

Osaka International Church
Luke 19:1-10
Zaccheus – Understanding Salvation
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Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

One thing about the 20th century has been the rise of multinational corporations and the explosion of mission statements or slogans. While watching Japanese television every product or company has a song or statement to promote their product or company. But these ‘mission statements’ when done correctly can be powerful. Even in my job as a school teacher every single has to have an inspiring mission statement (most actually include the word ‘inspire’). The reason I think mission statements have become so popular is that they explain and give focus to our actions. They make clear what we’re about.

What was Jesus’ mission statement? What explained his actions? Well you can find it here in this passage in **verse 10: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” One fundamental thing you can’t escape from in the Christian message is the idea of salvation.** It’s one of the unique things about Christianity. It’s not about a personal or social improvement project; salvation (being saved) is part and parcel of the good news. Chances are if you’re a Christian here you’ve talked about it with many people, and if you wouldn’t call yourself a Christian you’ve probably heard it time and again when the subject of Jesus comes up.

***Trans.** But the famous statement that you find all over Luke in many different forms needs some explanation. What does it mean? And what Luke does for us here is give us a picture of what the statement in v10 looks like. What we’re going to see is that this passage tells us three things about Jesus’ purpose statement: one about Jesus’ seeking the lost (**we’ll call it the scope of salvation**), and two about his saving the lost, (**what you could call the joy of salvation and the fruit of salvation**). So let’s look first at the **scope of salvation**.*

I. The Scope and Scandal of Salvation:

- a. Now, just like last week where we saw our definition or measure of sin can be off, so can our definition of who is ‘lost’. We can let our own human definitions of who deserves forgiveness cloud our understanding of what the Bible says about it. Those of us who are Christians here this morning would say we understand forgiveness, but from my own experience it’s easy to assent to the idea of God’s forgiveness yet still not functionally believe in it.
 - i. And you can see this dynamic being played out all across Luke’s gospel. People are always misunderstanding the mission of Jesus even when he tells them clearly. And the crowds of Jericho are no exception. Let’s look at **verse 7: “All the people saw this and began to mutter ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”** In the same way that Simon last week grumbled in his heart that the woman touching Jesus was a sinner, the crowd muttered as Jesus invited

himself to a sinners' house. They're saying, "What business does Jesus have getting cosy with this guy?"

ii. Okay, that's the encounter at face value, but let's try to understand it: **why do they mutter?**

1. In short (excuse the joke), **because Zaccheus is a tax collector**. Most of us who have read this passage before will understand something about the role of a tax collector in Jesus' time.

a. Remember that Israel was under occupation by the Roman Empire, which meant they owed taxes to Caesar. But this isn't like the Inland Revenue; Zaccheus was **basically in charge of collecting protection money**. It's less a system of government control and more of a mafia protection racket: "you give us money and we won't smash you."

b. And Zaccheus isn't just a tax collector; he's the chief tax collector (the only time this phrase is used in the entire Bible, by the way). His fellow Jews would have seen him as the corrupt spider at the centre of the web of extortion in Jericho. He's powerful because he's in with the Romans and he's filthy rich because he's been fleecing the people and skimming the cream off the top. He's clearly a very successful fraudster.

c. And can you see now why the people in the crowds are so offended by what Jesus is doing?

b. **They are coming face to face with the offense/scandal of the Gospel**. They find it unacceptable that Jesus came for Zaccheus. He's the one who has actively been harming and extorting money from the people of Israel (the people for whom Jesus is supposed to be the king who comes in the name of the Lord, the Messiah). Yet here Jesus is, accepting the hospitality of a man who's been actively harming their community. **A man who in their eyes does not deserve sympathy.**

i. We can tend to limit our definition of who is 'lost' based on our own assumption of who we think deserves sympathy. Usually it's people who have been downtrodden or abused, those who are in a desperate situation. But that's only half of the picture. We need to remember the inclusiveness of the gospel. The scandal is that Jesus didn't just come for the downtrodden and the abused (though he absolutely did). **He also came for those doing the treading down and the abusing**. Do you see how broad is Jesus' definition of the 'lost'?

ii. Think about the people in your life whom you might have shared the gospel with. How many of them were difficult to love? Would you want to share the gospel with someone who was arrogant, or proud, or difficult to get along with? What if they were engaged in fraud, or activities that were morally questionable? What if they were taking advantage of people?

1. I wonder how you felt about the Mitsubishi scandal in the news, where the company had been falsifying data about their cars emissions to make more money overall? Even internationally the news caused disappointment and outrage at their actions. Now, the way we may feel about those people with power who avoid the truth in order to make a higher profit gives us an insight into how the crowds feel about Zaccheus. And Jesus is the friend of this outcast rich man.

iii. Don't get me wrong: God is a God who sees the injustice done to the poor and needy and will put it right, but **he also sent Jesus to earth to seek and save all who were lost, not just those we think deserve it**. Think of all those people who we think don't deserve help or mercy, would we truly be rejoicing if Jesus came and wanted them in his kingdom? That's the offence of the gospel.

Trans. So we need to realise that salvation is open even to the people we find offensive and underserving of sympathy (and how powerful is that? No-one is off limits for Jesus). But this passage also teaches us

something really precious about the meaning of Jesus' seeking and saving the lost. Let's turn now to look at **the joy of salvation**.

