

THE SON OF MAN CAME...

Luke 19:1-10

INTRO

Is the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus merely an amusing story about a short man climbing a tree, or is it something more? Don't get me wrong, I love climbing trees, but Jesus believes there is far more happening here; in fact, he uses this encounter to show us his reason for coming to earth. By watching the story of Zacchaeus unfold this morning, we'll see Jesus' chief mission on earth: "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Is that something new, or has God always been seeking his people? From the garden when God called to Adam and said: "Where are you?" to the night when God wrestled with Jacob and left him with a limp and a new name, to the time when God remembered his people's suffering in Egypt and spoke to Moses from a bush alight with flame, to the murderous Pharisee blinded by divine light and made a monument to sufficient grace.

As God promises in Ezekiel 34, "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out...I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness" (34:11-12).

Zacchaeus is just such a story of God seeking and saving his people. And, as we'll see, his story is ours too.

But first, let's meet Zacchaeus. His name in Hebrew means "pure" and "righteous,"¹ but his life was quite the opposite. He was not only a tax collector but a "*chief* tax collector" (19:2), meaning he was likely manager over all the collections in Jericho, one of the three main tax centers in Palestine.^{2,3}

And he was "rich" – for two reasons: 1) because Jericho was a city booming with trade from its balsam trees and dates, in addition to boasting rose gardens, a Palm Forest, and main streets lined with

¹ William Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 159.

² Barclay, *Luke*, p. 208.

³ Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 208.

sycamore trees⁴ and 2) because tax collectors traitorously worked for the Roman Empire and were known to defraud people by taking more than they should.

At the top of his professional ladder, Z was likely the most hated man in Jericho – people expected the Romans to be bad, but one of their own turning on them?⁵

We also learn that he’s curious about Jesus – (v. 3) “he was seeking to see who Jesus was.” Perhaps he had heard reports⁶ – here was a rabbi who had a tax collector (Matthew) as one of his students – unheard of. Perhaps he heard about the kind of people this Teacher spent time with, and this gave him some vague hope.

We learn that Zacchaeus is not the tallest guy on the block – he’s “small in stature.” And we learn that he’s courageous or desperate or unsatisfied with his riches, or all of these, because he’ll do whatever it takes to get a glimpse of Jesus. And as we’re about to find out, this is the very man Jesus is seeking, for:

I. The Son of Man came to seek the lost.

“Lost” here literally means separated/disconnected from God.⁷

The word “seek” carries the idea of searching for someone/thing that is difficult to find.⁸ Twenty years earlier, when Mary and Joseph find twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, Mary says, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been *searching* for you in great distress” (Lk. 2:48). It took them three days to find him.

Jesus uses the same word to describe what the woman did when she lost one of her coins – no couch cushion was left unturned until she found it (Lk. 15:8).

⁴ Barclay, p. 234; Henriksen, p. 855.

⁵ Barclay, p. 234.

⁶ Bock, *Luke*, p. 1517.

⁷ Danker, pp. 47-48.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

What do we learn about Jesus' mission to seek the lost here?

A. SEEKING – Jesus Does the Impossible

[Just before Zacchaeus, Jesus meets another rich man, but this young man walks away clinging to his wealth, and Jesus said, “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” (Lk. 18:25). – “eye of needle” = smallest opening found in a home - impossible. His hearers wonder, “Then who can be saved?” And Jesus said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” God's seeking grace does the impossible.

[Who seems impossible to you? Perhaps you're hiding and you feel so distant from God it seems impossible to get back.]

Not only does Jesus seek impossible people, but:

B. SEEKING – Jesus Makes Obstacles into Opportunities for His Grace

Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, but there were two obstacles: (v. 3) the crowd and his height.

Jesus turns these into opportunities – because he's short and the crowd is too big, he runs ahead and climbs a tree – the very tree Jesus pauses at, looks up, and calls Zacchaeus down from.

Had he not been short, would Jesus have seen him and called him down, or would he have seen Jesus and left even more curious?

Note – these obstacles of the crowd and his short stature were both out of his control. He didn't choose these things.

Have you noticed that God often uses things in our lives that are out of our control and seem like hindrances/trials to propel us to him? You may be in a pit so deep.

