

Sermon Series: Why Jesus 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 study four of Jesus’ own statements about why He came to earth. In His own words, Jesus made these four statements about why He came:

- To seek and save that which was lost. (Luke 19:1-10)
- To bring a sword. (Matthew 10:34-39)
- To do the Father’s will. (John 6:38-40)
- That we might have life. (John 10:7-10)

Studying why Jesus came is rather important for at least a couple of very practical reasons. First, studying why Jesus came will help us 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.

Today we begin by considering Luke 19:1-10. This is the account of Jesus “seeking and saving” Zacchaeus. 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) Let’s set the context for today’s passage by reviewing Jesus’ encounter with the “rich young ruler” in the previous chapter (18:18ff). In response to the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus told this man 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). Next we read that “Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’” (vv. 24-25). Others present 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 Zacchaeus in Luke 19 illustrates this point - that by God’s grace a rich man can “be saved.”

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and 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, Zacchaeus would have been especially despised because he was something like a regional manager for tax collectors in that area. But, Zacchaeus had spiritual interest/curiosity:

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. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

Knowing the route Jesus would take, Zacchaeus runs ahead and climbs up in a tree in order to see Jesus; he didn't care about appearances. . . he just wanted to see Jesus. Significantly, Jesus wanted to see Zacchaeus also.

5 And 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."

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 Zacchaeus in his house. This thrilled Zacchaeus; he wasn't normally wanted by anybody desirable.

6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in 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 Zacchaeus responded to Jesus. The narrative is compressed, but it seems clear that Jesus had been at Zacchaeus' house for some time.

8 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."

From Zacchaeus' words, it's clear that he had come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God bringing salvation. Zacchaeus' words here in verse 8 describe 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 Zacchaeus 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 involved heartfelt generosity.

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

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

Jesus saw Zacchaeus' generosity as evidence that "today salvation has come to [Zacchaeus'] house"! Zacchaeus' new generosity was tangible evidence that he had experienced salvation. Zacchaeus had spent his entire career defrauding people; but now he was eager to give away more than was required. All Jews were "sons of Abraham" ethnically by birth; but Zacchaeus was also a son of Abraham by faith (Paul

wrote in Galatians 3:7 that we are truly descendants of Abraham if we share Abraham's faith). Whereas the rich young ruler (in the previous chapter - Luke 18) went away sad, Zacchaeus was exuberant and joyful about being a generous person. That's been my observation: generous people are usually joyful; lovers of money are usually miserable.

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

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

"Son of Man" was shorthand for "the Messiah." As the Messiah, Jesus came to earth and befriended people like Zacchaeus 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. Zacchaeus 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 his neighbor as himself he defrauded them out of their money. He was profoundly lost. Jesus was seeking "that which was lost" when He went to Zacchaeus' 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 the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

In response to their grumbling, Jesus told three parables about people who had 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 of clarifications about what it means to be "lost." First, ***Just because something is lost doesn't mean that it isn't valuable***. Lost does not mean worthless. If you drove home after this service and realized that you'd lost your phone, you wouldn't say, "My phone is lost therefore it's not valuable." Being lost has nothing to do with the value of an object.

The fact that human beings are created in the image of God means that every single person is valuable - even if s/he is lost and out of place in relation to God. If that weren't the case Jesus wouldn't have paid such a high price to seek and save us.

Second, as Willard points out, ***it is very possible to be lost and not know it.*** He points out that "Many a driver is lost before he knows he is - though rarely before his wife knows it!" 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 right 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. Many things can mask "lostness": affluence, competence, achievement, popularity, even Bible knowledge. You can have/be all these things and still be oblivious to the fact that you're "lost" in relation to God.

Let's think about a couple of implications of Jesus' statement, "I came to seek and save that which was lost."

What are the implications for what Jesus wants to do in our lives? The short answer is that Jesus is seeking and saving us. 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; and occasionally 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 Zacchaeus 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 Zacchaeus. And Jesus befriended me and spoke to me. He did this primarily through guys: StuJ, Bob, and Joel. 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 Zacchaeus 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 experience the same type of salvation Zacchaeus 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.

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 Christian 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. We've been talking about this the past ten months in our study of Acts. But this morning, I want to ask you directly, "Do you believe that Jesus is able and willing to seek and save the lost ***through you?***" Do you really believe that? I'm not asking whether you can figure out how God might use you in others' lives; I'm asking whether you agree in principle that Jesus wants to seek and save people through you.

If you actually believe that, it will change the way you live your life. You will have a sense of anticipation and purpose that you wouldn't otherwise have. Believe it or not, I sometimes have a hard time believing that Jesus wants to seek and save people through me. But when I'm thinking clearly (i.e., biblically), I interact with people very differently. I don't assume that anybody is beyond God's compassion or reach. And so I'm open to what Jesus might want to say or do through me. Believing that Jesus wants to seek and save people through you will change the way you live your life.

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. Consider:

- * In what ways is Jesus seeking/pursuing you this morning?
- * In what ways is He pursuing others through you?