

An Outsider Believes! – Luke 19:1-10 – Sermon Notes

Introduction

In 2003, Disney and Pixar released the classic animated film 'Finding Nemo'. If you don't know the story, Nemo is a young clownfish who gets captured by divers and placed in a fish tank a thousand miles away. His dad Marlin witnesses his capture and having lost his son, he frantically sets off on the long journey to find and rescue him, which he eventually does.

This is just one of many well-known stories of the lost being found and rescued. The 2018 rescue of the Thai footballers may also come to mind. And whilst these are fantastic stories, today's story of Jesus and Zacchaeus demonstrates the greatest rescue story known to man, and its final verse sums it up perfectly. "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." Jesus came to seek and save us.

We're going to explore this wonderful passage together, and uncover why this is the greatest rescue story, in three parts. What does it mean to be lost? What does it mean to be sought? And what does it mean to be saved? Lost, sought, and saved.

Lost

To know what it means to be lost we first need to know a little more about Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus is a Jewish man who works as a chief tax collector in the profitable city of Jericho. This is the only mention of a chief tax collector in the Bible, and Jericho is a prime spot for tax collecting as it sits on a major trade route. So, verse 2 is a bit of an understatement! This is very wealthy man and likely quite prominent.

He may be a well to do man, but he is not a liked man, especially by his fellow Jews. Tax collectors worked for the Gentile Romans, and, with the threat of the Romans, they could extort far more tax than was required, with anything extra ending up in their own pockets.

This is Zacchaeus' biggest problem. Jesus does not call Zacchaeus lost because he was a social outsider and despised by others. Zacchaeus is lost because he is a swindler. Zacchaeus is spiritually lost because he is a sinner.

In this context, Jesus does not use the word "lost" like we might describe a balloon that has escaped a child's hand. To be spiritually lost is to be lost like Nemo was. Nemo was not completely innocent in his capture. Nemo's father instructs him to stay in the reef around where they live because he knows the dangers of swimming too far into the ocean. But Nemo's curiosity gets the better of him, he deliberately disobeys his dad, and he rebelliously swims out to touch a nearby boat, which puts him right into the hands of the diver.

We call rebelliousness against God sin. Like Zacchaeus, our sin is our biggest problem. Because, like Nemo, our sin takes us away from the one who loves us. Our sin takes us away from the safe loving care of our wonderful God and the future hope of joyful heaven. The

result of our disobedience to God, and the way he designed us to live, means we are unfit for his presence, and we become exposed to his just wrath for our wrongdoing.

Maybe you have never considered if you are spiritually lost so how do I know if I am lost? Let's look at verses 3 and 4. Zacchaeus wants to see who Jesus is but because of the crowd that always gathers around Jesus, he cannot see him due to his short stature. So, he responds in most conventional way he can come up with, by running ahead of the crowd to a nearby tree and climbing it. Would an important man embarrass himself by rushing to climb a tree simply to satisfy his curiosity? I think it is unlikely. Would a social outcast who is yearning for acceptance and forgiveness climb a tree to meet a man who reportedly welcomes outsiders into his fold no matter what the crowd might think? I think that is more likely. Zacchaeus knows deep down he is lost. He feels the absence of love and fulfillment in his heart which is made worse by his social standing. So, he is compelled by Jesus' reputation to find out more.

Are you going to find out more today? I don't imagine Zacchaeus had Jesus pencilled in for dinner around 6 pm at the start of his day. It was more likely go to work, steal some money, back home for dinner with the family, good day. But he made the most of the opportunity presented to him. When we are lost, it is easy to get stuck in the hamster wheel of life without stopping to think about where we're going or why we do what we do. If you feel lost, consider rearranging your initial plans for today or any other day and find out more.

If, as in the words of the great hymn Amazing Grace, you were once lost and are now found, let us praise the Lord for his miraculous work in our hearts and lives. Praise him that we are no longer lost. Our yearning has been satisfied, our hearts are now full of glorious purpose, and we have confidence that our sins are forgiven.

Sought

As the divers load Nemo into the boat and drive away, Marlin could have thought, "Well it's his own fault so he can make his own way out of it." It would be a short film if he had. Instead, he responds with the same concern our heavenly God and Father shows us. While Marlin zooms off in search of the boat, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to become human to seek us through the truth spoken in his earthly ministry and ultimately through his saving death.

Zacchaeus is one lucky recipient of God's wonderful initiative during Jesus' earthly ministry. We may think that Zacchaeus does all the work, but Jesus could have ignored him and carried on walking. Instead, Jesus makes the deliberate choice to walk up to Zacchaeus and that is made clear in how he addresses him. No "Hello" or "Who are you?" or "Why are you in the tree?" In verse 5 he says, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." The Greek word used here for "must" also translates as "it is necessary". Jesus is so passionate about his purpose to seek the lost that he basically commands Zacchaeus to invite him round. "It is necessary that I stay at your house today."

Sadly, in their hard and hateful hearts, all the crowd can see in verse 7 is how unbecoming it is of a Jewish teacher to lower himself to stay at the house of tax collector. But Jesus doesn't

care how radical this is. Jesus doesn't care that Zacchaeus is an outsider. He is far more concerned with the necessity of salvation for the lost.

Such is God's desire for us too. In the matter of salvation, our appearance, social status, or finances have no significance. And on the inside, we have all been outsiders to God because we have rebelled against him. But Matthew 18:12-14 says, "If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish." What a wonderful truth! God does not want anyone to face the consequences of their sin, and so he comes after us. He is saying to us "It is necessary that I come into your life today."

