

Jesus Seeks Lost sinners, Part 1

Luke 19:1-6

Well, I'd like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Luke 19, Luke 19. Little hooray for getting into a yet another chapter of Luke's Gospel. They seem to come slowly to us, don't they? But Luke 19 in verse 1, and this is the account of a lost sinner who sought the Savior. It's also the account of the Savior who came to seek a lost sinner. Zacchaeus, the lost sinner, he wanted to see Jesus, and so he sought him. And Jesus the Savior, we find out, came seeking Zacchaeus.

So the question is, who was seeking whom? It's a very simple story. Simple account. It is typical to Luke as he records this narrative. He does not at all guild the lily. He does not try to overdo or over tell the story, but what he puts into the text is beautiful in its simplicity but it's also deeply, deeply meaningful. Very, very profound theology and explanation of salvation comes in this very simple narrative.

And there is as we're presented with the seeking savior and the seeking sinner, we ask that question who is seeking whom?

In his book, *The Message of Salvation*, Pastor Philip Graham Ryken, he pastored for a long time the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a renowned church. But he relayed in this book, *The Message of Salvation*," this illustration that was made famous by the well known Bible teacher Donald Gray Barnhouse.

And Donald Gray Barnhouse tried to use this illustration to help people understand the doctrine of election. "He asked them to imagine a cross like the one on which Jesus died, only so large that it had a door in it. And over the door were these words from Revelation, 'whosoever will may come.' These words represent the free and universal offer of the Gospel. By God's grace, the message of salvation is for everyone. Every man, woman, and child who will come to the cross is invited to believe in Jesus Christ and enter eternal life. On the other side of the door, a happy surprise awaits the one who believes and enters. From the inside, anyone glancing back can see these words from Ephesians written above the door, 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.' Election is best understood in hindsight, for it is only after coming to Christ that one can know whether one has been chosen in Christ. Those who make a decision for Christ find that God made a decision for them in eternity past." End Quote.

What a wonderful mystery as the free decisions, and the free conscious choices of moral agents, intersect. On the one hand the sinner, but on the other hand, the God of Heaven. We see those intersect here in the text before us as Zacchaeus of his own free will seeks the Savior and Jesus too of his free will and, we would say, his sovereign free will. He seeks Zacchaeus. His will and the will of Zacchaeus align in perfect, harmonious, beautiful simplicity here in this profound story of salvation. And which will be primary, which will is primary, which initiative to seek takes precedence over the other.

Well, let's just read these few verses and see what light the text here sheds on our question. Luke 19:1, "He" that is Jesus, "he entered Jericho and was passing through and 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 of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

"And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and he 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's 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 four fold.' 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.'"

So let's consider this Zacchaeus as he's first drawn to Jesus and then as he's awakened to new life. So here's a first point. Only two points for this morning. So here's a first, number one. Zacchaeus the seeking sinner. Zacchaeus the seeking sinner. We see Luke is connecting us to the previous account there in verse 1, just a very short statement. He entered Jericho and was passing through. That's just a point of reference. It connects us to the same city. So same city, same setting, same time frame, as last week. Remember, Jesus was outside the city when he met blind Bartimaeus and his friend on the road to Jericho.

That healing encounter took place outside the city gates, along the roadside and open space. But after that, he goes back inside the city of Jericho, verse 1, and he's passing through. The verb tense there indicates that he's, he's walking along, and it pictures him moving through the city, not aimlessly, but

really with intent. Just a brief word about the setting that Luke gives us here, and Luke quickly moves us on to think about the man, this man Zacchaeus.

Luke describes him in verse 2 and then he shows us what this man wanted in verse 3, and then he describes how he put himself in a position to get what he wanted in verse 4. So the man, what he wanted, and putting himself in a position to get it. That's kind of the order of two versus 2, 3 and 4. It starts out in verse 2, "And behold," and behold, "there was a man named Zacchaeus. Luke is calling our attention to a man. He's really grabbing our attention. It's like he's grabbing our face and turning us to look at this guy. Behold, this man seeking Jesus; Luke sees him as something very out of the ordinary. This is not, this is not the common experience Jesus has had, and he gives us three particulars to help him see why.

