

Salvation at the Sycamore Tree

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Date: 05 July 2020

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the Gospel according to Luke and chapter 19.

Luke chapter 19, and if we read again at verse 8. Luke chapter 19 at verse 8. What it says there, I'm sure that you've heard of the phrase, every day is a school day, or you learn something new every day.

Well, if you're anything like me, you probably say that all the time because, well, there's so much I don't know and there's so much I have to learn. And there's so many things to learn. But, you know, to my shame, having lived beside it for the past six years, I recently discovered that the lonely tree in the croft beside the manse is a sycamore tree.

And as I've said to you before, I'm not a green-fingered gardener. I'm not the most green-fingered gardener in Barbas either. But my interest in this lonely tree at the manse, it was aroused by one of the elders in Carloway when he pointed it out to me and he said that it looked something like a sycamore tree.

And so with a little investigation by asking my brother-in-law, who works in the forestry industry, he confirmed that the lonely tree at the manse, it is a sycamore tree, although it looks a bit windswept.

[2 : 02] And, you know, I'd love to know who planted the sycamore tree. I'm sure there's someone in Barbas or around the community that knows who planted it and could tell me. But, of course, when I discovered that the lonely tree at the manse is a sycamore tree, it brought me to this passage in Luke's Gospel.

Because it's here that we learn about this man, Zacchaeus, who found salvation at the sycamore tree. Zacchaeus found salvation at the sycamore tree.

And, you know, my friend, whenever you're passing the Barbas manse or whenever you come to the Barbas manse, you're always welcome to come. But whenever you're passing or whenever you come to the Barbas manse, I always, I want you to look out for the lonely tree at the manse.

Because that lonely tree at the manse, that sycamore tree, it stands all year round as a reminder of this man, Zacchaeus, who found salvation at the sycamore tree.

And I want you to remember that that sycamore tree, it is a reminder to you. A reminder to you that you too are able to find salvation when you come to Jesus Christ.

[3 : 10] My friend, I want you to remember Zacchaeus who found salvation at the sycamore tree. Because that same Jesus who saved Zacchaeus is able to save you this morning.

And, you know, these verses in Luke's Gospel, they may be well known to us. And they're very precious to us. Because my good friend J.C. Ryle, as he says in his commentary, he says, These verses describe the conversion of a soul.

Like the stories of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, the story of Zacchaeus should be frequently studied by Christians. The Lord Jesus never changes, he says.

What he did for the man before us, he is able and willing to do for any one of us. And for that reason, I'd like us to consider what Jesus did for this man, Zacchaeus, who found salvation at the sycamore tree.

And I'd like us to consider this meeting under three headings. Three headings. A concern from the Christ. A curiosity for the Christ. And a confession of the Christ.

[4 : 20] A concern from the Christ. A curiosity for the Christ. And a confession of the Christ. So first of all, a concern from the Christ.

A concern from the Christ. We see that at the beginning of the chapter, in verses 1 and 2. We're told that Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. Luke chapter 19 begins by telling us that Jesus was passing by.

Jesus was passing by. And Jesus was passing by through the community of Jericho while he was on the way to Jerusalem. Because in order to get to Jerusalem, Jesus had to pass through Jericho. But the reason Jesus and his disciples were going up to Jerusalem was to celebrate the Passover. Which, as you know, it's an important festival in the Jewish calendar.

[5 : 21] Because the Passover, it commemorates and celebrates the salvation of the Israelites from slavery and bondage in Egypt. But what's interesting is that Jesus, when he was going up to Jerusalem, He wasn't thinking about the Passover.

Jesus was thinking about his death and resurrection. Because at this point, Jesus knows that his hour has come. And in a few short days, when he enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey, Jesus knows that he's going to be denied, betrayed, delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and condemned to death.

Jesus knows that he's going to the cross. And so while everyone else is thinking about the salvation of the Israelites going up to Jerusalem, Jesus is thinking about his death and resurrection.

Jesus was thinking about the cross and the reason why he came into this world. Jesus was passing through Jericho thinking about those who may come to call.

Because as the gospel assures us, he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, my friend, Jesus was thinking about whom he came to serve.

[6 : 34] Because he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. My friend, while everyone else was thinking about the Passover, Jesus was thinking about lost sinners like you and me.

Because as Jesus confesses there in verse 10, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. But you know, as Jesus was passing by the community of Jericho, we see that there was a concern from the Christ.

