

Jesus Seeks Lost sinners, Part 2

Luke 19:1-6

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.'" "

Only several weeks earlier, as we've been talking about, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead just up the road in

Bethany. That caused quite a stir in Jerusalem. The news had reached down to Jericho. And now, lo and behold, here is this very Jesus. He's arrived. He's here. Everybody's talking about him. He's here in Jericho. In fact, he's done a miracle right outside the gates.

Accounts of Jesus' ministry had been known far and wide as he came preaching the kingdom of God and healing; stories of miraculous power, him casting out demons, his creating food for thousands of people. Accounts of Jesus' boldness, standing up to these pretentious, sanctimonious Jewish leaders, putting them in their place or the authority of his manner. Just his very personal being as his presence, his bearing, the way he taught, the way he spoke. He was not at all like the scribes who cited rabbis and sources *ad infinitum, ad nauseam*. Jesus didn't do that. He spoke with an inherent authority, with a clear understanding of scripture out of a relational familiarity with the God of Scripture. He knew his Bible and he knew the God of the Bible. And it was clear, and it was obvious.

Of particular interest to Zacchaeus, though, in all the stories that have been told about Jesus, of everything that he heard about his teaching and his power and his works, one particular thing caught his attention, that Jesus had called and

chosen a tax collector to become one of his closest disciples. Now that's interesting.

Also he'd heard, that if this Jesus has any black mark on his reputation, it's that he kept company with tax collectors and sinners, that he would not only talk to them, be in their presence, but he would enter into table fellowship, sit down and have a meal. Which for any Jew, they did not do that with those kinds of people, that was to enter into a state of uncleanness. Ceremonially, ritually defiled, can't come to the temple. This is very well known about him, about Jesus, ever since the very earliest days of his ministry in Galilee. We read about that in Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:34, that Jesus was even accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. Why would that be? Because he was a friend of tax collectors and sinners. No way he could be a friend of tax collectors and sinners if he's done chowing down like they are and drinking as much as they are. So he's a glutton and a drunkard. Slander, obviously. But that was his reputation.

So Zacchaeus is thinking to himself, Could this be? Could it be that this friend of tax collectors and sinners, he's here in my city at this time? It's been a long time since Zacchaeus could call anyone friend. Since he'd known anything like a

friend. He had associates. He had business partners, employees. He had a list of sinners and derelicts that he could call up, hire by the hour. Sure, but a friend? Might Jesus condescend to offer Zacchaeus such a thing as friendship? He had to see for himself.

I mean, wouldn't you? I mean, if you've ever come to see the depth of your own sin. If you've ever discovered the offense that you have been to other people. The hurt that you have brought. Pain that you've caused. If you've ever known what it's like to be the talk of the town, and not in a good way. To be ostracized, to be put down, and to know for certain when you're honest with yourself that it really is your own fault.

If ever your conscience, as you think about the law of God, has joined in the chorus with everyone else, condemning you as guilty and vile and worthless as a sinner, and therefore you are justly rejected and condemned. We read about this earlier as David, he had this sense of guilt and shame, didn't he? It welled up within him. Psalm 38:3 and following. And I'd venture to say that every true Christian has experienced this sense of shame at one time or another, to one degree or another, every Christian has had it.

David writes this, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation. There's no health in my bones because of my sin." He takes personal ownership, doesn't he? My iniquities have gone over my head. I'm drowning. They're like a heavy burden, too heavy for me. I'm crushed underneath the guilt of my own sin. I'm ashamed. My wounds stink and fester. I can't go out in public. It's because of my foolishness, he says, for Zacchaeus, the wealth has lost its shine. His job is his prison. And the only thing that matters, the reputation of his character, that's long gone.

Who keeps him company? No friends. None that he doesn't have to pay for anyway. Purchase the pleasure of their company. His only companions are Roman overlords with constant demands and his tax collector associates. Those whose loyalty he buys with a paycheck. The thugs, the prostitutes, the drunkards they join in his misery. They enjoy the free food and the free drink that he provides, and all of them together collectively drown out their sorrows.

Even, like David, his nearest kin, his family, they have probably disowned him. Many tax collectors were excommunicated from the synagogue, outcasts, unable to come in public and worship in public gatherings. We don't know for sure how much or

how little these thoughts are occupying his mind. But something is explaining this relentless, shameless, shameless effort, really to see Jesus. It says 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 in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way." The verbs there in verse 3, he was seeking and then he could not, or, more literally, he was unable.

