

“I Came to Seek and Save that which was Lost”

Luke 19:1-10

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas in which we ponder Jesus' coming to this earth (advent = coming). This year we are going to take four weeks to consider four of Jesus' own statements about why He came to earth. The four statements are found in the gospels:

- I came to seek and save that which was lost. (Luke 19:1-10)
- I came to bring a sword. (Matthew 10:34-39)
- I came to do the Father's will. (John 6:38-40)
- I came that they might have life. (John 10:7-10)

I think we'll see that an understanding of WHY Jesus came is very instructive for at least a couple of reasons. First, we will better understand ***what Jesus wants to do in our lives***. Jesus is still doing the same things today that He came to do in the first century. Second, we will better understand ***what discipleship looks like*** since He calls us to live the same type of life He lived. This morning, for example, we'll ask the question, "Since Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost, what does that mean for us to follow Him as His disciples?"

Today we begin by considering Luke 19:1-10. This is the account of Jesus "seeking and saving" Zaccheus. Here we have a tangible, fascinating example of the way in which Jesus pursues people who are lost. This should be a powerful encouragement and challenge to each of us.

Jesus came to seek and save that which was "lost." (Luke 19:1-10) The previous chapter (Luke 18) records Jesus' encounter with the "rich young ruler." In response to the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus told him to sell all he had and distribute it to the poor, and then follow Him. Jesus didn't require this of everyone; but money was this young man's god. Luke's comment was, "But when he heard these things he became very sad, for he was extremely rich" (v. 23). Jesus' disciples heard all of this and wondered out loud, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus' reply was "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God." In other words, by the grace of God people with money can enter the kingdom of God and can become apprenticed to Jesus. Jesus' encounter with Zaccheus in Luke 19 illustrates this point.

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich.

Tax collectors were despised by their fellow Jews because they collected taxes for the Romans (whose army occupied their country). As a ***chief*** tax collector, Zaccheus would have been especially despised because he was something like a regional manager for tax collectors in that area. But, Zaccheus had spiritual interest/curiosity:

3 Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way.

Knowing the route Jesus would take, Zaccheus positions himself up in a tree in order to see Jesus. Significantly, Jesus wanted to see Zaccheus also.

5 When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."

This is an example of what scholars call "a divine necessity": Jesus said, "I must stay at your house." Jesus had a divine appointment with Zaccheus in his house. This thrilled Zaccheus; he wasn't normally wanted by anybody desirable.

6 And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. 7 When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

This was the common reaction of religious people to Jesus. They thought that godly people kept their distance from "sinners" (and tax collectors were definitely sinners). Jesus had a very different mindset. He befriended people who had everything wrong with them because he viewed Himself as a physician who had come to heal sick people, as a redeemer who came to seek and save the lost. Verse 8 records how Zaccheus responded to Jesus.

8 Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."

I would love to know what the conversation had been up to this point. We're basically told Zaccheus' final destination of faith; we're not told how he got there. Zaccheus is describing what his repentance would look like. Since he had sinned against people financially by collecting more taxes than people owed, his repentance would involve making things right financially. But Zaccheus does far more than he was required to do by OT law. He would give half of what he owned to the poor and give back four times as much as he had defrauded from people. His voluntary repentance (Jesus didn't push this on him) involved this amazing generosity.

Notice Jesus' comment after Zaccheus announced what his repentance would involve:

9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.

Jesus saw Zaccheus' generosity as evidence that "today salvation has come to [Zaccheus'] house"! Jesus saw Zaccheus' new attitude toward money as tangible evidence that he had experienced salvation. Zaccheus had spent his entire career defrauding people; but now he was eager to give more than he was required to give. Whereas the rich young ruler (in the previous chapter - Luke 18) went away sad, Zaccheus was exuberant and joyful about giving.

In verse 10 Jesus frames up his encounter with Zaccheus with this statement:

10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Here Jesus gives a very direct statement about His advent/coming: He came to earth and befriended people like Zaccheus because he came to seek and save that which was lost. We need to think carefully about the category of people that the Bible describes as "lost." Dallas Willard has a brilliant discussion in *Renovation of the Heart* concerning what it means to be "lost." Here's part of what he writes:

To be lost means to be *out of place*. . . .Something that is lost is something that is not where it is supposed to be, and therefore it is not integrated into the life of the one to whom it belongs and to whom it is lost. (p. 55)

If your car keys are lost, they are out of place and therefore not useful to you. Your car keys will still open your trunk and start your car, but they're useless to you because they are out of place. In a similar way, the person who is lost spiritually isn't in the right place relationally with God. Zaccheus was "lost" because he wasn't in the right place with God - or with people. Instead of loving God he loved money; instead of loving people he defrauded them out of their money. He was profoundly lost. Jesus was seeking "that which was lost" when He went to Zaccheus' house and spent time with him.

The other primary place in Luke where Jesus talked about seeking what has been lost is chapter 15. There again we read that the religious leaders grumbled at the type of company Jesus kept:

1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.
2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

In response to their grumbling, Jesus told three parables about people who has lost something valuable: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost son (i.e., the "prodigal son"). In each case, the emphasis is upon the value of what was lost. The sheep, for example, was so valuable to the owner that he left behind the 99 to go seek out the 1 that was lost.

Before we consider the implications of Jesus' statement, I'll make a couple more points about what it means to be "lost." First, as Willard points out, ***it is very possible to be lost and not know it.***

"Many a driver is lost before he knows he is - though rarely before his wife knows it" (p. 56).

