Joyful Repentance & Joyful Salvation

Luke 19:1-10

You're here because you want to see something. Here to experience something, and I believe you've been led here today by the Holy Spirit of God, because He has something to say, which He wants you to experience.

Following in the series in Luke, called "*Meet Jesus*", we're in chapter 19. Jesus is traveling from Capernaum - on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee - South 160 km to Jerusalem, and his disciples and crowds follow him almost everywhere. The more Jesus travels his reputation and his name increase. Now close to Jerusalem, Jesus passes through Jericho.

Jericho: a magnificent city; a desert oasis. The great city had a fortress, aqueducts, a winter palace complete with (what recent archaeological excavations have discovered) huge pools - in which Herod the Great is reputed to have drowned his own son. Geographically, it's still today the lowest city in the world: 260 meters below sea level. With a tropical climate and excellent water access, it meant great agriculture, so something called balm was grown there for producing perfume. A rich city and a central hub for trading and for merchants, it also attracted less savory characters, namely, tax collectors.

Jesus came to Jericho because he was really was just passing through - Luke tells us this in verse one. But there's always more to Jesus then what's on the surface, and there's a deeper purpose in everything he does. Jesus was looking for someone. Now when you hear that, that "Jesus was searching for some person", my first was "they must be important!" Jesus is on a mission to Jerusalem – where he would be crucified – and he's looking for someone. Let's meet this most fortunate person!

Here he is, verse two: his name was Zacchaeus. Zack was a chief tax collector, and was rich. Also, we find out he was small in stature. We know that tax collectors were hated in that time, and rightly so. Working for the oppressing Roman government, they collected taxes from their fellow Jews, normally collecting much more than required and lining their own pockets. To the Romans they were nothing more than a tool, and to the Jews, a traitor. Martin Slack described them as the "first century equivalent of a Nazi collaborator". Ironically, the name "Zacchaeus" means "pure, innocent and righteous" – but this man could not have been more corrupt, even being called the chief tax collector. He probably had other tax collectors working for him, *and* he was rich. Imagine the kind of a man this was. He'd been likely doing his job a long time, and you don't just get handed a job at the top of the Ponzi scheme. You don't just stumble into working the head of the mafia - you step on people, and use and abuse people. You lie and backstab your way to the top. This man had long ago stopped caring about any people around him. He was undoubtedly a hateful, spiteful, greedy, unhappy, creep on a downwards spiral.

Remember shortly before entering Jericho, Jesus is approached by a rich young ruler. The young man was well respected, well educated, and very proud of what a morally upright person he was, and he trusted in his money – trying even to add Jesus' salvation as just another trophy

to his collection of good things. So like the rich young man and, later, the poor blind man were complete *social* opposites, so the young man and Zacchaeus were complete *moral* opposites. One a corrupt, hated, man and the other an upstanding, respected man but they had one thing in common: they were both rich. Jesus had said "*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God*." Mark Bateman illustrated this by bringing in a needle. I could barely see the needle, much less the eye of it from where I was sitting. It's not "hard" for a camel to go through - Jesus said it's "impossible". I think we're all here very rich. If Jesus had said "it is harder for a *poor* man to enter the kingdom of God then for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle" wouldn't he have still been correct? Who can enter the kingdom on their own? Jesus just said that being rich just makes it that much harder. Immediately afterwards, Jesus thankfully says "*What is impossible with man is possible with God*." Zacchaeus is where Jesus will prove that to be true, that it *is* possible.

So here's Jesus, searching for someone who's possibly the most vile, corrupt, calloused heart in all of Jericho. Maybe you've gotten a hold of the kind of man Zacchaeus was by now. And, knowing Jesus, don't you just have a sense that he's going to do something amazing? If you know Jesus, you know he liked to cross cultural boundaries, to break social norms, and to generally exceed your expectations. Now Jesus is about to be in close contact with Zacchaeus, the little man who had run ahead of the crowd. Imagine this short man, sprinting behind the crowd, heading for a low hanging tree, scrambling up and positioning himself on a branch - what an embarrassing posture for a rich man to be in, sitting in a tree, getting bark and leaves all over his rich man clothes.

Why did Zacchaeus climb this tree? Had he heard Jesus reputation? Heard of the miracles and healings? But Zacchaeus wasn't sick that we know of. He wasn't dying, he wasn't a leper, or needy in any sense that's obvious to us. Luke only tells us that our man was "seeking to see Jesus".