There was a concern from the Christ. And there was a concern from the Christ, not because there was a concern about the cross, but because there was a concern for the community. There was a concern for the community.

There was a concern for the community of Jericho, because there were lost souls in the community of Jericho. And you know, my friend, there's always a concern from the Christ when it comes to the lost souls of a community.

There's always a concern from the Christ, because this Christ is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

[7 : 48] There's always a concern from the Christ, because as he says himself, he came to seek and to save the lost. My friend, there's always a concern from the Christ, because there are lost souls in a community that need to be saved.

That's why Jesus was passing by the community of Jericho. And that's why Jesus is passing by your community this morning. He's passing by in the gospel.

And you know, my unconverted friend, you have yet another opportunity this morning to come to this Jesus and call out to him for salvation.

That's what happened when Jesus was passing by the community of Jericho. There were lost souls who came to Jesus and called out to him for salvation.

The first lost soul that we read about was the man sitting at the roadside. He was sitting there at the entrance to the community, and he was a blind beggar called Bartimaeus.

[8 : 53] And we read that at the end of chapter 18, that when Bartimaeus was told that Jesus was passing by, he cried out and he called out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

And even though there were many people who told Bartimaeus to stop shouting and to be silent, he cried out and called out all the more, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And because there was such a concern from the Christ, we're told that Jesus stopped. Jesus stopped, and he commanded blind Bartimaeus to come to him.

And as Bartimaeus stood in front of Jesus, Jesus asked him, the question that he asks all of us, what do you want me to do for you?

What do you want me to do for you? And blind Bartimaeus, he didn't need to be asked twice. He said, Lord, let me recover my sight. But you know what's remarkable is that there was a concern

from the Christ, not only for those with rags, but also for those with riches.

[10:06] That's why we see Jesus entering Jericho, because there was a concern from the Christ for this man, Zacchaeus. And you know, when you consider Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus, there's such a contrast between them, isn't there?

Even when you consider their names, there's a contrast. Because, well, Bartimaeus, it wasn't really his name, because he didn't have a name. He was just known as the son of Timaeus, which is what Bartimaeus means.

So Bartimaeus, he was nameless. He was a nobody. He was an outcast. He was unnamed, unwanted, and unworthy of salvation. But for Zacchaeus, his name meant pure.

He was from a well-known and well-to-do family. And there was such a contrast between Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus, because one was a beggar. The other was a bully.

One was blind. The other was blinkered. One was thankful. The other was a thief. One was homeless. The other was a homewrecker. One was draped in rags.

[11:11] The other was dripping with riches. There was such a contrast between Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus. And, you know, for Jesus, there was no contrast at all.

There was no contrast and there was no comparison. Just a concern. A concern for their lost soul. There was a concern for their lost soul.

Because, my friend, the truth is, Jesus never looks on the outward appearance. Jesus doesn't look at your clothes or your car. He doesn't look at your books or your bank account.

He doesn't look at your family or your friends. He doesn't look at your house or your holidays. But he does look at your heart. He does look at your heart. My friend, Jesus never looks at the outward appearance.

But he always looks on the heart. He never makes a contrast or a comparison. He just has a concern for your soul.

[12:11] There was a concern. And, you know, there was a concern from the Christ for these members of the community. Because they were lost souls. And that's why Jesus was passing by. And that's why Jesus is passing by this morning in the gospel.

My friend, Jesus is passing by because there's a concern from the Christ. And his concern is that you're lost. You're lost.

You're lost. His concern is that you're lost. And Jesus says, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. And, you know, that's the whole emphasis of Luke's gospel.

That Jesus is passing by your community. And he has a concern for your lost soul. He has a concern for your lost soul.

And so there's a concern from the Christ. But the question is for you is, do you have a curiosity for the Christ? There's a concern from the Christ.

[13:15] But do you have a curiosity for the Christ? And that's what we see secondly. A curiosity for the Christ. A curiosity for the Christ.

We'll read again in verse 1. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, 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 so 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. So as Jesus entered the community of Jericho, Luke introduces us to Zacchaeus. This man whose name means pure, but whose lifestyle was anything but pure.

And Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was not only a tax collector, but he was a chief tax collector. And he was rich. Now most of us, we don't like the tax man.

[14:17] It's nothing personal, but when you lose a percentage of your hard-earned wage before you even see it, it can be a bit frustrating and even demoralising.

And we grudge paying so much tax, don't we? Because we grudge paying it, especially when we consider some of the things that the taxpayer is funding. But you know, the reality is there's nothing new under the sun.