Those verbs are in the imperfect tense. It, it portrays in the past repeated attempts to see Jesus, he was repeatedly seeking and repeatedly unable to do so. So, he's repeatedly trying to see Jesus, and repeatedly frustrated in trying to see Jesus because of the size of the crowd, which was large, and the contrast of his own size, which was not. So he kept on trying, kept on seeking, but he kept on being thwarted in his efforts.

As a shorter man, smaller of stature, he couldn't see over the crowd to get a glimpse of Jesus. And being a rather unpopular man, no doubt despised by many of these same people, he couldn't press into the crowd or very easily pass through the crowd. In fact, maybe he was even loath to do that, a little bit intimidated to try that. But being an intelligent and resourceful man. He finds another solution to the problem. He

didn't rise to the place of tax commissioner for no reason. We're going to see more about his thoughtfulness and his intellect next time.

But as a resourceful man, intelligent man, Zacchaeus notes where the procession is going. He runs ahead, climbs up one of the sycamore trees that lined the streets of Jericho. Elevated vantage point for a shorter man. Again, there's this childlike way about him, isn't there? And at this point, and I say it's shameless because he has no sense of shame here. He's got no sense of self consciousness, no sense of public propriety or concern about that. There's no thought here about how a man of his position and stature, with his level of wealth, there's not a thought in his head of being noticed and laughed at and mocked and mercilessly scorned.

Which, if anybody noticed him, that's what would happen. Amazing, considering this Middle Eastern culture, this Middle Eastern context. Men just didn't do things like this. They never ran in public. Most certainly they did not climb trees, just crazy. What explains this? Again, Luke 18:17, "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter into it." Which stated positively, whoever does receive the kingdom

of God like a child, he shall enter into it. Clearly his heart and his mind have been, are being, prepared to receive Jesus.

Now that we've seen Zacchaeus, the seeking sinner, let's consider a second point, number two, Jesus the seeking Savior. Jesus the seeking Savior. Zacchaeus may have been seeking Jesus. But we come to find out it was Jesus, who had been seeking him all along, verse 5 says, "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.'" "

Whatever is going on in Zacchaeus' heart, whatever caused him to run on ahead, whatever compelled him to climb up into that sycamore tree, listen, the real force driving Zacchaeus to seek Jesus, sovereign grace is at work, invisibly, mysteriously, to chase down and compel this lost sinner, to drive him, to his Savior to find salvation. Several evidences here of sovereign grace in these two verses. Again sovereign grace working invisibly, working mysteriously, working providentially to bring this desperately lost sinner into a close personal contact with his seeking Savior. First the text says "when Jesus came" or as Jesus came. What's that doing? That's marking the time, isn't it? Then when Jesus came to the place, what's that doing? That

marks the location. And then finally “when Jesus came to the place, he looked up.”

What made Jesus look up? At that particular time in that particular place, what made him look up? Does the text say Jesus spotted a funny sight, little man climbing around the tree, scurrying around? No, it doesn't say that. Does it say someone in the crowd noticed Zacchaeus in the tree and said something to him? No. What made Jesus look up? It was the right time and the right place. And the text is actually explicit in stating it that way and drawing attention to time and place. He'd come to the place, the specific place; we could even say the appointed place. And he looked up at precisely the right time, lots of trees up and down those streets in Jericho. He looked up at precisely the right time as he was passing the exact place where Zacchaeus was.

Folks, this is nothing less than sovereign appointment. The providential working of God to put Zacchaeus on the path of intercept. So that Jesus seeking Zacchaeus would surely find him. The time is now. The place is here in Jericho at this particular sycamore tree. Time for what? Place for what? For salvation to come to Zacchaeus.

We see the second piece of evidence here of sovereign grace in how Jesus addressed him. He addressed him by name. He looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus. We can only imagine how Jesus said that to him, Zacchaeus. And we can only imagine the contrast of, how often Zacchaeus had heard his name spoken in a, a much less flattering manner, with revulsion, for years, people spitting the name out. Almost reminding him of how his name itself was a contradiction to everything that he is.

Setting that aside, the fact that Jesus knew his name at all. I mean this one man and these swollen streets of Jericho surrounded by this crush of this crowd. Some commentators suppose Jesus heard Zacchaeus' name from some bystander. Someone in the crowd identified the despised tax commissioner and called him out, exposed him, telled, told everyone he's up there sitting in a tree.

