whatever it is the Lord is directing us in. It's not the judgments and the assessments of people round and about that we're to take in. It's what the Lord is putting in our heart and the Lord is asking us to do.

And anyway Jesus goes with Zacchaeus and we see how this salvation has come to the house. We see evidence of it in verse 8. Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord behold Lord half of my goods I give to the poor and if I've defrauded anyone of anything I restore it fourfold.

You know this is the beauty of faith. Faith transforms people completely. Here's the evidence of it. Zacchaeus could have said Lord I believe and that was it but no faith is going to work right out in his life because one of the things he has come to discover is when he's there with a perfect saviour beside him and he realises oh my life it's been so bad because he robbed the poor.

[28 : 15] He wasn't a man who robbed the rich and gave it to the poor. He was a man who robbed the poor. He made out it didn't matter as we said he would have been a ruthless aggressive bully who was out for himself and nobody but for himself.

but here's the transformation of grace. It has so affected and changed his heart that he says I am going to make restoration and not just I'm going to pay back people I've swindled.

I'm going to give them fourfold and I'm going to give half of all that I have all my wealth I'm going to start going around the poor. Can you imagine what a powerful witness that would be in Jericho?

The man everybody despised this corrupt man this man who was always out to swindle and he would do you as soon as look at you and he would be going round the homes with money and with goods to the poor people.

Everybody would be talking about it. They'd be saying what happened? And those who had judged remember those who had judged Jesus for going with Zacchaeus they would then realize our judgment was wrong.

[29 : 34] And that's the impact of an encounter with Jesus. That's the impact of meeting with Jesus. And that's why the title is This Little Man Who Began to Grow. From that day on Zacchaeus began to grow and grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

and what God the Lord has done in the life of Zacchaeus he's able to do in your life and my life and everybody's life. May we know the transforming power of God's grace within our lives.

Let us pray. Lord we pray that you will be gracious to us. We give thanks for your grace which is amazing grace and we pray that your grace will be in our hearts and in our lives.

May we not just talk about it but may we seek to live it. And in all our different relationships whether it's at home or at work nor the different challenges that we face we pray that it's the fruit of the spirit that will be in evidence and not the base human nature that so often manifests itself in our lives where we say things that are wrong and we do things that are wrong.

Lord forgive us when we let you down when we don't mirror you and we pray then that you will bless us each and every one take us to our home safely and do us good cleansing us from our every sin in Jesus name we ask it.

[31 : 07] Amen. We're going to conclude singing from Psalm 86 Psalm 86 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 86 that's on page 341 and page 341 and the tune is Evan we sing in verses 10 to 13 Psalm 86 verse 10 page 341 because thou art exceeding great and works by thee are done which are to be admired Thou art God thyself alone. Teach me thy way and in thy truth, O Lord, then walk will I.

Unite my heart that I thy name may fear continually. O Lord my God, with all my heart, to thee I will give praise. And I the glory will ascribe unto thy name always.

Because thy mercy toward me in greatness doth excel. Thou delivered hast my soul out from the lowest hell. 10 to 13, Psalm 86, Because thou art exceeding great.

Because thou art exceeding great, and works by thee are done.

Which art to thee at thy love, that art of thy self alone.

[32 : 46] Teach me thy way and in thy truth. O Lord, then walk will I.

Unite my heart that I thy name may fear continually.

Unite my heart that I thy name may fear continually. O Lord, my God, with all my heart, to thee I will give praise.

Unite my heart that I will give praise. And thy God, Lord, we will ascribe unto thy name always.

Unite my heart that I will give praise. Unite my heart that I will give praise. Unite my heart that I will give praise. I bless thee to worthy in greatness of righteousness.

[33 : 58] And I deliver past my soul as from the lowest end.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.