

"See the Lost as Jesus Sees Them"

Luke 19:1-10

Let's use some biblical imagination this morning. Last week I mentioned how a blessing from a father or the naming of a son at his circumcision (we know this from John the Baptist's circumcision) was a big deal. The choosing of a name was usually thought about with the future in mind, that this child would prayerfully become what their name was.

Imagine a Jewish scene probably not many years apart from Jesus and John's birth. In a similar home the Rabbi comes on the 8th day, circumcision and naming day. The baby boy is often given to the grandfather to hold for the ceremony while the parents watch on. The Rabbi prays this prayer

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Thy commandments, and has given us the command concerning circumcision.

Then the father responds:

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Thy commandments, and has commanded us to make our sons enter the covenant of Abraham our father.

Those present respond:

"Even as this child has entered into the covenant, so may he enter into the Torah, the nuptial canopy, and into good deeds."

The Rabbi then takes a cup of wine and recites over it a prayer for the infant in which the father gives the infant his Hebrew name. A drop or two of the wine is placed in the infant's mouth and, traditionally, the father drinks some of the wine and saves the rest for the mother.

Often there were included other readings and blessings as well, and the parents often speak about the reason they chose the boy's Hebrew name. The ceremony is generally followed by a festive meal, and special prayers are recited in the grace after meals, blessing the parents, the child, the Rabbi and the grandparents.

And on this particular day around the same time or perhaps no more than 10 years prior to Jesus' birth, the father announces his son's name and it will be Zacchaeus [and the crowd happily smiles] and he explains that Zacchaeus means pure, righteous one. And they pray that Zacchaeus will do many good deeds proving his name to be well given.

And the years go by and Zacchaeus grows into a fine young boy, listening to his parents and reciting the Torah, doing a good job at his Bar mitzvah when he turns 13 and becomes a man. But there's always been this shadow in Zacchaeus' life and that is his size. When all his peers were having their growth spurts Zacchaeus prayed for his. And as his friends got bigger and he did not, he most likely was picked on and left out and laughed at because of his size. As he got older he got lonelier. His life wasn't much. He was just for being picked on. One day a Roman approached him, taking advantage of his social ostracizing from his own people. And offered him a job of collecting

taxes from these same people who picked on him all these years. It appealed to this friendless, young man so he said yes. And now it was his pay back time on all those who made fun of him because of his size and unfriended him on Facebook. And Zacchaeus did well, so well, people hated to see him. But what did he care? They didn't like him before anyway. So he charged them extra. Made up taxes that weren't by the book. But the Romans didn't care as long as they got their money. He did so well he was promoted to Chief Tax Collector. He no longer had to collect the taxes themselves (which he was growing to dislike more and more) and now he had subordinates working for him. He built a large house. He hosted parties for his tax-collecting friends because that's the only friends he had. One day he hears some talk about a prophet who likes tax-collectors and because of that the Pharisees don't like. 'Hmm, he can't be all bad' Zacchaeus thought. 'Who is He?' He asked. His name is Jesus. He's from Galilee. The religious leaders don't like Him. They sarcastically call Him 'The Friend of Tax-Collectors and sinners.' Apparently He can heal people of their sicknesses, blindness and even casts out demons. Some say He could be the Messiah.'

Zacchaeus pretended not to show too much interest in this Jesus but quietly asked around and listened in on conversations about Him – which wasn't too hard to do since everyone was talking about Him. Even the Romans were concerned because everywhere Jesus went crowds gathered and that always made the Romans nervous.

While this is my own fictional account of the background of Luke 19 (taking known cultural traditions in mind), I think we can understand that something happened in his life to ostracize him from his Jewish community. He obviously first thought all this money was great but it came with a price. He was hated. He was unclean so he was not welcome in the synagogue. He had to be careful if he went out in public, but he probably rarely did because he would have had servants to do that stuff for him. But he was certainly empty and unfulfilled and a long way from being the 'pure, righteous' man his parents prayed he would become. One day he hears Jesus is coming through Jericho and he's wondering if maybe Jesus would be his friend, if he likes tax collectors. Is He the Messiah? Will He heal someone here? Maybe He'll let me follow Him? He heard one of the 12 used to be a tax-collector.

Who's a Zacchaeus in your life? Someone you have little respect for, someone who might have hurt you verbally, maybe even cheated you? Someone who seems to show no concern for you or others, someone who possibly is not welcome in your family or community?