Listen, I don't deny that possibility, but I think that doesn't fit the context. I don't think it fits the narrative, which is very precise in noting the time and the place. Luke does not portray Jesus as just happening to look up. As in, oh look, I found one of my lost sheep. How lucky. Jesus doesn't accidentally stumble over Zacchaeus. In fact, Luke doesn't show Jesus doing anything, accidentally haphazardly. Everything Jesus

does in this Gospel is intentional, purposeful, even to the time of his death. The moment that he chooses to give us his spirit. He's in sovereign control. By the same logic and with the evidence in the, in the text, the narrative does not portray Jesus getting Zacchaeus' name from some bystander. This is sovereignly determined. This is divinely imparted knowledge. And this is not the first time something like this has occurred either.

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, right at the beginning, John 1:47, "Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.' And Nathaniel said to him, 'how do you know me?' And Jesus answered." Listen, the guys told me all about you, Nathaniel. I've been learning all about your back story. It doesn't say that. He says no. "'Before," Phillip, "Phillip called you when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'" I knew your thoughts. I knew what you were praying about. I knew that you were praying about Jacob's dream and the ladder reaching from heaven, heaven to earth, with the angels of God ascending and descending. I knew that.

In a similar way, I believe here this is sovereignly imparted, divinely imparted knowledge that the father is making

known to the son that this Zacchaeus is one of his lost sheep. One for whom he will soon die, in a week's time, ascending the cross to be punished for Zacchaeus' sins. So at the Spirit's prompting, and by the father's sovereign will, Jesus looks up. He sees one of his own, and he addresses him by name, Zacchaeus.

The reason I imagine Jesus speaking that name in a friendly tone, with a tender and familiar voice, with warmth, with eagerness, is because the Savior, who is gentle and lowly in heart, he would speak that way to one who is so used to being despised by so many. Not only that, but the rest of the account here of what Jesus says makes me hear it that way too.

Zacchaeus, hurry, come down. I must stay at your house today." One commentator says that Jesus uttered the, uttered these words in a cordial tone. A friendly tone, as if he were speaking to a familiar friend whom he's glad to see and with whom he means to stay that day. What a delightful surprise. That salutation, and how irresistible, it's friendly frankness, verse 6 shows.

Jesus has just met this Zacchaeus at this particular time in this place. In his divine nature, though, he has known Zacchaeus since before the foundation of the world. And so now in his human nature, informed by his divine nature, in his human

nature Jesus delights to see this man, one of his own, and to enter into warm fellowship with him.

Third evidence here of sovereign grace in the verse. Jesus said "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." That expression, I must, shows up a lot in Luke's Gospel and Luke's writing in general. The impersonal verb *dei*, D E I, if you want to write that down, it means it is necessary. It is necessary, it must be, and it points to divine necessity, with one exception, I think, about a dozen uses in Luke, but one exception, but all of them referring to divine compulsion and divine necessity.

As a boy learning at the temple, Jesus said "I must be in my Father's house" when his parents complained that he had, he'd stayed in Jerusalem when the caravan took off. Luke 2:49, "I must be at my Fathers' house." Didn't you know? I mean, you're the adults in my life. Luke 4:43, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose." Again, purpose and necessity. Luke 9:22, "The Son of Man must suffer many things. Be rejected, killed and on third day, raised." "The Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say, what you must say." Luke 12:12. And then he says Luke 13:33, "I must go on my way today and tomorrow

and the day following. For it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.”

I'm not going to march through the other half dozen references, but you get the idea. Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today, it's another evidence of divine compulsion. Here it results in the Savior's necessity, what he must do. The emphasis here though, in this verse, the focus isn't actually on the divine necessity, that comes at the end of the verse. The focus and what's put up to the front is on the word, today. Literally, it's, for today, and then, in your house. Yeah, divine will is driving Jesus, determining his timetable, setting his calendar and his daily itinerary. Everything, but at this moment, that is not the first thing on his mind. Divine will, that's always a given for him. But what is foremost on his mind? It's the joy of table fellowship. It's the prospect of spending time with his long lost and newly acquired friend, Zacchaeus, my Christian friend.