First, the man's name is Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Zaccai. It's a name that you can find actually written in Ezra 2:9 and Nehemiah 7:14. Some of the, some of the exiles who came back into the land with Ezra and Nehemiah and the name Zaccai. The, it's from the verb *zakak* and it's related to the adjective *zak*. And it means pure, it means clear. So the adjective *zak*, it means pure, it means clear

to describe the quality of the olive oil that had to be used in the temple to keep the menorah lit. So clear, pure olive oil, pure oil, clear. And that literal use of the term, that literal meaning, resulted in a figurative usage, the quality of purity and clarity that ought to characterize someone's life.

This is what the life of virtue or integrity looks like. Purity, clarity. Proverbs 20 verse 11, "Even a child makes himself known by his acts whether his conduct is pure and upright." Same word there. So from his Hebrew name we know that Zacchaeus was a Jew, and from his name we can assume his parents had godly aspirations for Zacchaeus. They hoped that he would, like all parents do for their kids, he, they hoped that he would live up to his name. That his conduct would be pure, that it would be upright. That his path would be clear before him. Clarity in the path of righteousness. Sadly, it was not to be, he's blown that. Luke describes him further, that he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. Chief tax collector, and he was rich. It means he was good at his job as a tax collector.

Zacchaeus, at some point, must have chosen to dive to the bottom of a filthy cesspool of social outcasts. Because that's what tax collection business was all about. He chose the most disreputable profession, especially considering Israel and its

situation underneath the Roman oppressors. Worse, he was being paid very well for it, for he was the kind of man who was able to trade his reputation for money. Much like the stereotype of modern day politicians. They don't care anymore about truth or honesty. They just care about money and, and kickbacks and favors, and all that brings us to the second point of interest in this man's bio, that Zacchaeus was a tax collector.

Actually, Luke says he's a chief tax collector, which means he sat at the very top of the tax system in Jericho. And to pull that off, he had to be, I mean, he was no dummy. He was an intelligent man. He had to be a very skilled, shrewd, conniving, we should say, politician. He was good at getting what he wanted. He was good at backroom deals. He was good at the art of compromise, at the art of making a deal.

Last week we spent some time getting acquainted with the city of Jericho itself. We learned that Jericho really sits at a strategic economic crossroads in the world, in that region. So all kinds of goods and trade and money flowing in and out of Jericho, all kinds of people in and out of Jericho, those serving the Herodian dynasty. The Herodian dynasty had made Jericho its winter quarters, its winter getaway place, because it was warmer and, and pleasant.

So all those serving that dynasty, all the priests and the Levites who served in the Jerusalem temple, many of them lived in Jericho. Caravans of traders that passed through and all of their entourage, all the people who served. We talked about this last time, the balsam industry, production to sales, to distribution in that entire industry. Everything from perfumes to medicines to oils. All that supported that industry and trade was there in Jericho.

Don't forget the soldiers who were there, who are keeping the city safe from marauders and invaders. Everybody who attends and tries to get the soldiers money who are far away from home and willing to spend trying to get their money and make it change hands. So all kinds of people living and working in Jericho, serving the populace of Jericho. It's a cosmopolitan city. A lot of languages kind of flowing in and out of there. Very wealthy city. Probably lots of very good food in that city. Lots of joy and pleasures of this world and temporal pleasures and joys and all the rest.

So this meant, because Jericho was so prosperous and so industrious, Rome kept a very close eye on Jericho. Made sure that the customs, the tariffs, the toll taxes are all tracked well, carefully collected, properly accounted for and the full



revenue sent back to Rome. Just a little insight into how that works. The Roman Senate back in Rome created tax franchise that, franchises that they would sell to rich businessmen in Rome, in and around Rome, from the Equatorial class of Romans. So these are Romans who buy these franchises, tax franchises. They are from the wealthiest class of Roman society.