Do we know their heart?

No.

Does Jesus know their heart?

Yes.

As we look at how Jesus saw Zacchaeus I think we need to learn how to be more like Jesus in how we see the Zacchaeus' in our own life and remember they are lost and need saving. And that's the first thing we need to be reminded of here. That

Jesus' Agenda was to Minister to the Lost **(9:51; 18:31-19:4)**

In Luke's gospel, there is a key division point at 9:51. Here we read,

⁵¹ As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for [or set His face towards] Jerusalem.

At the time Jesus was in Galilee. So He makes His way through Samaria and gradually works towards Jericho, due south of Samaria along the Jordan River, where He will proceed to turn northeast and literally go up to Jerusalem. Jericho was one of the lowest elevation spots in all Israel, one day's journey away. But even though Jesus has an agenda – He has somewhere He needs to be – ['Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through'] - doesn't mean He won't stop and minister to people. Because His agenda is the cross. And so our agenda first and foremost is share what Jesus' agenda was, which is

The purpose of the cross(18:9-14; Matt. 9:11-13)

The agenda of the cross doesn't just mean 'I have to get to the cross and I can't let anything stop me'. The agenda of the cross is to save people from their sins so on His way He reaches out to and ministers to people who need saving. Luke has a specific interest in tax-collectors. When John the Baptist is preaching to the crowds in Luke 3, we read in v.12 *'Even tax-collectors came to be baptized and asked 'What should we do?'*

In Ch. 5 we have the account of Jesus choosing Matthew, a tax-collector to follow Him. Matthew does and then held a great banquet which included a large crowd of tax collectors. The Pharisees were upset of course and asked Jesus,

"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

³¹ Jesus answered them, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

In 7:29 we read again that many tax-collectors were following Jesus. And in telling the parable of the lost coin, sheep and son in Ch. 15, Luke begins,

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

And then to set up his audience for Zacchaeus, in Ch. 18 when Jesus tells this parable:

⁹ *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' ¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

In 18:18-30 we then read about the rich young ruler who didn't choose to follow Jesus. Jesus told His disciples its hard for the rich to enter the kingdom but not impossible with God. So now we meet Zacchaeus, a rich tax-collector whom no one liked and no one expected to come to know Jesus, but we are reminded by Zacchaeus that some of these

People who knew they were lost (vv.2-4)

We can't assume that the people who look like they have it all together, or who appear

heartless and have even hurt us are not outside the grace of God – and know it! What signs do we know that Zacchaeus is lost and wanting Jesus to help him?

A lot of the cultural background insights of the Jewish world I have gotten from Ken Bailey, a scholar who lived most of his life in the middle east, who has written many books on the cultural backgrounds of the gospels. Here we read that Zacchaeus, who was short, wanted to see Jesus but couldn't because of the crowd. Wouldn't the crowd give way for Zacchaeus to see Him? No! Zacchaeus was hated and should he get caught in a crowd it wouldn't take much for someone to knife him and his body wouldn't be discovered until the crowd – and the assailant – dispersed. Not an option.

Instead he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore fig tree. A sycamore tree was a large, strong tree with large leaves but the branches were low to the ground. Easy to climb. Grown men did not climb trees and run in public. Especially, wealthy, prominent men (like the father of the prodigal). It's a sign of humiliation. Zacchaeus doesn't care. Zacchaeus is endangering his life by going out in public but he's willing to take that risk to meet Jesus. Will Jesus be my friend?

Not surprisingly, Jesus stops at the tree outside of town, sees Zacchaeus and says something astonishing;

⁵...*“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”*

If we're going to reach the Zacchaeus' in our life, we need to see them as lost as Jesus does and do as Jesus did;

Jesus Wanted to Spend Time with the Lost **(19:5-7)**

Much to their shock (vv.5-6)

For a couple of reasons. Back in v.1 we read that

“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through ...”

Shock # 1, Jesus showed He did not intend to stay in Jericho. Jericho was one of the largest cities in His day. It was an important port and trade city (that's why Zacchaeus lived there). Herod had a palace there, so it was a key city. When someone of significance comes to a city, that city is obligated to host the guest. The leaders will pick someone important, who will impress the guest(s) and show them Eastern hospitality at its finest. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem and appears to ignore (insult) the people of Jericho by not staying. We know He actually passed through town because middle eastern culture did not like large trees in their cities. They actually had laws that said a sycamore tree could only be planted 50 cubits passed the city boundary. They thought sycamore trees (especially) got in the way of the view of the city!

