

# Search & Rescue

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 18, beginning at verse 35.

We've been journeying through this middle section of the Gospel of Luke. We have come to our last portion this morning. Next week will be Easter Sunday.

We'll be looking at the account of the resurrection. This Friday will be our Good Friday service, looking at the crucifixion. But today we have come to nearing the conclusion of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

So let's read beginning chapter 18, beginning at verse 35 to chapter 19, verse 10. As he, Jesus, as Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.

And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. And he cried out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

[ 1 : 21 ] And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him.

And when he came near, he asked him, what do you want me to do for you? He said, Lord, let me recover my sight. And Jesus said to him, recover your sight.

Your faith has made you well. And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

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

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.

[ 2 : 30 ] For he was about to pass that way. And 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.

So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

And Jesus said to him 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.

On February 18th of 1952, two tanker ships split in half in a terrible winter storm off the coast of Massachusetts. From the portions of each ship that remained afloat, crews radioed for help.

[ 3 : 44 ] The local Coast Guard station dispatched most of their resources to aid the first tanker. So when the second tanker called for help, all that remained was four men and a 36-foot rescue boat.

Most people who heard about it thought it was a suicide mission. The boat faced towering waves and gale force winds. They had to cross a bar of dangerous shoals that could have easily have sunk the boat at any time.

And having reached the sinking ship, they then had to return to shore in the same way. Against all odds, the rescue mission succeeded. The story is told in the book and the movie, *The Finest Hours*.

*The Finest Hours* is not the only movie about a search and rescue mission. Think of *Argo*, the unconventional rescue of American diplomats by a CIA agent or *Saving Private Ryan*.

Search for a soldier whose three brothers had been killed on the front lines of World War II. Why are we attracted to these harrowing tales? These heroic stories of search and rescue missions.

[ 4 : 56 ] Missions. You can almost guarantee that every couple of years, another one will come out and it'll be a blockbuster. Now, some people might say rather cynically, people love a good thriller.

It helps them escape for a moment from the dullness of their daily lives. That's all it is. But aren't we so consistently drawn to these stories because in them we glimpse humanity at its best when circumstances are at their worst.

We see men of courage and self-sacrifice undaunted by hostile environments putting the needs of others above their own. And even in our cynical age, we can't help but admire that when it's real.

We might also sympathize with those who are lost and needing to be found, those who are in danger and needing to be rescued. We feel our human vulnerability.

We realize that we could very well end up in such a situation and we hope that someone would have the compassion and courage to reach out to us if we found ourselves in such desperate straits.

[ 6 : 05 ] I think we're attracted to these stories because they tap into the reality of our human calling and our human condition. We sense that if the world is ever to be put right, it will take something like a search and rescue mission.

Well, this is what the Bible has said all along. The end of today's passage concludes with a statement, For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

For the last few months, we've been walking through this middle section of the Gospel of Luke, following Jesus and His disciples along the road toward Jerusalem, and today we arrive at the last stop before they reach Jerusalem itself.

They come to Jericho. Jericho was an important city. It was the first city the Israelites conquered when they crossed the Jordan and came into the Promised Land.

It was an oasis in a desert region surrounded by springs of water. It was a busy city at the junction of main roads, and it was especially busy as it was here when Jewish pilgrims were heading toward Jerusalem for one of the three annual festivals because it was the last city the pilgrims would come to in the valley before they went up the 15-mile-long mountain road to Jerusalem.

[ 7 : 34 ] If you look up in verse 31, Jesus says to His inner circle, the twelve, For the third time, see, we're going up to Jerusalem.

And there the words of the prophets will be fulfilled, and there I will suffer and die and rise again. And for the third time, His closest followers look at Him with blank stares.

Verse 34, They understood none of these things. They've been with Jesus all along. They understand the fact that He is walking toward Jerusalem, but they don't understand why.

And they don't understand why He keeps telling them that He's going there to suffer and be rejected and be killed, and then rise again. What does that mean?

But in our passage this morning, Luke shows us the purpose of Jesus' journey and the purpose of why Jesus came to earth. Luke shows us here, Jesus came on a search and rescue mission.

[ 8 : 50 ] The Son of Man, the truly human one, the new Adam, the King of Israel, had finally arrived, and He came to rescue us from our lost state and bring us home with Him to God.

This morning, we see two men, a blind beggar and a chief tax collector. They're the last ones that join the caravan of Jesus' disciples along this journey to His destination.

We see two men who are lost who get found. I want to look at these two stories in three parts. First, who were these men? And in what sense were they lost?

Second, how does Jesus find them? And third, what's the result? So first, who were these two guys? Who are these two guys that we meet here?