Because in the first century, Israel was a nation living under the rule and reign of the Roman Empire. And in order to fund and finance their great and growing world empire, Rome would put a heavy levy of tax upon all the nations who were under their control.

But the Jews, they resented paying these heavy levies. And in many cases, they refused to pay the taxes to Rome because they knew that that money was supporting a secular government and it was

funding heathen gods.

And yet, despite all the resentment and refusals, the Jews were still forced to pay. But what also made paying their taxes a hard pill to swallow for the Jews was that the tax collectors were one of them.

[15 : 31] Tax collectors were Jews by birth and Jews by upbringing. But the sad thing was that they chose to work for the selfish and secular government of the Roman Empire.

And while working for them, they would pocket a percentage of the tax money. And because of all this, the Jews considered tax collectors to be traitors and turncoats.

They thought of them as scoundrels and sinners. And that the tax collectors were nothing but crooks and criminals, rogues and robbers, liars and lawbreakers. And as you would expect, very few people liked tax collectors or had time for them because they were despised, disliked and detested by the people.

And so you can see that Zacchaeus' reputation, it always went before him. But when Jesus was passing by the community of Jericho, everything was put to one side.

Because Zacchaeus had a curiosity for the Christ. Zacchaeus had a curiosity for the Christ. And with Jesus now reaching the end of his three-year ministry, Zacchaeus, he would have inevitably heard about this miracle worker from Galilee.

[16 : 46] And his curiosity about the Christ would have grown. And it would have grown to the point that Zacchaeus wanted to meet Jesus for himself. Zacchaeus would have heard so much about Jesus that he wanted to use this opportunity to see Jesus.

But you know, we have to ask the question, why did Zacchaeus have a curiosity for the Christ? Why did Zacchaeus care about seeing Jesus? Why did Zacchaeus give up an afternoon of fleecing his fellow citizens for the sake of getting a glimpse of Jesus?

And you know, the conclusion we must come to is that Zacchaeus wasn't content with his cash. Zacchaeus wasn't content with his cash.

He had plenty of money. But it didn't make him happy. It didn't buy him friends. It didn't bring him satisfaction or security. Zacchaeus had a curiosity for the Christ because his cash didn't provide satisfaction.

Zacchaeus had a curiosity for the Christ because he felt that there was something missing in his life, something lacking in his life. He felt that there was this void in his life, this emptiness in his heart that he couldn't explain or express with words.

[18 : 07] And yet Zacchaeus was being drawn to Jesus because he knew deep down that Jesus had the answer she was looking for. Do you know, my friend, are you like Zacchaeus this morning?

Are you like Zacchaeus this morning? Do you have a curiosity for the Christ? A curiosity that has been growing over many years where you've heard so much about this Jesus and you've heard others testify to his transforming power.

And you've heard people, maybe people in your own family, you've heard them speak about his saving grace. And now for you, do you have a curiosity for the Christ? Because like Zacchaeus, you feel that there's something missing in your life.

Even though you might have all the comforts of this life, you have a warm home, you have a well-paid job or even a nice retirement package. You have a loving family, you have nice friends, you have a good health.

And yet with all these things, you know that there's something missing. You know that there's something lacking. You know that there's this void, this emptiness where you're not satisfied and you don't have the security that you long for.

[19 : 24] And like Zacchaeus, you know that money can't buy what you need. And you're being drawn to Jesus because you know that he has the answers that you're looking for.

But you know what's fascinating about Zacchaeus is that the way that verse 3 is worded and he was seeking to see who Jesus was, the way that that's phrased, it suggests that Zacchaeus had been seeking Jesus for some time.

Zacchaeus, you could say, was a seeker. And Zacchaeus had repeatedly been seeking Jesus for some time. In other words, Zacchaeus wasn't seeking Jesus all of a sudden.

No, it was gradual. It was ongoing. It was progressive. Because his curiosity for the Christ, it had been developing over time and he had been seeking the Saviour for a while.

All this was going on in his heart and it was growing and growing and growing. And now with Jesus passing by his community, Zacchaeus didn't want to miss his opportunity.

[20 : 32] Zacchaeus didn't want to waste his opportunity. And in order to make sure that he would see Jesus, this small man Zacchaeus, he runs ahead of the crowd and he climbs up into a sycamore tree and he waits for Jesus to pass by.

My friend, are you like Zacchaeus this morning? Are you like Zacchaeus? Do you have a curiosity for the Christ? Are you a seeker of the Saviour?