In the same way, many people are completely oblivious to the fact that they're lost spiritually - that they're not in the right place in relation to God. The Pharisees in the NT exemplify this type of oblivion. Because they knew the Scriptures better than everybody else and because they held positions of authority, they thought they were

tight with God. But Jesus said (in Matthew 23:13, 15) that they hadn't entered the kingdom and that they were "sons of hell." The Pharisees were very lost but they didn't know it. The same can be true today. You can be very insightful about some areas of your life and still be oblivious to the fact that you're "lost" in relation to God.

Second, ***if something is lost, that doesn't mean that it isn't valuable***. Lost does not mean worthless. When I lost my wedding ring a few years ago, that didn't mean it was worthless or that it lacked value. It was so valuable that I turned everything upside down looking for it; of course I found it a couple weeks after we'd bought a new one. The fact that Jesus paid such a high price to seek and save that which was lost suggests that humanity is infinitely valuable to God. God so wanted us to be rightly related to Him that He sent His one and only Son to become one of us and to die for us.

Let's spend some time thinking about the implications of Jesus' statement, "I came to seek and save that which was lost." We'll ask two questions. First:

What are the implications for what Jesus wants to do in our lives? The short answer is that Jesus is still seeking and saving those who are lost. Jesus still pursues people who are wandering around helpless and clueless and lost because they are out of place in the most foundational relationship in their life - their relationship with their Creator. Jesus pursues such people; He chases them down, spends time with them and convinces them that they don't have to be lost.

I often think back to the time when I came to Christ in college. If you had asked me when I was a freshman in college, "Are you lost?" I am sure I would have been insulted. I probably would have said, "What do you mean, lost? I grew up going to church; I read the Bible; I'm a good person." I was very, very lost, but I didn't know it. But in retrospect, I now realize that when I started hanging out with a group of believers in Jesus, I was just like Zaccheus sitting up in a tree. I was keeping my distance, but I wanted a glimpse of Jesus because I'd met people who raved about Him. It turns out that Jesus noticed me every bit as much as He noticed Zaccheus. And Jesus befriended me and spoke to me. He did this through Bob Bowen and Joel Piper. Through them Jesus sought me out and saved me. I gladly, whole-heartedly put my faith in Jesus; it was eventually an obvious thing to do.

It may be that you coming to worship here today was a bit like Zaccheus climbing into that sycamore tree. You've heard people talk about Jesus and you now want a glimpse of Him. You're willing to take a look at Him and listen to Him. If I'm describing you, please know that Jesus notices you, Jesus wants to come to your house and have table fellowship with you, and Jesus wants to talk with you. If you listen, you will hear Him say, "I died on the cross to pay for your sin." If you trust in Him, you will begin experiencing the same type of salvation Zaccheus did. I can't predict what it will mean for you; but ultimately Jesus will give you a life that is far superior to anything else.

Before we ask the second question, I want to point out that even if you know Jesus, there may be an area of your life that is lost - it's not where it should be and you can't get it where it should be. It may be a relationship that is lost (with a spouse, a friend, a

family member, another person in the church). It may be an area of your life in which there's habitual sin or disobedience. It may be a circumstance that's far beyond your control. There is a sense in which Jesus is still seeking and saving such specific areas of our lives. He hasn't abandoned us to lostness in any area of our lives. Jesus is still pursuing us and wants to bring salvation to every area of our lives. This is sometimes called "progressive sanctification." Through the Holy Spirit, God and Jesus are pursuing us so that we might be holy/found in every area of our lives.

What are the implications for our discipleship? This is where we need a rich and robust understanding of the body of Christ. The body of Christ isn't merely slang for "church people." The body of Christ is Jesus embodied on this earth. For approximately 33 years the body of Christ was His flesh and blood body that allowed Him to be among us as one of us. After His resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God. Now His followers are the body of Christ; we are the flesh and blood presence of Jesus in this world. Corporately we think and say and do the very things Jesus did when He walked this earth.

When Jesus walked this earth, He went around seeking and saving that which was lost. Therefore, as the body of Christ we are supposed to go around seeking out those who are "lost" (out of place) so that they might be found/saved. Just like Jesus noticed that there was a tax collector up in the tree, we are supposed to **notice** people who are out of place. . . people who might not even realize they are lost. Just like Jesus we are supposed to **befriend** people who are lost. Jesus wasn't merely "friendly" to people who were lost; Jesus went to their houses and enjoyed table fellowship with them (which communicates acceptance and relationship). And just like Jesus, we are supposed to be **full of grace and truth** (John 1:14) in our relationship with people who are lost.

I realize that this is a huge topic; there are many aspects of participating with Jesus in His mission of seeking and saving that which is lost. And so I want us to think specifically about whether or not we really "buy" the idea, "As I follow Jesus, I am called to notice, befriend, and talk with people who are lost." Do you really believe that Jesus is seeking and saving the lost **through you**? Do you really believe that?

It's easy to believe that Jesus is seeking and saving people through our missionaries, right? Last week Bob Cochran shared about how they are going to the most remote regions of Indonesia, seeking to bring the gospel to people who've never heard. It's easy to see how Jesus is seeking and saving people through them. But what about through **you** here in our community?

As we've often talked about, for the sake of integrity and for the cause of Christ, there has to be a continuity between what we do here and what we send people to do on the other side of the world. Our Love Manhattan effort is based on the premise that Jesus is still seeking out lost people here in our community. We can move out into our community with compassion because Jesus already cares for our community and is actively seeking people who need Him.

Who is the most lost person you know? Who are the people who are so obviously out of place that the message about Jesus just might be heard as “good news”? Are you open to the possibility that because Jesus is still seeking and saving those who are lost, He wants you (as His disciple) to notice, to befriend, and to be full of grace and truth as you talk with that very person?

As we celebrate the Lord’s table this morning, allow the bread and the cup to remind you that Jesus became one of us to seek and save that which was lost. In what ways is Jesus seeking/pursuing you this morning? In what ways is He pursuing others through you?