[When a savage storm nearly crushed John Newton's ship, he uttered the first cry for mercy to the Lord since his childhood. He did not choose this storm, but God used it as an opportunity for him to experience amazing grace.]

Have you seen God make obstacles in your life, even deeply painful circumstances/trials, into the very pathways that lead you to back to him?

C. SEEKING – Jesus Takes the Initiative

(v 5) “And when Jesus came to the place, Zacchaeus said, ‘hey you! Look up here! I’m your guy!’???”

No, Jesus “looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.’”

Talk about taking the initiative –

- 1) Knows Z’s name – divine foreknowledge?
- 2) “I must stay” – “it’s necessary that I stay” – John 4:4
- 3) “stay” – remain, abide – not just quick visit, I’m spending the night! Reverse hospitality ☺

Zacchaeus wanted to “see who Jesus was;” Jesus already knew who he was. Is this not the way Jesus seeks us?

By doing the impossible, by making obstacles into opportunities for his grace, and by taking the initiative to move towards us before we would ever move towards him.

WHY SEEK US like this? TO SAVE US.

II. The Son of Man Came To Save the Lost

“Save” – rescue from spiritual peril”⁹

What does this saving look like in a life?

A. SAVING – Brings a Change of Heart (6)

How does Zacchaeus respond by being put on the spot? “I’ve gotta clean my house quick!” – no, “he hurried and came down and received him joyfully” – responds with JOY

⁹ Danker, p. 345.

Common response to Jesus' coming:

- Mary's song before Jesus' birth: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit *rejoices* in God my Savior" (Lk. 1:46)
- The shepherds at Jesus's birth – "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great *joy* that will be for all people...(just like Z hurried down) they went with haste" to find Jesus (Lk. 2:10, 16).

Zacchaeus went from being curious about Jesus to being captivated with him. He had a change of affections.

But it wasn't just a change of heart, Z had a change of life flowing from this new heart.

B. SAVING – Brings a Change of Life (8)

(v. 8) "stood and said, '1/2 possession to the poor, if cheated anyone, restore 4x"

1) pretty rich if he can give this much away!

2) 4x – goes far beyond the law's demands for this situation¹⁰ (at most 2x)

His change of heart leads to a change of life – changes the way he sees money – from something to hoard for self to something to give to others – goes from taking advantage of others to serving them

[Newton – from slave ship captain, to treating slaves better than any other, to one of loudest voices for abolition of the slave trade]

Z's change of life shows that his change of heart is real, and it's the same for us.¹¹

C. SAVING – Open to All (7, 9)

¹⁰ Bock, p. 1520.

¹¹ Barclay, p. 235.

(9) “Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.’”

Calling him a “son of Abraham” – double meaning:

- 1) National identity – Jewish – one of the lost sheep of Israel, heir of God’s promises
- 2) Spiritual identity – just as Abraham was made righteous by his faith apart from works, so was Z

Note – Repentance and faith is not the response of all present – (v. 7) crowd can’t believe that out of all Jesus could have stayed the night with, he chose Z! But isn’t that Jesus’ point? These are the ones he’s come for – sinners.

Interesting – Z is last person Jesus spends time with in Luke’s gospel before his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

(v 1) “He entered Jericho and was passing through” – whereto? (18:31) “See, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished...” In just over a week, going to die, and on the third day rise.

Zacchaeus’s house was his last stop in Luke¹² – why?

Another question: Is this the first time God is Seeking and Saving someone in Jericho?

Remember a certain prostitute who took in certain Israelite spies? The word used when Zacchaeus “received Jesus” into his home – lit. “welcome under one’s roof,”¹³ “show hospitality”¹⁴ – this is the same word used James uses (Ja 2:25) to describe Rahab taking in the spies.

Both were known in Jericho as some of the most massive sinners of their day. Why would God seek them out?

¹² John records Mary in Bethany (John 12).

¹³ Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, p. 227.

¹⁴ Danker, p. 364.

What if Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus is more than just good material for nursery rhymes and picture books. What if people like Zacchaeus and Rahab are just the kind of people Jesus came to save? Because he delights in making massive sinners – sinners like John Newton, like you, and like me – into monuments of his grace. He will “seek the lost sheep, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak” (Ez 34:16).

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”