

A Seeking Saviour

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[0 : 00] So let me invite you to take your copy of God's Word and turn to Luke chapter 19. And the wee man meets with the big God. This well-known story of the dodgy taxman called Zacchaeus, who meets Jesus in the most unlikely place, up a tree.

And as you've got that open before you, let me pray. Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

This account of Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19 verses 1 to 10 is probably one of the most well-known passages in the Gospels.

If you grew up in church, you probably know this story so well because you were taught it many times as a kid. It's an unforgettable story.

[1 : 13] The way that it appeals to being short and climbing up trees, the beautiful chorus. Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he. For many reasons, this story is viewed as a cute story.

And I'm using account from the life and ministry of Jesus. However, I want to suggest to you tonight that that perception is very unfortunate.

This account is not meant to be cute. This account is actually supposed to be very shocking. This episode is supposed to overturn our expectations of who Jesus is.

It's supposed to confront our prejudices and expose our self-righteousness. This account is going to put on full display the grace of Jesus in all its freedom and in all its unexpectedness.

So as we come to this passage, let me first invite you to leave your preconceived ideas and come and see this passage as it's meant to be seen.

[2 : 28] Now, I should point out, just by way of context, this passage occupies a very strategic place in the Gospel of Luke. This is the last public encounter that Jesus has before he enters into the great city of Jerusalem.

Back in Luke chapter 9, verse 51, Jesus set his face to Jerusalem. Luke 9, verse 51 to the end of Luke 19 is the journey of Jesus going to Jerusalem.

In other words, this account sits in the shadow of the cross. And it wants us to see Jesus in his mission.

In order that we might come to faith in him ourselves and be drawn in to his mission as well. I want us to look at this passage tonight under three very simple headings.

The sinner's condition. The saviour's initiative. The sinner transformed. Let me read verses 1 to 4 again.

[3 : 38] Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man, he could not because of the crowd.

So he ran ahead and climbed the sycamore fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. And here Luke paints a very vivid description of his acchaeus.

Now this description is certainly not of a cute, funny wee man. For Luke, Zacchaeus is exhibit A of what a person looks like when they're alienated from God.

Zacchaeus is a picture of a person who is as far away from God as one could possibly be. His name, Zacchaeus, is Jewish origins.

But we're told he's a tax collector. That means this. He's a traitor and a turncoat. He's turned his back and his Jewish upbringing and he's now working for the pagan Romans.

[4 : 54] It's clear that he's not walking as a Jew. He's not an heir to the promises and the privileges of being a son of Abraham. We need his job.

He was a chief tax collector. It's hard for us to get our minds just around how negatively Zacchaeus would have been thought about in his own time by his own people.

Tax collectors worked for the Romans. The Roman Empire was one of the most powerful and yet one of the most pagan emperors that ever existed. Zacchaeus worked for this Roman emperor.

By raising money. Extorting his own people so that it could pay for the soldiers, the army, the military advancement. And even to pay for the extension of the pagan Roman religion.

Not only that, as he extorted money from his own people for this Roman government, he would extort money from his own people to fatten his own wallet. Zacchaeus was so corrupt.

[6 : 10] Unbelievably corrupt. In fact, it says he was the chief tax collector. You can find no other mention of a chief tax collector in all the Bible.

If Zacchaeus had a PhD, he had a PhD in being an expert thief. An expert crook and an expert criminal.

To be the chief tax collector, you need to be a great collaborator with the Romans who were a powerful nation.

To be a chief tax collector, you need to become a master oppressor. When we think of Zacchaeus, we need to think of Zacchaeus.

When we think of Zacchaeus, we need to think of him as the kingpin of a criminal organisation. He would have hit men. Gangs of youths who would do his debt collecting.

[7 : 13] He would have tax collectors in every city, in every town, in every village. Gathering money for the Romans. It's no accident that in the Gospels, tax collectors and sinners are always coupled together.

They are the worst of the worst. It's interesting. One more little thing about this picture that looks painting for us of Zacchaeus. Where does he work?