If you have ever in your life entertained any doubt whatsoever about whether your Savior loves you. If you have ever listened to the deceptive whisperings of the enemy, that your dear Savior has somehow grown tired of you, and now, after your salvation, that he's merely tolerating you, that he's simply

putting up with you. Let this picture of your Savior, which is written down for your encouragement here in Holy Scripture, let it drive away your every doubt, and banish your every vile temptation that deceives you into thinking anything less of his love and his interest for you.

Know this for sure that Jesus loves you; longs for fellowship with you. He truly desires your company, and he offers you the gift and the joy of friendship and the fellowship of communion with himself and with his father in Heaven. What he says to Zacchaeus, he says to each and every one of us. My beloved Christian friend, hurry, come down for today at your house, and with you, I must stay. Stay here is the verb that's used so thoroughly and richly in John 15. It's the verb *meno*, meaning, abide, remain, stay. He'll have it no other way. And by the sovereign grace of God, neither will the father above.

If you're not yet a Christian, if you have any doubts at all as to whether you are a Christian, you need to listen to the call of Jesus the Savior. Who came, verse 10, "to seek and to save the lost." Hurry and come down, enter into the fellowship of salvation in Jesus Christ. But notice it's not just sovereign grace on display here, it's also irresistible grace as well. In verse 6, Zacchaeus, hurried and came down. He received him

joyfully. He, hurried and came down. Same verbs, exactly the same that Jesus used to command Zacchaeus, Luke uses to describe Zacchaeus' behavior. He did exactly as the Lord commanded, so his discipleship is off to a really good start, isn't it?

Jesus commands; he hears and obeys. That's discipleship. He hurried, came down, not only that, but the friendship that Jesus offers Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus received. Again, the word received here, important word, portrays the instinct of salvation, that those who are saved, they receive Jesus, they welcome him, they enter into fellowship with him. And that's exactly what Zacchaeus does here. He receives the king and thus he receives the kingdom, as Jesus said in Luke 18:17, "like a child."

Whatever Zacchaeus lacked in his knowledge, remember he's grown up as a Jew, in a Jewish Home. He has a Jewish name. He understands the Law. He understands God's holiness, his perfect standard of righteousness. He understands pretty thoroughly, by intimate acquaintance, his own sin, his own failure to keep the law. So he understands who God is, who he is as a sinner, but what he is not well acquainted with, but just now meeting, he's starting to understand his Savior. Who he is, what he's like, what he's come to do, what he's come to offer.

We don't know the exact timing, of course, of his salvation. Pretty typical for us as Christians, isn't it, that we often fail to discern the precise time of our regeneration? I mean, who can know the mysterious invisible working of the Holy Spirit to cause us to be born again. The exact moment that God caused us by the working of the Spirit to cause us to be born again. Pretty common for us as Christians not to know that precise moment.

One thing that Zacchaeus knows for sure. By this point, is he may have set his will to seek Jesus. And his will then drove him up into that tree. And now we know, after meeting Jesus in person, it's abundantly clear that it's been the other way around entirely. He knows, as all of us now know, our salvation was not so much a matter of us seeking him as it was him seeking us. There's an old poem written by Jean Ingelow in England in 1878. And it starts with this verse, "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me. It was not I that found, O Saviour true, no, I was found of thee." If you're here and you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, may today be your time. May this be your place for your salvation if you do not know Christ.

Our Father, we thank you for this account. It really kind of caps off the itinerant ministry of Jesus as we see him passing through Jericho to find Zacchaeus, a lost sinner. And many of us have done wrong before you and committed sins and Zacchaeus, he'd run the gamut. He'd committed all of them. He'd broken your law like we all have in thought, word, and deed, and committed sins of omission and commission. And he stood before you guilty, in need of your grace. And you, Father, were pleased to deploy the Holy Spirit to drive him to seek the Lord.

You were pleased to send your son on his route to Jerusalem, just before getting there, to have him pass through Jericho. To go that way, that he might find this one lost sinner, this wandering sheep away from your fold. We thank you that we've seen how Jesus found him. Let that be an encouragement to any who are yet to be found by the Lord Jesus Christ. May you be pleased, even this day, to deploy your sovereign grace, to deploy your Spirit and to send them into the path to intersect with Jesus today.

For all those who do know you, may we be reminded of the fellowship that Jesus himself desires with each one of us and let none of us resist. Drop every barrier every, take away every temptation, take every resistance away that we would run, as

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—TRUTH— 

Zacchaeus did, hurry come down into his waiting arms. It's in
his name that we pray.