These uber wealthy businessmen, they would bid for this franchise contract. And after they won, won the contract they would pay the bid price itself into the public treasury of Rome. So the reference to that is *in publicum*, *in publicum* and hence the name *publicani*, or *publicany* or *publican*. We understand it as publican. These are Romans, publicans from the Equatorial class of the Romans, most of them are Romans. They are the ones who held the tax contracts, and they hired these tax collectors, unscrupulous men from the native population, in this case, from among the Jews. These are Jewish men, so Jewish tax collectors. *Telones* is the word. They are the ones who run the day to day operations of tax collection.

You have to understand, by operating one of these tax franchises, one of these sites of tax collection, these unprincipled men already making a deal with the devil, so to speak, to get money from their own people. Already they're

unscrupulous, they're unprincipled men. And so they apply that not only upward to get what they want, but then downward to fleece the flock. To take every advantage of their own people. And they did that. Whatever came through their tax houses, whatever goods passed through the customs office, that *telones* is there. The tax collector is there to examine bales of goods, examine what's on the caravan coming through, what's on the wagon coming through, whether it's imported or exported, whatever is coming in or going out of the city. They assessed values more or less arbitrarily. Whatever they thought they could get away with, then they wrote up the tax bill, demanded payment.

For business owners who were in town operating a business locally, maybe those who bought wholesale goods, or who traded with the caravans of traders, or just had things that they wanted to sell, even food or whatever it was. For the business owners in town for the common people, tax collectors hired others under them to do the work of actually collecting those taxes. So whoever refused to pay them voluntarily, or whoever did not pay on time, they hired street thugs to go and coerce payment. And that created just another layer of an opportunity for extortion, since this hired muscle added an additional percentage on top of the required amount.

According to William Smith, "Tax collectors overcharged whenever they had the opportunity. They brought false charges of smuggling in the hopes of extorting hush money, and they detained and opened letters on mere suspicion. It was the basest of all livelihoods. They were regarded as traitors and apostates, defiled by their frequent intercourse with the heathen willing tools of the Roman oppressor." End Quote.

It's one of these men, these *telones*, a tax collector, keep in mind, one of these kinds of people is who Jesus called to be one of his disciples; it's one of these whom Jesus chose to be one of his twelve apostles. Luke 5:27 says, "After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax booth and he said to him, 'Follow me' and, leaving everything, he rose followed him." And Levi, we know him as Matthew. He's the writer of the Gospel of Matthew. We know that he was not some two-bit street thug. He hired people like that, but he was the one who was in charge of them. He had employees working for him at all different levels in his own tax house. He was their boss, but he was certainly responsible for everything that goes on underneath him.

Coming back to Luke, 19:2, Zacchaeus, he's not just a *telones*. He's at a higher level than Matthew. He's higher than a

*telones*, a tax collector. Zacchaeus is an *architelones*, a chief tax collector. So he employed a number of men like Matthew, with their own tax collectors, each over different tax houses, maybe doing different duties around the city and around that region. So he's got tentacles reaching out to all different levels of customs and commerce, and he's collecting all the different kinds of taxes that Rome could devise.

So think of Zacchaeus, he's at the apex of this massive tax enterprise, he's a very powerful and a very wealthy man. Since this is the only place in New Testament where we find this title, *architelones*, we don't know for certain his exact rank or his exact position, but he is at a very high level. And it's more at a strategic level, an operational level, so to speak. He's at a political level, he's got close interaction with Roman officials. He's in constant communication with Rome since Jericho is of interest to Rome.

So think of Zacchaeus, and some commentators even call him this, that he is like a tax commissioner. He's the commissioner of taxes and customs for the city of Jericho. That's the level he's at. He's an important figure to Rome, okay? But he's a despised and much maligned, hated, figure among his own people. Still, Rome paid him well. And with that paycheck, with that

salary, with that, with the money con, constantly pouring in, so much money he doesn't know what to do with, he hoped that money would help him forget the social price that he had to pay for all this. Which brings us to the third description of Zacchaeus, namely that he was rich. He was rich.