So Jesus has shocked the people by passing through a very important city but then stops and sees public enemy # 1 (who is trying to hide unsuccessfully in a tree) and tells him that He has chosen to stay at Zacchaeus' house. **Shock # 2**. Because guests did not choose their host.

And **shock # 3**, He chooses to let Zacchaeus represent Jericho as the host!

Yet there's something prophetically gracious going on here. Jesus, knowing Zacchaeus is

hated by the people, purposely invites Himself into Zacchaeus' home,

Knowing it would produce hostility (v.7)

Purposely taking on the hostility aimed at Zacchaeus upon Himself. See v.7?

⁷ *All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'*

Isn't that what the gospel is all about? Jesus takes upon Himself the wrath of God, meant for us because of our sin, so that we can know that forgiveness is available to us if we choose to believe who Jesus is and what He did for us on the cross. And Zacchaeus' heart is ready. He knows he's a sinner but He understands Jesus is willing to show Him mercy and grace. And Zacchaeus is proof positive that

**Jesus Can Change Anyone
(19:8-10)**

How do we know Zacchaeus truly believes who Jesus is?

⁸ *But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "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."*

When we read the laws of restitution in Exodus-Numbers, we understand Zacchaeus was being extremely generous, more than necessary. Which demonstrates the genuine change in his heart. Why did he change? Because when you

Accepting costly love produces radical transformation (vv.8-9)

Zacchaeus knows he is unworthy of Jesus' love towards him, the offer to be a guest in his house. You see, when Jesus says '*I must stay at your house*' the word for stay means to eat and rest, spend the night. According to the religious culture Jesus is deliberately defiling Himself by being in Zacchaeus' home, eating his food, drinking from his cups and lying in a bed in his house. Zacchaeus humbles himself in response to Jesus' humil-iating Himself for Zacchaeus that he vows to repent and live a righteous, pure life. This is how we know salvation has come to his house, that he placed his faith in the Son of God who willingly took on his defilement in front of the people. Remember, Jesus resolutely is going to Jerusalem where these kinds of gracious, acts of love infuriate the religious leaders, forcing their hand to crucify Him at the Passover, one week away.

When we think about the Zacchaeus' in our own life, think about the radical transformation that can take place should they accept Jesus' sacrifice for them on the cross. These people are lost. Some of them may even know it but in their pride hide behind their arrogance and influence, yet in reality want to change but don't know how. And Jesus reminds His disciples and all those who heard or read His words, what His agenda was and what ours is:

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

Jesus was inviting others who also knew they were lost and needed saving to come to Him. He was

Extending the invitation for people to believe Jesus can change their life (v.10)

Any of you religious leaders out there want to confess your sins? Anyone in the crowd want genuine forgiveness for your sins and want to find joy like Zacchaeus now has? Come.

And that's our goal when we are praying for, having spiritual conversations with and challenging people with the gospel; to extend an invitation for them to believe in Jesus so Jesus can change their life. From the inside out.

Every day God has an agenda for you and me: to show His love for others that they can see how much He loves them and sent Jesus to pay the penalty for their sins. Sadly, we all get caught up in our own agendas of good things and important things but forgetting to be witnesses in our jobs, in our homes and to our neighbours. Let's work on that. Let's orient our day toward His agenda by praying at the start of our day that God would help us live a Jesus-like life so we can share Jesus' life with others.

And let's pray for the Zacchaeus' in our life, that God in His grace might allow us to show grace to them and share Jesus with them. They say they don't want Him but maybe they're hiding their pain and rejection from us. Let's look at them the way Jesus does, as lost people unaware of how much Jesus was willing to humiliate Himself for them on the cross.

Gracious and merciful God and Lord Jesus, thank you for showing your grace to us and opening up our hearts to under-stand the gospel. May our own salvation spur us on to know that You're still saving others. Help us to be ready everyday to be used by You to share your love. We pray for those in our life who don't know You; the Zacchaeus' who are living a sin-filled life apart from you but also the nice people who think that their niceness is good enough, but its not. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Lord, I pray that anyone here or any-one listening to this right now through Zoom or in our neighbor-hood, would understand what You say in Your Word about them. You love them so much you sent Jesus to die for them. They need to confess their own sins and accept Jesus as their mediator between You and them. And then they'll find true joy and we'll watch how Your radical love transforms them.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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