Maybe even a secret seeker of the Saviour? Because is that not why you're still listening to sermons even though church is closed? Is that not because, is that not why you still have an interest in the gospel this morning?

You're seeking this Saviour. You're being drawn to this Jesus. And you know why Jesus came. You know that Jesus came to seek and to save someone like you.

Someone who is lost. And you know that as this Jesus passes by in the gospel today, you know that you shouldn't waste your opportunity.

[21 : 40] Because it might just be your last opportunity. You know you shouldn't waste it. But you know as Jesus passed by the sycamore tree, in amongst this crowd from the community of Jericho, we're told that Jesus stopped.

Jesus stopped because he found the person he was looking for. And we're told in verse 5, when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and he said to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.

So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And you know these verses, they're some of the most wonderful words in the gospel. Because we're reminded that even though Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus, Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus.

Jesus was seeking this lost sheep. Even though Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus, Jesus was also seeking Zacchaeus.

And the concern from the Christ, and the curiosity for the Christ, they met with salvation at the sycamore tree. They met with salvation at the sycamore tree.

[22 : 59] You know my friend, as Jesus was passing by the community of Jericho, salvation was on offer today. That's what we're told. Today, today salvation has come to your house.

And you know my friend, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today. Salvation was on offer today. There was salvation at the sycamore tree. Today. And my friend, as Jesus passes by your community this morning, salvation is on offer today. Salvation is on offer today.

Hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today. Today salvation has come to this house. Salvation is on offer today. It's not on offer tomorrow.

Because none of us know if we're promised tomorrow. But salvation, the wonder of salvation, is that it's on offer today. And the gospel urges you, that now is the accepted time to come.

[24 : 07] And today is the day of salvation. Therefore, my friend, if you have a curiosity for the Christ, if you're a seeker of the Savior, if you have an interest in the gospel, if you're being drawn to Jesus, Jesus is saying to you today, that as he passes by, don't waste your opportunity, because there's salvation at the sycamore tree today.

There's salvation at the sycamore tree today. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart, because there is salvation at the sycamore tree today.

And so Zacchaeus, he found salvation at the sycamore tree. And he found salvation because there was a concern from the Christ. And there was a curiosity for the Christ, which led to, lastly, a confession of the Christ.

A confession of the Christ. Look at verse 7. And when they saw it, they all grumbled. He has 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 fourfold. And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

[25 : 37] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. You know, when everyone witnessed Zacchaeus find salvation at the sycamore tree, the crowds confessed that Zacchaeus didn't deserve it.

They didn't think that Zacchaeus was worthy of salvation. They didn't think that he was worthy to have Jesus at his house, because Zacchaeus was a sinner. The confession of the crowds was that there were many upright and upstanding members in the community, other than unfaithful and underhanded Zacchaeus.

But you know, Zacchaeus, he didn't deny that he was a sinner. Zacchaeus didn't deny his unfaithful and underhanded ways. Zacchaeus didn't deny that he was rich because he had ripped people off. No, Zacchaeus, he confessed that he was a sinner. But more than that, he confessed that the Christ was a wonderful saviour. And that's because the gospel, my friend, the gospel doesn't ask you, are you good enough for Jesus?

The gospel asks you, are you bad enough for Jesus? The gospel asks you, do you see yourself as a sinner in need of a saviour?

[26 : 52] The gospel asks you, are you willing to make a confession of the Christ? Are you willing to make a confession of the Christ? And you know, that's what happened in the privacy of Zacchaeus' home.

He made a commitment and a confession of the Christ. And that's what you can do today in the privacy of your own home. You can make a commitment and a confession of the Christ.

Because we're told that as Jesus and his disciples, as they sat down to enjoy a meal at the house of Zacchaeus, we're told that Zacchaeus stood up, verse 8, Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor.

And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. Zacchaeus stood up in order to make a stand for Jesus. Zacchaeus stood up and made a commitment and a confession of the Christ.

And you know, my friend, the evidence that Zacchaeus had found salvation at the Sycamore tree was that he considered his salvation to be more precious than his possessions.

[28 : 02] And you know, that was actually a complete contrast to the rich young ruler that Jesus met in the previous chapter.

Because in chapter 18, Jesus meets the rich young ruler. And the rich young ruler thought that he had done enough and was good enough and even worthy enough to inherit eternal life.

Because in his mind, the rich young ruler thought that he was a good person. And he had kept all of God's commandments so that he had every right to inherit eternal life.

But you remember where Jesus said to him, You lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor. And you'll have treasure in heaven and come and follow me.