On the outside, these two men were about as different as you could imagine. The first man, the blind beggar, is physically helpless and desperately poor, begging by the side of the road.

[ 10 : 03 ] Do you remember in the parable of the shrewd manager, the guy who's about to get fired from his desk job, and he says, I'm too ashamed, I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm too ashamed to beg.

See, begging was seen as the most shameful, demeaning means of survival imaginable. It's humiliating to have no other option but to beg a stranger for your next meal.

You have this sense that you don't belong anywhere. There's nobody who will take you in and even feed you. And so that's all you can do.

And this is the blind man's life. Every single day, he would sit by the road calling out, hoping that some passerby would be moved to pity him. He couldn't even see whether the people he was calling out to would look at him or whether they would simply turn their heads the other way and pass by.

He was powerless. In the 1990s, the World Bank did a survey of 60,000 poor people from 60 different countries.

[ 11 : 21 ] They asked them all the same question. What is poverty? What does it mean to be poor? Here are the most common responses.

Shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, isolation, voicelessness.

The experience of being poor wasn't just and wasn't even primarily about the lack of material things, important and necessary as those are.

It was primarily about feeling dehumanized and constantly overlooked and disrespected. Some of you may have felt that way.

Some of you may feel that way every day. Powerless, voiceless, humiliated, hopeless. Maybe you felt that way because of your physical circumstances.

[ 12 : 24 ] Maybe you feel that way for other reasons. That's the first man. The second man, Zacchaeus, is on the opposite end of the social spectrum.

He's physically able. He may have been short, but he still could climb a tree. And he was financially successful. A chief tax collector.

Now, when you hear tax collector, that does not mean that he was a government official. He did not work for the ancient equivalent of the IRS. The Roman government had privatized the tax collection business.

They subcontracted it out to the highest bidder in each region. So, Zacchaeus was an entrepreneur. He was an independent business owner.

And he had achieved every business owner's dream. He had found some other guys to work under him to do most of his dirty work. He would get a cut off whatever they brought in in addition to whatever he brought in directly.

[ 13 : 32 ] And in a busy town like Jericho with many people coming and going, imports and exports, it's not surprising that he was rich. He had made it. He owned a house.

He never had to beg. In fact, he could compel people to pay him and threaten them with the police if they didn't. He had power.

Some of you might feel like you've made it. You've been successful in your business. You've risen to the top. You stay in shape. You can take care of yourself and your family and you have a decent chunk of change to spare.

Some of you aren't quite there, but you're on the way and that's what you're aiming for. But you know, you can be the top dog. You can be, you can look good and feel good and still deep down you can wonder what's the meaning of it all.

Recently, I was at an event where Professor Lori Santos was speaking. Some of you are familiar with her. Last year, she taught the most well-attended class ever in Yale College about how to be happy, psychology, and the good life.

[ 14 : 46 ] And she rehearsed the statistics 61% of college students report feeling overwhelming anxiety. 60% say they're very lonely. Over 40% say they feel hopeless.

A third say they feel so depressed it's difficult to function. And then she gave her top three techniques. Proven by empirical studies for improving your happiness.

Number one, recognize your mind lies to you. The example she gave was most people think that in order to be happy they need to earn about twice as much as they currently do.

But actually, once you get to a certain threshold, she said about \$75,000 a year, the more you earn doesn't actually increase your self-reported happiness.

Recognize your mind lies to you. Number one. Second, make time for social connections. With family, friends, or even strangers, live in a meaningful community. Third, express gratitude every day.

[ 15 : 50 ] Now, guess what? The top three empirically proven ways to improve your happiness are all things that the Bible has been telling you to do all along. Recognize that we are prone to self-deception, that we easily deceive ourselves.

Live in meaningful community and thank God every day. Of course, the studies don't say who you should thank, but isn't that the question? Who do you thank?

It's so much more satisfying to have someone to thank. Isn't that what we were made for? But the point I wanted to get to is at the end of her presentation, someone asked this, what if you implement all these techniques and still find yourself longing for something more?

And she said, I totally get that question. She said, I see the purpose of my class as wrapping a big band-aid around the hurts of college students.

giving some relief, trying to help people feel a bit better. And I hope that once people get some relief, then they can start asking the big questions about meaning.

[ 17 : 13 ] And she said, the social sciences by themselves will never answer those questions. On the outside, the blind man seemed to have nothing, and Zacchaeus seemed to have it all.