Charles Spurgeon, the 19th century British preacher, recalls that the day he surrendered his life to the Lord. He stumbled into a simple little church, where the pastor had been snowed in that morning, and in his place a poor man whom Spurgeon politely described as "stupid", read Isaiah 45:22, which in the KJV reads
"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the Earth".
He didn't even pronounce the words correctly, but it didn't matter, he continued "This is a very simple text indeed. It says 'Look.' Now lookin' don't take a deal of pain. It aint liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand [pounds] a year to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look.

And that's all Zacchaeus wanted to do. I believe his desire to see the Lord was the Holy Spirit working in him, calling him and moving him towards Jesus, who was searching for him. The parallel is this: If the Spirit has led you here tonight, He's led you here to look upon Jesus. I want to show you Jesus. You need to see your savior, who said "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Zacchaeus did it, Spurgeon did it,

and now it's your turn: look to Jesus. God has something better for you, and that thing is salvation - salvation from God's wrath and instead: the gift eternal life in paradise with Jesus. Should we carry on?

Amidst a crowd of sweaty people pushing and tugging, also wanting to see, here's this little man in a tree, and no one likes him, but! We don't how Jesus knew his name, but he did, and he called out to him: "*Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today*."

Had you doubted that Jesus was here looking for Zacchaeus? Jesus just confirmed this is why he was here. There was no other option; Jesus definitively had to do this now. "*Today*" carries a heavy sense of urgency. It's a "*carpe diem*" moment. Jesus doesn't ask if it's ok, or if there's food in the fridge, he says he "must". There was no scheduling for another date, no option to think it over. I'm talking about you. Jesus doesn't beg the sinner to come - He commands. Think about how defiant Zacchaeus would have been to reject. He could only have said "no!" or some lame excuse "my house is a mess"…

Why Zacchaeus? Why did Jesus choose *him*? Because Paul, in 1 Corinthians writes "*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God*." (1 Cor 1:27-29) There is a condition people need to meet in order for Jesus to call to them. The condition may not be clear at first, but it isn't being rich or poor, being sick or corrupt or socially rejected. The condition is much worse than that: you must be a sinner to be able to receive Christ's forgiveness.

This is unbelievable: Zack jumps down from the tree, to receive Jesus "joyfully". You might assume that Zacchaeus' joy was in spiting the crowds, like "Ha, that shows you bunch!" or maybe from the thrill of the experience. How can we know *why* he rejoices?

But we can well see that the crowd's reaction was quite different. They *grumbled*. We imagine grumbling sounding like what a child does when he has to repeat his chores poorly done. You know, when the mother says "*these dishes aren't washed at all! Get over there and do them right*" the child grumbles. Luke writes "they *all* grumbled". Everyone there was sour over the fact that the great rabbi would dine with this sinner. In Chapter 5, Pharisees and scribes likewise grumbled: "*Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*" In that culture, sharing food with someone signified acceptance and association. These crowds hated Zacchaeus being accepted because they were better than this sinner. How blind they were their hypocrisy; blind like the rich young ruler. Zacchaeus the chief tax collector didn't deserve the honor. This sinner even tainted Jesus, making him unclean - much like contact with a diseased leper, or contact with a carcass, made someone unclean. But Jesus cannot be made unclean – instead, Jesus healed the leper. He raised the dead. Likewise, he forgives the sinners.
So in response to the Pharisees in chapter 5 Jesus retorts "*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*." This is the same Jesus who said that it's the sick that need a doctor, not the healthy. Are you sick? Are you a sinner? This is how we know *why* Zacchaeus rejoiced:

because he knew he was a sinner. He knew he had wronged God not only in not keeping God's commands as the rich young ruler claimed he had, but Zacchaeus had severely broken God's commands. How do we know he knew this? Because he repents! Zacchaeus turned away from his sin. He wouldn't turn away from good; he turned away from his evil and he turned to God. He dropped his sin like heavy baggage; he removed his sins like dirty clothes – quickly, joyfully! It's never from a sense of duty, or with regret, or with a heavy heart that we are to accept Jesus, otherwise that might betray a false salvation. What prisoner, when he is freed, leaves his prison cell while grumbling and complaining?