He works in Jericho. Jericho is one of the most strategic cities in Palestine because it was on the way to Jerusalem. It was also a really corrupt city itself.

So here's this corrupt tax collector who thrives in this corrupt city. Who can extort so much money for all the pilgrims who will pass through Jericho to go to Jerusalem. So what we have to understand is that Luke has painted us a picture of a man.

He's not cute. He's not funny. But he's a serious sinner. And Luke says to us this little detail.

[8 : 21] He was wealthy. He was rich. That little detail is really important. Luke wants us to view him negatively.

If you read through Luke's Gospel, you'll read about a rich man who had to build up barns. You'll read about a rich young fool. You'll read about a rich young man who came to Jesus and left him very sad.

If you turn back one page, you'll see that Jesus has just shared a story in his meeting with the rich young ruler where he says, How difficult is it for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God?

Luke 18 verse 24. It's far easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Rich people were viewed as negative.

Can I tell you why they were viewed as negative though? Because often rich people had gotten their money from oppressing other people. The key is, he's a prime example of someone who did just that.

[9 : 30] Let me just be clear, if anyone's wealthy here and they feel a bit uncomfortable, Luke wants us to understand that wealthy people who find it really difficult to enter the kingdom of God is because they oppress people and they reject God.

If I can just sum the keys up like this, He is a God-hater and he is an oppressor. Now, one other thing I need to clear up about Zacchaeus.

You know it says the reason he couldn't see Jesus was because he was small. That's true. He was small in stature. But the reason he couldn't see Jesus wasn't just because he was small, it was because the crowds would not let him.

So this is something else you've got to understand about Zacchaeus. He was one of the most hated men in all of Palestine. He was a social, spiritual outcast.

No one wanted to let this man through. No one wanted to let this man by. Zacchaeus is exhibit 8 of a person who is as far away from God as you can possibly be.

[10 : 56] Now here's a big question for you then. Why does Luke tell us that Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus?

That's what it says. Why did Zacchaeus want to see Jesus?

If rich people are viewed negatively in Luke's gospel, here's another little thing. Tax collectors, this is interesting, are viewed positively.

So the first tax collector we meet is in Luke chapter 5. His name's Levi or Matthew. Jesus called him to follow him. And Matthew, Levi followed him. He threw a party and invited all his mates to meet with Jesus.

Maybe Zacchaeus had trained with Levi. Maybe Levi was one of Zacchaeus' employees and one day he got a letter of resignation. I'm done.

[12 : 16] I'm going to work and follow Jesus Christ. Or, in Luke 18, there's this parable that Jesus shares on one occasion of a tax collector and a Pharisee who one day went up to the temple to pray.

And it's really interesting. Who comes out as the good one in the story? The tax collector, not the Pharisee. He left the temple just to fight. Maybe someone was there one day.

They heard that. And when they were passing through Jericho, they said to Zacchaeus, By the way, there's this guy, Jesus. He told a story, this religious leader.

And he said that there was a tax collector who left the temple justified. Maybe it was that story that filled his heart and filled him with intrigue and curiosity.

And that's why he wanted to see Jesus. Why did Zacchaeus want to see Jesus? Maybe because Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was the friend of tax collectors and sinners.

[13 : 21] I don't know why you're here tonight. I pray and I hope and I long that it's because you want to see Jesus. I want to see Jesus.

One little thing before we move on from this sinner's condition. The crowds prevented Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus.

Can I ask a question? Are you like the crowds? By that I mean this. Do you prevent people from seeing Jesus?

And I'm directing this question to the Christians here. The crowds prevented Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus. Because the crowds, they hated Zacchaeus.

He brought moral repulsion to their minds and hearts. They weren't friends of sinners. They put up every barrier to stay away from sinners.

[14 : 20] Particularly the worst of sinners. So let me ask an honest question. Are you like the crowd? And if you want the other alternative.