But on the inside, they both knew their spiritual need. And they were both drawn to this Jesus. We don't know exactly what the blind man or Zacchaeus had heard in advance about Jesus, but when the blind man heard that Jesus was passing by, he began crying out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

He did all that he could to get Jesus' attention. And interestingly, in that one statement, the blind man displays more insight into who Jesus is than anyone else around him.

The crowds simply identified Jesus as Jesus of Nazareth. They identified him with his hometown. The blind man identified Jesus as one who had kingly authority, Son of David, and tender mercy.

Verse 34 says, the inner circle of Jesus' disciples still didn't understand who he was despite many private conversations. And the blind man, relying only on second-hand reports, perceived something true about Jesus and desperately wanted more.

[ 18 : 49 ] Zacchaeus was also drawn to Jesus. Verse 3 said, he was seeking to see who Jesus was. And the tense of that verb may imply that he had wanted to see who Jesus was for a long time.

Maybe he had heard that unlike nearly every other religious teacher, Jesus spent time talking and eating with tax collectors, who is this religious teacher who doesn't just despise people like me?

Whatever his thinking, he heard that Jesus had come to town and he thought, here's my chance. They're both drawn to Jesus, but in both cases, the crowd gets in their way.

What happens when the blind man starts crying out to Jesus? The crowd tells him to shut up. Move over. You're not important.

Jesus is. Don't you recognize that? They rebuked him, just like they rebuked the parents who were bringing young infants to Jesus for his blessing.

[ 20 : 01 ] Zacchaeus was also hindered on account of the crowd. He couldn't see Jesus. You might say, well, why doesn't he, you know, okay, if he's short, why doesn't he just find a friendly tall person and ask to squeeze in front of them?

Right? I mean, if I'm ever in the back of a crowd, I just find somebody like Pastor Nick and say, hey, can I get in front of you?

Your view won't be obstructed at all. But no, there was no friendly person in the crowd.

Tax collectors were despised, even hated. They were seen as traitors and cheats. And their reputation was not completely undeserved.

So they're both drawn to Jesus. The crowd gets in both of their ways, but we see that both of them persist in reaching out to Jesus.

[ 21 : 08 ] The crowd tells the blind man to shut up and he gets louder. He cried out all the more. Zacchaeus couldn't see Jesus through the crowd, so he runs ahead of the crowd and climbs a tree.

Now, that's not exactly the most dignified thing to do. I mean, imagine a Yale professor or a pharmaceutical company executive, right, or someone who works in a bank and is wearing a suit, climbing a tree to peer over a crowd at a visiting celebrity.

A little unusual. Now, sycamore fig trees, they're native to Jericho, and they are great for climbing. They're those kind of trees that have a big trunk and lots of branches, low-hanging branches, and they also have large leaves.

So, most likely, Zacchaeus thought, okay, if I get up in this tree, I can get a good view of Jesus and probably I can escape being seen by the crowd.

But still, he was taking a risk because he was drawn to Jesus. Now, before we go on in the stories, let me take a moment to speak to those of you who might be like Zacchaeus or the blind man, drawn to Jesus but not yet committed to Him.

[ 22 : 41 ] Is there something about Jesus that is drawing you towards Him? Maybe it's what the blind man noticed, that he has this striking combination of kingly authority and tender mercy.

You know, if you read through the Gospels, you see this all the time. Jesus makes the boldest claims about Himself. He claims to be the promised Messiah. He claims to be God Himself. He claims to be and do what only God can be and do.

Over and over and over. And at the same time, Jesus washes His disciples' feet. He spends time with little children.

He touches lepers. He befriends outcasts. He's the humblest, most approachable person, most down-to-earth person ever. And you might think, how does that fit together?

I don't know anyone who's that authoritative and that humble at the same time. Maybe you grew up in another religious tradition, but you're seeing Jesus and you see something and it's strangely attractive and it's drawing you toward Him.

[ 24 : 01 ] And maybe you're desperate like the blind man, or maybe you're fascinated like Zacchaeus. But perhaps at the same time, there's also something that's getting in your way.

Something that's hindering you, blocking you, trying to intimidate you and get you to stay away from Jesus like the crowd. Maybe there's a hostile crowd that tells you like they told the blind man, you're worthless.

Shut up and get out of the way. Maybe you've had bad experiences with some of Jesus' disciples, or at least people who seem to be closer to Jesus than you are.

Maybe some of them look at you funny or make you feel like you're not wanted. If you begin seeking after Jesus, if you really want to find out who He is, there is almost always something that will try to get in your way and throw you off course.

And sometimes, once you start following Jesus, there's something that gets in your way and wants to stand between you and Jesus. Don't let anything get in the way of you finding out who Jesus really is.