This is how he repents: Zacchaeus says "*Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold*." Zacchaeus wants to right his wrongs. He wants desperately to make restitution, payback, for the wrongs which he knows he's guilty of. Jesus gives life to Zacchaeus: his heart is changed, his soul begins to be restored; his life is given light, and because Jesus saves him, he then produces good fruit. Here's a little OT law for us: as a Jew, Zacchaeus was likely educated in Jewish law and custom. According to Levitical law, 1\5th was needed as a restitution fee. He gives back not 1/5th, but 4/5ths: *four* times more than required. This was only required by law if an animal was stolen and killed. Do we know what this shows? It shows he judged, by the law, his own crimes *very* severely. He acknowledged that he was *as* guilty *as* the lowest common robber. Consider that most of his fortunes had been acquired through fraud; this cost him everything he had, and on top of that, he gave half of whatever he had left to the poor – yet, unlike the rich young ruler who was "deeply saddened" when asked to give away all his riches, Zacchaeus eagerly and joyfully *volunteered* to give his riches away without second thought or remorse! Why? Zacchaeus' actions reveal that his repentance and faith are genuine. Zacchaeus' actions were the fruit, the product, of his salvation – not the condition. True salvation always produces obedience to Christ, and love for him. This is the type of generosity that characterizes those whose lives have been transformed by the gospel. Look at Acts, chapter 2 we read more of believers engaged in voluntary, joyful surrender of possessions. Never in a foolish or in a regrettable way, but in such a way were that more and more people attracted to the believers and the early church. Have we ever experienced this? Have we been drawn to people like this, or attracted people through this? They recognized their love for one another, their generosity and their gladness, and they wanted a part in it.

Jesus not only changes the way Zacchaeus views money and possessions, but how he views people. He went from worshipping money and abusing people with it, to being grateful and serving people with it. For this man, the idol, the evil and the stumbling block was riches. For you or me, it could be your friends, your pride, your sexual "freedom", your hobby – the Son of Man takes our sins and redirects our focus to God.

That's what joyful repentance is. It's like coming home, and having your child run up to you saying "daddy, daddy!" and you drop your heavy briefcase or bag without second thought of it to pick up your child. It's joyfully dropping our heavy burden of sin, and turning to God. Following this public display of joyful repentance, Jesus speaks to the grumbling crowds: "*today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham*." Remember how Jesus said "*What*

is impossible with man is possible with God", this rich man, Zacchaeus, would enter the kingdom of God. It's by definition, a "miracle"! The impossible has happened, the dead is made alive. Ever seen anything this radical? Ever experienced the transforming power of the gospel? A son of Abraham means not a physical descendant from Abraham, but rather a spiritual descendant. Zacchaeus believed as Abraham believed. Like Paul writes in Romans 2:28, everyone who believes in Jesus is a son of Abraham. And the impact of Jesus' salvation is so thunderous that Zacchaeus' household - if he had, wife, children, servants, all of which he likely abused with his money - witnessed the power of Christ, and received salvation that day.

Jesus says "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost". These might be the most glorious words Jesus ever spoke! God is seen pursuing his lost ones from the beginning, and it's why we're saved. Romans 3:11 says "no one seeks for God", and yet this is why Jesus is here, to seek for us.

The grumbling crowds didn't acknowledge they were lost and needed to be found, neither did the rich young ruler. Zacchaeus and his household were lost, they were sinners, and they knew had acknowledged it. Like the previously-blind man, they looked unto Jesus. Zacchaeus didn't find anything in that tree. Jesus had come to Jericho to find one of the lost sheep the Father had given him. Romans 8:30 says "*And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*" Jesus had called and that day justified Zacchaeus. And Jesus is now commanding you: I must stay with you today. You may say, "*But I've looked and seen, I know Jesus!"* Do you have proof? Praise God if you do. But once having seen Jesus, how can that be enough for us? Is it enough to merely *once* meet your fiancée? Wouldn't you long and dream to spend all your time with your fiancée? Would you spend your energy on pursuing someone else, and at the same time claiming to love your fiancée? Likewise, once we have seen the Lord, the proof of a changed heart and life is characterized by a longing pursuit of being with him; of knowing him; of spending time with him; of valuing his person above all things. If I said I was engaged to be married to my fiancée, but I was always flirting and dating others - shouldn't she rage with jealousy? Shouldn't the fiancée question, even severely doubt your commitment, even possibly your engagement? It's not too late, and you're never too lost for Jesus.

So are you prepared to climb a tree, maybe lose your reputation, for a glance at Jesus? Is your heart ready? Zacchaeus traded in his reputation in exchange for what Jesus gave him: salvation - a reputation and status worth infinitely more. God has something better for you! Are you ready to abandon your earthly possessions, and see them for what they really are? Possessions aren't bad things - they're gifts. So is your heart prepared to value Christ, the *gift giver*, above his gifts? Or do we not believe that God has something better for us? He does. Don't we believe the Lord is better than money, houses, status, TV, sports, or whatever? I struggle with this deeply, and you know what my problem is? When I really look at Jesus, everything else fades away. Christ's surpassing worth is so obviously greater than anything I have - and often I fail; I take my eyes off of Jesus and look at my stuff. Here, this *stuff*, it's just rotting away - and I become short sighted, and I need to be reminded. Look to the King. Look to the cross, where he died in your place. Look at his redeeming love. He is the only way, and He's faithful to his promises.