If I can spiritualise it for just one moment. Or are you like a sycamore tree? Do you help people see Jesus? Okay, so that's the sinner's condition.

He was the vilest offender. He was a crook. He was a criminal. He was a chief tax collector. He was exhibit A of a person who is far away from God as you can possibly imagine.

Second point. The saviour's initial. We're told that Zacchaeus ran ahead and he climbed up this sycamore fig tree. He looked out and he caught a glimpse of Jesus.

But then we read these words. And when Jesus came to the place. He looked up and said to him.

[15 : 27] Zacchaeus, hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today. I want you to see something very important there.

It says, when Jesus came to the place. What place? When Jesus came to that spot.

What spot? The precise place. The specific spot. Where Jesus always intended that he was going to meet with Zacchaeus.

You see, this meeting was a divine appointment. He, even Jesus, as he meets with Zacchaeus at this place and at this spot.

He speaks to him with an absolute certainty. Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today. He doesn't say to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, hurry, go home.

[16 : 29] Go ask your wife if I can come over for dinner. He doesn't say to Zacchaeus, do you have any plans for today? No, he says, hurry, come down. I must stay at your house today.

And see that word must there? It is a theologically loaded term. Luke chapter 2. Jesus is with his parents. He goes missing in the temple. His parents leave Jerusalem.

They forget him. And three days later they come back to him. They say, Jesus, where did you go? Why are you missing? We're worried about you. Jesus said to his parents, why are you worried

about me? I must be about my father's business.

I must. Three times on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus is chatting to his disciples. And three times he says to his disciples, I, son of man, must go to Jerusalem, be handed over to the religious leaders and suffer.

I must. The divine necessity. This word must. When Jesus says to Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today. Jesus is saying this is because it is a divine appointment.

[17 : 36] Every moment of Jesus' ministry is because of divine purpose. If you're not a Christian here this evening, this may be God's divine appointment for you.

The reason you're here tonight, the reason you came here tonight, is because God wants to meet with you. Moments ago, I was seeing Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus.

That's true at a human level. Maybe there's somebody here tonight for ages you've been wanting to just hear about Jesus so that you can come to get to know him. Maybe you're seeking Jesus. But at a divine level, can I be absolutely clear?

It was the real case that Jesus wanted to see Zacchaeus. He didn't just want to see him, like glance at him. He wanted to be with him.

He wanted to stay at his house, to sleep in his guest bed, to have a meal with him. And if you were here this morning, we're chatting about the importance of meals in the ancient Near East, and the importance was he wanted to be close to him, intimate with him, share fellowship with him, be embraced by him.

[18 : 54] He wanted to enter his life. If you're here tonight, Jesus wants to enter your life. Now, it's interesting, the crowds come back again.

Look at verse 6, 7, sorry. When they saw it, they all grumbled. The crowd were fuming. The crowd were going ballistic. Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner?

He couldn't. What's happening? Jesus is hanging about with this man who is a notorious criminal, a crook. Are you kidding?

Jesus is hanging about with the people he came to be friends with, the people he came to save. In all honesty, this is where this passage makes self-righteous people feel really uncomfortable.

Because it's really clear to us that Jesus did not come to save people who think of themselves as religiously acceptable. Jesus came for lost people.

[20 : 13] People who knew themselves to be lost. People who were willing to admit that they needed a saviour. People who were living far away from him. Luke here is making a massive point.

Jesus comes to save the messy, the broken, the wretched people of our world. This morning we saw Jesus save a prostitute. Tonight we're going to see him save a notorious criminal. Now I totally understand if this gets under your skin because this story gets under my skin.

It exposes my self-righteousness. It exposes my false prejudices. It exposes my shallow view of Jesus. Jesus loves to be friends with sinners.

Broken people. Messed up people. People who do not have it all together. If you're a person who understands grace, if you're a person who understands the gospel, you will just love this account. But if you're a person who's self-righteous, this account will make you feel uncomfortable. Jesus' mission, Jesus' purpose was he was willing and able to save any sinner because no one's too hopeless beyond the pale, too far gone.