[ 25 : 27 ] It's worth your time. It's worth the potential embarrassment and inconvenience. It's worth it to reach out to Him and seek to see Him for who He really is.

There's a reason why you're drawn to Him. It's worth finding out if that's real and true. And Christians, there's a lesson for us too.

Let's not allow anything to get in the way of us fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. So that's the first part of these stories, these two men.

On the outside, they looked completely different, but on the inside, they're both drawn to Jesus. Second part, how did Jesus find them?

I want you to step back for a moment. I want you to imagine that you are hearing or reading through the Gospel of Luke for the first time and that you know nothing else about Jesus or about Christianity.

[ 26 : 37 ] By this time in Luke's Gospel, you would probably expect that Jesus will heal this blind man. Why? Well, in chapter 4, Jesus' opening sermon, He says, He has come to proclaim good news to the poor and recovering of sight to the blind.

Chapter 7, He has already bestowed sight on many who are blind. Chapter 14, Jesus tells people, invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame to your feasts.

Chapter 17, Jesus heals a group of lepers who call out to Him in the same words, have mercy on us. Over and over, we've seen Jesus' compassion for the lowest, the last, and the least.

Jesus is the Savior of the helpless and the hopeless and of all who recognize their spiritually hopeless condition and cry out to Him for mercy. But if you were reading through Luke for the very first time or hearing it read to you back in the ancient world, what would you expect when you hear about Zacchaeus?

On the one hand, we've seen Jesus earlier in Luke showing welcome and hospitality to tax collectors and sinners. On the other hand, we've seen Jesus repeatedly warning the rich that God's judgment will come upon them.

[ 28 : 00 ] If you do a word search for the word rich in the Gospel of Luke, here's what you'll find. Chapter 1, the Song of Mary. God has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty.

Chapter 6, woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation. Chapter 12, the parable of the rich fool.

With great plans to build bigger barns only to have his life taken from him that very night. Chapter 16, the parable of the rich man who ends up in hell while Lazarus ends up in heaven.

In chapter 18, the ruler who at first seemed so eager to follow Jesus, but when Jesus told him to give away his wealth, he became very sad for he was extremely rich.

And Jesus says in chapter 18, verse 25, 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. So far in the gospel of Luke, riches are almost always a hindrance to following Jesus.

[ 29 : 17 ] And so when we hear in verse 2 that Zacchaeus was rich, we think he's the most unlikely candidate to join Jesus' entourage.

He's the one who would have seemed farthest away from the kingdom of God. He had everything he could want in this world's terms and so why would he need anything else?

But Jesus seeks and saves even him. You see, you can't predict in advance how someone will respond to Jesus.

sometimes we can be tempted to write people off because we assume that they have no interest in spiritual things at all.

The only way you can know is to invite them in one way or another to consider Jesus. Both men were drawn toward Jesus but neither of them would have found Jesus on their own.

[ 30 : 31 ] You see, neither of them would have personally encountered Jesus unless Jesus personally sought them out. You see, what we see in these two stories is not the blind man and Zacchaeus successfully being successful in their quest to find Jesus.

We see Jesus being successful in his quest to find them. All the blind man could do was cry out for help. He couldn't even see where Jesus was, let alone walk over to him.

Verse 40 says, Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him and said, what do you want me to do for you? Jesus treated the man as a person to be loved and honored, not as a problem to be solved or done away with.

Jesus was not too busy, too anxious, or too distracted to hear the cries of a desperate man. And Jesus gave this blind man even more than he asked for.

Lord, let me recover my sight. And Jesus says, recover your sight. And then he says, your faith has made you well.

[ 31 : 56 ] But elsewhere, that same phrase is translated, your faith has saved you. Who can be saved?

Everyone who reaches out to Jesus in faith. likewise, Zacchaeus also got more from Jesus than he had bargained for.

You know, it's not clear what exactly Zacchaeus was hoping for. Climb the tree, certainly wants to see Jesus. Perhaps he wants to hear him in person. But he certainly didn't expect Jesus to look up in the tree and call him by name and invite himself over to his house for dinner.

By the way, that was not any more common in the ancient world than it is today. It's the only time somebody does that in the Gospels.

Jesus came to Zacchaeus' house, and verse 9 says salvation came to Zacchaeus' house that day too, because Jesus had come. You see, despite the barriers presented by the crowd, Jesus sought out these two men.

- [ 33 : 18 ] Someone said, if anyone is seeking after God, it is only because God has been seeking that person first. C.S. Lewis wrote, there comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion, man's search for God, suddenly draw back.

Supposing we really found him, worse still, supposing he had found us. An impersonal God, well and good.