But how does God seek us today? We may not have Jesus in physical flesh like Zacchaeus did, but we do have everything we need to know about him right here in the Bible. As Jesus said himself, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." In the Bible, there are four different accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection which we collectively call the Gospels. The word "gospel" means good news, because it is very good news that Jesus came, lived, died, and rose again to seek and save the lost. We are looking today and have been over the last few months at the account written by a first century doctor called Luke, and if you would like to learn more about this man who came to seek and save the lost, then please do pick up a copy of Luke's Gospel.

But the Bible is not the only way God seeks the lost today. Church services have many purposes but the primary one is the teaching of the Bible. God has graciously gifted some men and empowered them with the Holy Spirit to prepare and preach the Bible for you. So please, everyone, continue to make the most of Sunday mornings. God is working through those men to bring the Bible to you.

God also seeks us through the guiding work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says in John 14:23 and 26, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

How can you take advantage of how God is seeking you? Could you read the Bible for the first time, or can you keep on reading it? Could you come regularly on a Sunday morning if you don't already? Could you pray to God for the Spirit to help you understand what God is teaching us? (And that is advice for everyone because we always need help understanding and following God). And you don't have to do any of this alone. Who could you ask to help you discover more about Jesus?

Because the story of Zacchaeus is clear, whilst Jesus does 100% of the seeking, a response is required from us. This is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus invites himself round to someone's house and it directly illustrates what he says in Revelation 3:20, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." And again, in Luke 11:9-10, "I say to you: Ask and it

will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." Jesus promises that he will save those who seek him, just like he did with Zacchaeus.

Are you seeking Jesus today? This applies to everyone whether you are a believer or not. If you are not, then know that Jesus is still seeking you today. He wants to bring you home. But will you respond like Zacchaeus, will you seek Jesus, and take hold of what Jesus has promised you?

For us believers, we need to challenge ourselves. Are we still seeking Jesus? Do I make the most of the Bible, of church, of prayer, and of fellowship? Do I run to Jesus or to worldly comforts when I struggle? Matthew 6:31-33 says, "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Saved

The fruit of Jesus seeking Zacchaeus and showing him love and kindness despite his status as an outsider is that Zacchaeus finds faith in God. It is not clear when he and his family are converted, maybe it happened whilst Jesus was staying, but Jesus himself confirms this new faith in verses 9-10. Whilst Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham in the sense that he is a Jew, Jesus uses the term spiritually. Just as Abraham was a man of faith, so too is Zacchaeus now.

But Jesus' small act of love and kindness here is also a precursor of his ultimate act of love and kindness for all humanity. We have all been lost at one point. We have wandered away and disobeyed him. And, unfortunately, our rescue is not as simple as Nemo's rescue. God cannot simply let our sin pass by because he is so perfect and holy. So how do you pay the penalty of wickedness without condemning your lost ones? God sent his Son to die on a cross where he willingly accepted the punishment due to humanity for their sins, so that, by faith in Jesus, we may be saved and made right with God.

"This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith." (Romans 3:22-25).

There are no two ways about it. The love and kindness of Jesus to pay for our sins on the cross should lead us to put our faith in him for our purpose and salvation.

But what does faith look like? How does Jesus know Zacchaeus has faith? How do I know if I have faith in Jesus?

Well, faith completely transforms our lives. Look at Zacchaeus in verse 8. "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of

anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” In contrast to the rich ruler that Pete preached about a couple of weeks ago, Zacchaeus does give his possessions to the poor. His faith is no longer in his wealth, but in Jesus. The transformation of his heart leads him to seek justice for his own wrongs and to be generous with his abundant wealth. So, he makes this declaration of repentance and follows through on it immediately, “here and now.”

Now faith does not always reveal itself as dramatically as it does for Zacchaeus, but the marks are the same. If we have faith, our hearts will be changed. Like Zacchaeus, we will see joy, assurance of our forgiveness, humility, and repentance in our lives. We might also see peace, patience, grace, integrity, or any other characteristic of Jesus.

Have you put your faith in Jesus yet? If you haven’t, I hope this morning has encouraged you to consider this man who came to earth to die to save you. I know it is a scary idea, to have your life changed by faith in Jesus, but you are not alone and will never be alone. God is a loving Father who wants to bring you home and he has placed spiritual brothers and sisters round you who are more than willing to help, and the Spirit’s help is only a call away.

If you have put your faith in Christ, then let us measure our transformation. Not in a proud or comparative way, but in an obedient and servant-hearted way. Am I becoming more like Christ day by day or year by year? Is there an area in my life that needs dramatic transformation like money was for Zacchaeus? Just because we are saved does not mean we can become complacent with our faith or continue with our sin. Another man of faith with a name beginning with Z is Zechariah. In Luke 1 he sings this song, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them... to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”

Prayer

Our father in heaven, thank you for sending your son to seek and save the lost. Thank you, Jesus, for your death on the cross to pay the punishment of our sins. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for transforming our hearts to seek the things of God and not the things of the world. May we examine ourselves and our standing before you. If we are lost, please find us, and encourage us to respond to your saving grace. If we are found, please keep working in our hearts. May we find comfort in the gospel every day, may we become more like Jesus every day, may we seek to honour and glorify you with everything we do. Amen.