[21 : 35] You might be here tonight and you think that about yourself. Ah, Jesus couldn't save me. There's things in my past that haunt me.

Or I've just committed this sin too often. He could never save me. Jesus will save anyone who's willing to repent and believe.

The drug dealer, the adulterer, the corrupt, dodgy taxman. He'll even save religious, self-righteous, religious people.

Here's what's so beautiful about this account is that this account actually reveals to us how someone is saved. Jesus says to Zacchaeus, I must come and stay at your house today.

What do we read in verse 6? He hurried and came down and he received Jesus joyfully. That, dear friends, is the Saviour's initiative and that, dear friends, is Zacchaeus being born again.

[22 : 37] Amen. This is not a sinner seeking God. This is God seeking a sinner. This is Jesus finding and embracing and bringing Zacchaeus home.

If you're a sinner here tonight, you're in a very good place. Jesus is seeking you. Jesus wants to save you. He wants to embrace you and bring you from the kingdom of darkness and into the

kingdom of life.

Then all of this leads us to the third and the final point. A sinner transformed. You know what's so incredible about this moment when Zacchaeus is born again is that he immediately receives Jesus and he receives him joyfully.

Can I suggest to you that one of the key features to being a born-again Christian is to be filled with joy because of who Jesus is and because of Jesus' love and because of Jesus' grace.

that undeserved love. Zacchaeus was a notorious sinner. He was a man opposed to God. He was an oppressor of God's people. But here he comes to faith. And can I say something that's so important that you hear this and see this?

[23 : 48] There is no religious formality in the salvation account. So get this. This is what I'm saying. Zacchaeus is saved in the most unlikely place a person could be saved.

Where is he saved? Up a tree. How is he saved? By embracing Jesus. No religious jargon.

No religious formality. Just him. Jesus. You know what I love about Jesus? He saves people wherever they are in whatever state they are but he doesn't leave them the way they are.

How many people have been converted in a prison cell? How many people have been converted out in the fields in the moors? How many people have been converted when they're in the gutter? Jesus saves people wherever he so chooses. You know what I love about the salvation story as well is this change.

[24 : 55] Just get this right. Zacchaeus' heart has always been captivated and captured by money, power, oppression. But now his heart is captured by Jesus.

I love this about this conversion account because Zacchaeus is totally transformed. If you have money it's hard to love Jesus.

In fact, that story just in the chapter before says it's impossible if you love it. You can't serve two masters. But do you know what's so powerful about this conversion, about this experience that we see before our eyes is that there is a clear indication that this is a transformed man because do you see what it says?

What does Zacchaeus do? He says in verse 8, He stood and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I will restore it fourfold.

Now, we read this and I don't think we get this. This guy is the chief tax collector in Palestine for the Roman Empire.

[26 : 08] He is kingpin. He is many people who work for him. He's got palaces probably throughout the country. He is minted. He is loaded and he says here, Half of my goods I give away.

All of his earthly security I'll give it away. He then says, If I have defrauded anyone. Now, think about this, right?

He's defrauded everyone. I'll pay back fourfold. If you know Exodus, you know the Jewish restitution laws, you know that 20%, twofold is what's required if you're going to pay back somebody you've wronged.

The key is two steps forward. Fourfold. What do we see here? We see a transformed man. man, this is incredible. Why does he give all away like this?

[27 : 17] Because of the debt of the salvation that he received from Jesus. All his sins forgiven.

Welcomed and embraced by a perfect, holy saviour. If you meet with Jesus and you receive him joyfully, he will transform you from the inside out.

This is repentance in full display. He stops loving the things he once loved and he starts loving the person he once hated.

this is what the gospel does. He doesn't care about his earthly security.

He cares now only about his heavenly security and he begins now by storing treasures up in heaven. If you're a transformed person, that's what you're doing. You're storing up your treasures in heaven.

[28 : 25] And so look at what Jesus says to him. Today salvation has come to this house since he also is a son of Abraham.