A subject of God inside our own heads, better still. A formless life force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap best of all. But God himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, approaching at an infinite speed, the hunter, the king, the husband, that is quite another matter.

Jesus says to Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today. It's that verb, must, that Luke uses over and over to indicate the steadfast purpose of God.

Hurry, he says. We must not even delay. And in verse 6, we see Zacchaeus' vigorous response. Four colorful verbs.

- [ 34 : 38 ] He hurried, he came down, he received, and he rejoiced. Verse 7, we see the crowd's response again in four verbs. They saw, they grumbled, he has gone to be his guest.

You see, Jesus endures the scorn and hatred of the crowd against Zacchaeus.

the crowd starts complaining about Jesus, not just about that despised tax collector who got rich off us.

The crowd now says, he has gone there. But the Bible says Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters.

Jesus identifies with us even to the point of enduring the scorn and hatred that others direct against us.

- [ 35 : 54 ] Hebrews says, he endured the cross, despising the shame, so that we might be brought with him to glory. glory. You notice how the crowd's reactions differ?

When Jesus heals the blind man, the crowd rejoices. They praise God. When Jesus goes to Zacchaeus' house, the crowd grumbles. But Jesus doesn't choose his followers based on a popularity contest.

Thank God. God. He doesn't extend his welcome to us based on how many people will approve of him for welcoming us. He has come to seek and to save the lost.

He's come on a search and rescue mission. Finally, the result. How are these men changed by their encounter with Jesus?

Jesus. The blind man shows us what faith looks like. Verse 43, he recovered his sight and followed Jesus glorifying God.

- [ 37 : 04 ] You see, the blind man didn't just see Jesus as a means to some other end. He didn't just get his healing, go on his way, and do his own thing. No, his healing led him to obedience and worship.

He led the people in praising God. Nothing could hold him back from becoming a full-fledged disciple. The twelve couldn't imagine why Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. The blind man couldn't imagine not going with him.

That's what faith looks like, following Jesus and worshipping God. You see, faith is not like it's something that we have to sort of build up within ourselves and feel within ourselves and feel really strong in.



Faith is simply looking at Jesus. at first, it's reaching out to him despite the hindrance of the crowd, and at the end, it's following him and walking with him along the road.

It's just looking at him. When Jesus says, your faith has saved you, Jesus is not saying your achievement has saved you. He's saying, looking at me as I have saved you.

[ 38 : 19 ] The blind man shows us a picture of faith. And Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus shows us a picture of repentance. Verse 8, without even being asked to do so, Zacchaeus willingly gives 50% of his wealth to the poor, and he promises to make restitution to everyone he has wronged.

That's a heart that has been changed by the grace of Jesus. Back then, giving 20% of your wealth away was considered extremely generous. And in most cases, the law of Moses only required you to add 20% when making restitution.

Zacchaeus goes above and beyond the letter of the law because the Holy Spirit had broken through in his heart and given him a love for God.

He had become a child of God. You see, when someone truly receives Jesus like Zacchaeus, there are fruits of repentance. Sooner or later, repentance expresses itself in concrete acts.

Someone said, when Jesus opened his heart to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus opened his heart to the poor. See, when we truly receive Jesus, we begin to see other people differently.

[ 39 : 40 ] People that you used to think of as beneath you are now fellow image bearers of God or even brothers and sisters in Christ. People who you used to see as above you, you're not so intimidated by them anymore because they're just people.

The blind man could join in with Jesus' disciples and not be ashamed. From all the humiliation he experienced through his whole life, he knew that he belonged in the company of Jesus' disciples and Zacchaeus no longer looked down on the poor and on his customers.

He started to value them and want to treat them right and to love his neighbor as himself and so he said, I'm going to share some of what I have. Zacchaeus gives us a picture of repentance, the blind man gives us a picture of faith, but in reality these are simply two sides of the same coin.

Turning from sin, turning to Jesus, getting off the sinking ship and stepping in to the lifeboat. Why did Jesus come to earth?

Why did he go up to Jerusalem and enter the city on Palm Sunday and suffer and die on Good Friday and rise again on Easter Sunday? He did it all because he came to seek and to save the lost.

[ 41 : 10 ] Let us pray. We thank you, Lord, for your abundant mercy and grace.

We thank you for how we see it in the story of these two men who you sought out, who you found, and who now belong to you.

and trust you and worship you for all eternity. Lord, we pray. We pray that you would search us out.

Lord, those of us who are far from you, we pray that you would search us out and show yourself to us and draw us to you. we pray that for those of us who have come to repent and believe in you, that we would continue on that journey of daily repentance and faith, that we would look to you, our great shepherd, our great Savior, our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.