II. The Joy of Salvation:

- a. Because this passage is full of what happens when you truly grasp that Jesus came to seek you. See the joy of Zaccheus in **v6** and **8**: he welcomes Jesus gladly (or with joy), and when he begins to give away his possessions he says "**Look, Lord!**" the same way a child does when they're doing something they want daddy to see. He could have just done his duty but it looks like Zaccheus is full of joy. **Why is he so joyful?** It would be easy to say 'because he met Jesus', but it goes so much deeper than that.
 - i. Have you wondered why Luke goes out of his way to point out Zaccheus' height and the fact he has to climb a sycamore tree in **verses 3 and 4**? Seems like a bit of a strange thing to include.
 1. Luke does it to emphasise that **the crowd hates him**. See, Zaccheus' greed has made him an outsider. The crowd won't even let him through to see Jesus (what does it honestly cost to move aside if you're taller than someone?), but Jesus comes through the crowd to him.
 - ii. And that sets up a contrast for us. Zaccheus responds with joy to Jesus because he realises something: **In asking for Zaccheus' hospitality Jesus bore the disdain of the crowd**. You can see the crowd's disgust at Zaccheus in how they exclude him from seeing Jesus, and their muttering at Jesus' acceptance of his hospitality. But **Jesus takes on that disapproval and disgust in order to save Zaccheus**. Zaccheus hadn't even heard about the cross, and look at his joy.
 1. How much more joyful should we be knowing what Jesus had to bear so that he could be *our* friend and saviour? Jesus bore the disgust of God at our sin, his divine disapproval over our moral corruption.
- b. **Individuality**
 - i. And we're also shown here that the Gospel is for individuals. Look at how personal this salvation that comes to Zaccheus is: taking **verse 1** at face value it seems like Jesus was just passing through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem, but **he is actually seeking out an individual**.
 - ii. Jesus highlights this by saying he 'must' come and stay at Zaccheus' house. Salvation is not random for Jesus; it's a must. He *must* be the guest at your house. He's *got* to see you! He *must* have you!
 1. Isn't the beauty of a marriage or a relationship that it's just for you? That person wanted you and you alone out of all the other people they'd met. It's that the other person is interested in *us*, not as a project, but a person. Now that's because we see something lovely in the other person, but the beauty of the gospel is that God looks at *you*, even though there's nothing he could need in you, nothing lovely in you and picks *you* out. He looks at you and says 'I've *got* to have that person.'

Trans. But I'm sure you can imagine there might be many who would doubt the genuineness of Zaccheus' conversion. So what Luke does is show us how Jesus' saving of Zaccheus works itself out in his life. He shows us **the fruit of salvation**, and this is going to be the final thing we'll look at today.

III. The Fruit of Salvation:

- a. **And the fruit Zaccheus shows is a generous joy.**
 - i. What had been used to oppress people was turned into a means to bless them. He had been ripping people off, now he pours out his possessions on them.
 1. Remember how we saw earlier that Zaccheus could have just done his duty and left it at that? But here Zaccheus lists the numbers for us. See the OT standard of tithing was 10%, but he gives 50%. The amount you'd give back to those you'd wronged was 120%; he gives 400%.

2. See, for Zaccheus all he had was his money and the power that brought with it. It's what kept him safe, allowed him to exert control over people. What he's doing here is relinquishing his power.
 3. This really convicted me. When I started to tithe I did so because I was genuinely grateful for my job, but I only gave as much as was comfortable. I wasn't ready to give sacrificially. Why? Because money represents control, comfort and opportunity. It represents power. I'd forgotten that Jesus gave up his power and comfort for me, so that I could have the only comfort, power and safety that really matter. Just like Zaccheus, my generosity displays how well I understand the gospel. Sometimes our unwillingness to give and make ourselves vulnerable by it is because we don't trust that being in Christ is our true safety, our true power.
- b. And lastly, the order that this generosity comes in tells us something about the **uniqueness of the Christian message** as well. There's a connection between **verse 5** and **9**, which shows **salvation comes to you; you don't bring it to yourself**.
- i. You don't clean your life up then wait for Jesus to say, "I love you." Jesus says to Zaccheus, "I love you." And then he cleans up his life *because* of the total change of heart he's had. **See, that's the only way to know that you're genuine. If you clean your life up so God will love you you're being ultimately selfish. If you clean your life up because God has loved you it's because you've been born again.** It's a sure sign.
 - ii. Tim Keller makes a great point about the way salvation works in Christianity. What he says is that **in every other religion salvation is basically a process**. It's all about what *you* do, so you can never be sure you've done well enough (and you'll never do enough, by the way). When I used to work in London with Muslims I remember often asking them about how salvation worked in Islam. I always used to get the response "Insha'Allah I'll go to heaven." which means that "God willing I'll get in." and it sounds very humble and makes total sense if you're whole system of relating to God is based on how well you live. I think it's also fair to say that in Buddhism you achieve enlightenment if you've meditated deeply enough and cleansed your heart of evil desires.
 - iii. But that's not the way it works with Jesus. In this passage he can say, "**salvation has come to this house**" because Jesus has come to this house. Jesus *is* salvation; he doesn't just bring it. If you're a Christian here today please don't ever fall into the trap of wondering if you've done well enough for God. You can say over your soul with confidence "Salvation has come to this house." People may call it arrogance, but the Bible names it boasting in the cross: "**May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ....**" (Galatians 6:14) revelling in the fact that the *whole point* is that you weren't good enough, but Christ was. Christ was good enough for God, and you are saved on his merits alone.