It's so incredible again, right? This is incredible because this salvation, it all happens just there.

Maybe they walk down from the tree, maybe they go back to Zacchaeus' home.

But do you know what's so interesting? Jesus doesn't say Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, if you really want to be right with God, you now need to go up to the temple and get washed and you now need to go up to the temple and offer sacrifices.

Jesus says today, right now, salvation, come to your house. It's beautiful. Salvation comes from believing and repenting and trusting in Jesus. If you're here tonight and you are not saved, believe, repent, put your faith in Jesus and be saved right now where you're sitting.

God's divine appointment for you if you're not in Christ. Now, this is a beautiful picture, the sinner's condition, the saviour's initiative, the sinner's transformation.

[29 : 39] Just as we finish this off, before we wrap it up, there's one final verse that we need to look at and it's a key verse. It's the last verse, a verse we know so well, verse 10. Now, you might be really familiar with this verse.

Can I urge you not to be really familiar with this verse because this verse contains in it the greatest, the most beautiful gospel truth. For the Son of Man came to seek, to save the lost.

Have you ever noticed the dramatic juxtaposition in this verse? who came to seek and save the lost? The Son of Man.

Who is the Son of Man? Daniel 7 verse 13. The Son of Man is the second person of the Trinity who approached the eternal, the ancient of days.

The Son of Man is the one who has all kingdoms, all dominion, all authority. A kingdom that cannot be destroyed. What did the Son of Man do to seek and to save?

[30 : 53] He left the glory of heaven to enter this sin-sick, broken, messed-up world to seek and to save. Him who was worshipped in the presence of the holy angels did not hold on to it, but was willing to humble himself and leave it.

He could have come as the king of all glory and he could have strut himself up in everybody's face and said, do you know who I am? But he didn't. He came like one of us.

He came in human flesh. You see, the juxtaposition is this, the Son of Man is the king of glory.

And he came to seek and save the lost. And how did he seek and save the lost? Well, the Son of Man's divine appointments didn't end with Zacchaeus.

There was another tree that Jesus had to stop at. There was a hill he had to climb and there was a tree he had to be put on. Calvary's tree.

[32 : 17] Where he was tortured. Where he was spat on. Where he was mocked. Where he was jeered. There is where the Son of Man sought and saved the lost.

Picture the cross in your imaginations. Jesus, his arms stretched wide open, seeking the lost.

Position, welcoming, beckoning, calling.

Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. Picture the Son of Man hanging there on that cursed tree, saving.

Because there on the cross he drank the cup of wrath. he bore the wrath that you and I deserve. Seeking and saving.

Have you come like Zacchaeus to the Son of Man in faith and repentance? As I close, I've got two questions.

[33 : 32] Here's the first question. how do you view non-Christians? And if you're here tonight and you're not yet a Christian, let me ask you this, how do you view yourself?

This is how Jesus views you. With a face, with a name. He knows every single thing about you. You're not an inconvenience to him.

He left all heaven's glory and he came down. You're not an inconvenience to him. He was so committed to you that he walked the path, the road of suffering.

He sacrificed his all. How does the Son of Man view you? He views you as a lost person, as a lost soul, as a lost sheep.

And so when I say lost there, I don't mean lost like, you know, when you lose your wallet or your keys. I don't mean lost like that. I mean lost like a ship at sea, adrift and helpless and in grave danger of perishing.

[34 : 43] Jesus wants to save you from drowning in your sin because you're heading for judgment. How does Jesus view you tonight?

He views you as a lost soul. But remember who Jesus is. He's the shepherd who goes after lost sheep. He views you with love, compassion, worthy of his time, his affection and attention.

Here's the final question. This is the big question. How do you view Jesus? How do you view Jesus?

Maybe in your head, Jesus, this is what you think of Jesus. You've grown up in church or you've heard many sermons from this pulpit or you've done Christianity explored and you view him as the

son of God.