We get an idea of how rich down in verse 8, when he vows to give half of his possessions to the poor. We're not talking, when we say possessions, we don't mean just what's in the bank account. We mean possessions. All the real estate he's bought up. All the businesses that he's bought up and operates. All the households that he runs and is over. His possessions, half of it to the poor. And he vowed to use the other half to pay back four-fold whatever he had extorted from anyone else. Man, that had to be a pretty hefty sum considering all the, the graft and the kickbacks and extortion and everything that was happening underneath him. He was far richer than any of us can imagine.

That's how Luke introduces Zacchaeus to us, by his name, by his job, and by his wealth. Now we could imagine, if we put on our thinking caps here, we can imagine how all three of these descriptors, his name, his job, his wealth, all three of those things for Zacchaeus, become reasons for his growing sense of

discontentment, to loosen the moorings, that all that is held upon his heart, and cause him to want to see this Jesus.

We can imagine how these are constant, all three of these things, his, his name, his job, his wealth, with all three of these are constant reminders to him of this deep and abiding and a growing feeling of disappointment and dissatisfaction, always nagging at him. His conscience bothering him. As anyone with means will tell you, money does not buy happiness. They can say it over and over again, jump up and down, stomp their feet, scream it out, make big signs and banners and tell you money does not buy happiness and what does everybody who doesn't have money do? Continue pursuing money to buy happiness. But they will tell you, money doesn't buy happiness.

In fact, money can often create far more severe headaches, create more bitter sorrows, create more superficial friends, sycophants surrounding you, always wanting to get their hands in your pocket. People who are always yes men, nodding, saying yes to whatever you say, and counting you as great in your brilliance and eloquence, because they really just want to flatter you, laying a trap for your feet to get stuff that you have and make it their own. Money does not buy happiness, and in fact it creates a lot of challenges.

For Zacchaeus, his wealth had become like golden handcuffs. Keeping him tied to his job as tax commissioner of Jericho. Big title, but man, big responsibilities. It sounds prestigious, with a great salary, kickbacks, perks, benefits. But the job, the possessions that he could afford, the home that he lived in was like a golden cage with Zacchaeus locked up inside. The wealth, yeah, it was the reward for his compromise. To be in league with Rome, to be judged a traitor to his nation, to his people, and long ago the shine of the money had since worn off. And underneath the glory, the glamour of a big paycheck and a big title is the ball and chain of the actual job.

He's trapped between the high expectations and the relentless demands of Rome, above him on the one hand, and then below him on the other hand the seething hatred of his people. People from whom he took taxes and customs and tariffs and dues. Those whom, his own people, from whom they had extorted money and bullied and intimidated. He had to walk down the street and see those people. Enslaved to the Roman machine, caught up in the gears of its oppression, Zacchaeus had become a tool of its oppression, thereby alienating all the people that he'd ever wanna spend the money with. Got all the money in the world and no one around to do anything with, with it.

So these disappointments in his wealth, in his job, had to bring him to the, I'm sure the, the deepest disappointment of all, the one that he had tried to block out of his conscience, the thing that he wanted to silence and ignore as much as possible, but for some reason now I think it's starting to bubble to the surface. He's not at all living up to his name, Zacchaeus, is he? The name Zacchaeus bestowed upon him by his Jewish parents, high hopes for his character, of integrity, of moral purity, of ethical clarity, let them down long, long ago.

That had to eat away at his soul. That had to crush his heart. And it's, over the years, when you start down that path you do a really good job, when you've got energy, of drowning that in drink and pleasurable company. You do a really good job of drowning that in busyness. In celebrating the money and the rewards and the opportunities and the businesses you purchased, in the real estate you purchased and all the great deals you've made. But as you get older and all that wears thin. It all comes creeping back, doesn't it?

That's why David, you see him praying to the Lord, saying, "Lord, do not remember the sins of my youth." They kept revisiting him and he had to go back to the Lord. The sins of his youth is coming back to eat him. Eat away at his soul.



Torment his conscience. So maybe all this is coming to a head for him on this particular day when Jesus came to Jericho.