But the rich young ruler, we're told that he went away sorrowful because why? He considered his possessions to be more precious than his salvation. He considered his possessions to be more precious than his salvation.

[29 : 15] And then Jesus says about the rich young ruler, How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God. In fact, says Jesus, It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

And then the disciples, they all ask, Who then can be saved? And Jesus says, What is impossible with men is possible with God. And you know, that's what we see in the life of Zacchaeus.

This man who found salvation at the sycamore tree. Zacchaeus found salvation at the sycamore tree. And the camel, you could say, the proverbial camel, passed through the eye of the needle.

And the rich man entered into the kingdom of God. And he entered in. Zacchaeus entered into the kingdom of God not because he righted all his wrongs. Not because he gave away his possessions. Zacchaeus entered the kingdom of God because of his conversion, commitment, and confession of the Christ.

[30 : 23] My friend, the evidence that Zacchaeus had found salvation at the sycamore tree was that he considered his possessions to be more precious than his salvation. He considered his salvation to be more precious than his possessions.

In other words, it's not enough to follow Jesus in your head. You have to follow Jesus with your head, your heart, and your hand. There has to be evidence.

There has to be fruit of your salvation. And when you make a confession of the Christ, my friend, this is the wonder. There will be a confession from the Christ.

When you make a confession of the Christ, there will be a confession from the Christ. Today salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

And you know, what better words could you hear today? What better message could come to your house today than for Jesus to say to you today?

[31 : 30] Salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. You know, my friend, will salvation come to your house today?

Will it come today? That's my longing. My longing is that today there will be rejoicing in heaven because of your conversion, commitment, and confession of the Christ.

Will salvation come to your house today? Because salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus when he found salvation at the sycamore tree.

And you know, the reason he found salvation at the sycamore tree, it was because he found Jesus at the sycamore tree. In fact, that's what the name Jesus means. It means salvation.

Call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins. Call him salvation. Jesus came to the house of Zacchaeus when he found Jesus at the sycamore tree.

[32 : 36] Salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus when he found salvation at the sycamore tree. Will salvation come to your house today?

A concern from the Christ. A concern from the Christ. A curiosity for the Christ. And a confession of the Christ. Salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus when he found salvation at the sycamore tree.

And you know, my friend, I want you to remember Zacchaeus. I want you to remember this man who found salvation at the sycamore tree. And I want you to remember that whenever you're passing the Barvis manse, or whenever you come to the Barvis manse, remember that lonely tree at the manse.

Remember that sycamore tree, which is standing all year round. Remember that it stands as a reminder to you and to this community that like Zacchaeus, who found salvation at the sycamore tree, you are able to find salvation when you come to Jesus Christ.

Because the one there is, my friend, this Jesus, he came to seek and to save that which was lost. So you come to him and you find salvation because there is salvation in him and him alone.

[34 : 06] May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, may I give thanks to thee that salvation is able to be found in Jesus Christ and that like Zacchaeus, we might have that growing interest and that growing desire to follow Jesus.

But Lord, we pray that we would just commit our lives to him and that we would confess him as our Lord and Saviour and realise that this Jesus, he is a wonderful shepherd.

He is able to save lost sheep and that he says to us in the Gospel, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give to them eternal life and they will never perish neither shall they be plucked out of my hand.

O Lord, that we would all find salvation at the Sycamore tree, that we would all come to this Jesus crying out, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

Lord, do us good and we pray. Bless thy word to our souls that I would find lodgment in our heart and that we might come to this Jesus and find in him a resting place where he will make us glad.

[35 : 27] Do us good, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing the words of Psalm 98.

Psalm 98 in the Sing Psalms version, we're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked four. And Psalm 98, it's a psalm that calls us to sing that new song to the Lord because of the wonders of his salvation, that he has accomplished salvation on behalf of sinners.

O sing a new song to the Lord for wonders he has done, his right hand and his holy arm, the victory of one. The Lord declared his saving work and made it to be known to all the nations of the world, his righteousness is shown.

These verses of Psalm 98, to God's praise. O sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders he has done.

His right hand and his holy arm, the victory of one.

[36 : 54] The Lord declared his saving work and made it to be known.

To all the nations of the world, His righteousness is shown.

And all the nations of the earth have seen what God has done.

A king. A king. His right hand and your holy arm, the king.

écritore. A labor on the earth Shall gladly and rejoice Make music and be juvent To Him lift up your voice