You view him right now as up in heaven. You view him as disconnected, unconcerned. Maybe you view him just because of your upbringing and your experiences.

[35 : 59] Someone who, what he really likes in people is people who show up to church, who dress a certain way, who sing certain songs. Maybe you view him in a sort of cold and disconnected way.

He's someone who likes religious formality. Maybe that's how you view him. How do you view Jesus? Do you view Jesus as the seeking saviour?

Do you view Jesus as the friend of tax collectors, sinners and Pharisees? Do you view Jesus as the shepherd who goes after lost sheep? Do you see Jesus with his eyes wide open right now on the throne of heaven looking down on us?

Do you understand that Jesus is more concerned about you than you are yourself? Do you understand that Jesus is more committed to you than any other person could ever be committed to you because he left heaven?

Do you view Jesus as the saviour and friend who can change you and transform you?

[37 : 21] Because that's how the story of Zacchaeus is supposed to help us view Jesus. He's the son of man who came to seek and save the lost.

Believe, repent, and trust yourself to him and be saved tonight. And if you are his, get on board with his mission and become friends of sinners, tax collectors, Pharisees, everybody and anybody and point them to Jesus.

Let's pray. It's an awesome thing to bow our heads in your presence, Jesus.

as you sit upon the throne at the right hand of our father, of your father. To think that you are the son of man, with all glory, with a kingdom that is eternal, that cannot be destroyed.

He will save people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and language to worship you. You are the lamb upon the throne, who is worthy of all praise, glory, and honor, power, and majesty.

[39 : 09] You are the good shepherd who laid down your life for your sheep. You are the good shepherd who goes after that one lost sheep and you leave your ninety-nine on the hillside.

you are the savior that went to Zacchaeus' house to save him that day. We thank you how real you are, how personal you are, how intimate you are, and how willing you are.

We pray that tonight that all of us, whether those in you or those outside of you tonight would come to you. We kneel in our minds and in our hearts at Calvary's cross, and we see your outstretched arms.

We see the horror of the cross as you drank the cup of wrath, and yet we see the glory of the cross as it screams out to us of your mega, off-the-charts love.

And we see it in awe and wonder and glory, because you are the Son of Man who came to seek and save the lost.

[40 : 30] We pray tonight that you would seek and save, because you are the mighty Savior, and we pray it in your powerful and precious name. Amen. Brothers and sisters and friends, if you're here tonight, you're not a Christian, you want to be a Christian, or you become a Christian even during this sermon, please tell someone tonight.

If you want to talk about your soul, please talk to someone. We're going to conclude our worship, and it's a great psalm we're going to sing, it's the last part of Psalm 51, it's Psalm 51 verses 7 to 13. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me, I shall be cleansed so, yea, wash thou me, and then I shall be whiter than snow.

Let's stand and sing this sound to God's place. Amen. Johor comprius- whiter f cui phi■i fenni He he I show peace to give Dan you power sites AC Learn Romans fui Chi faire The night shall be whiter than the snow.

Of gladness and of joyfulness, May he to hear the voice that so this very voice Which thou hast broken may rejoice.

[42 : 38] For my inequity brought out thy face high from my scent.

It's a clear heart, Lord, with you, A right-spently weapon.

Cast me not from thy sight, Nor take thy holy spirit away.

Restore me thy salvation's joy, With thy fruits let me stay.

Then will I teach thy wisdom to Those that transgressed fear, And those that sinned shall, Then be turned unto thee.

[44 : 24] The book of Revelation says this as it ends, And we'll read this as we depart. Behold, I am coming soon, Bringing my recompense with me, To repay everyone for what he has done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, The first and the last, The beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, So that they may have the right to the tree of life, And that they may enter the city by the gates.

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you About these things. I am the root and the descendant of David, The bright morning star.

The spirit and the bride say, Come, And let the one who hears say, Come, And let the one who is thirsty, Come, And let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

He who testifies to these things says, Surely, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

[45 : 34] And now, May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all this night, Now and forevermore. Amen.