

"THE SEEKER AND SAVIOR OF THE LOST"

I. Introduction

- A. One question that confronts every Christian is how to account for our conversion.
1. As John Newton once pointed out, "The work must begin somewhere. Either the sinner first seeks the Lord, or the Lord first seeks the sinner." [*Letters*, 73]
 2. If we accept what the Bible has to say about man's thorough corruption in his fallen estate and his natural enmity toward God, we cannot say that our conversion begins with our seeking the Lord.
 3. The only way to explain the salvation of sinners is to conclude that it takes place at God's gracious initiative.
- B. This is the truth that is wonderfully illustrated in the story of Zacchaeus.
1. At first glance, it may seem like it was Zacchaeus who took the first step in seeking Jesus.
 2. But when we take a closer look it becomes clear that Zacchaeus's desire to see Jesus was prompted by God.
 3. This passage shows us an example of the truth that Jesus spoke of when he said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (Jn. 6:44a)
 4. As we study this text today, we will consider how it gives us a picture of what happens when a person is sought and saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Sought by Jesus

- A. The events described in these verses took place in the city of Jericho, which was the last major stop as Jesus made his way to Jerusalem for the final time.
1. The preceding passage in Luke was set in the same general vicinity, as we saw last week when we studied the account of Jesus's healing of the blind beggar who persistently cried out to Jesus for mercy.
 2. In this text, Luke tells us about another individual in Jericho who had a great interest in Jesus, a man named Zacchaeus.
 3. Zacchaeus is identified as a chief tax collector, which means that he not only collected taxes himself but also had people under him who collected taxes.
 4. In other words, he was at the top of the taxation food chain.
 5. That being the case, it is no wonder that he was a wealthy man.
 6. There was almost certainly a connection between his line of work and his financial position.
 7. As you will recall, the Romans farmed out the task of tax collection to the highest bidder, and then they let that person pocket anything that they could collect above the amount that they had bid.
 8. Zacchaeus's words in verse 8 indicate that he had defrauded people as he carried out his tax collecting duties.
 9. He had enriched himself by cheating others.
 10. Now, nobody likes to pay taxes, but because this system was so open to abuse and was imposed upon the Jews by the Romans, the Jews ranked tax collectors alongside prostitutes as the most notorious of sinners.
 11. Zacchaeus had plenty of money, but he was a lost soul.

12. And as we think about this, it is important for us to keep in mind that we are no better than Zacchaeus in our fallen estate.
 13. Like him, our default mode is to do whatever we think is in our best interest, even if it means walking all over people and defying God's law.
- B. Zacchaeus went to extreme lengths just to get a glimpse of Jesus.
1. He climbed up a tree, something that would have been utterly unthinkable for a man in his social position.
 2. To get a sense of what this was like, imagine that on some Sunday the following scenario unfolded here at our church.
 3. A man pulls his Lamborghini into our parking lot and finds it so full that he has to park way down by the mailbox.
 4. Then he walks up the driveway, enters the sanctuary, and looks for a seat in vain until some young children up in the front row notice him and squeeze close together to make a small space for him.
 5. This is the sort of thing that Zacchaeus was doing in climbing up that tree.
 6. What would cause a man of such affluent means to do such a thing?
 7. The answer is found in our Lord's words in verse 10.
 8. The reason why Zacchaeus had such an intense interest in Jesus, the reason why he was so determined to see Jesus, was because Jesus was seeking him.
- C. This is made clear by the way Jesus responds when he sees Zacchaeus up in that tree.

1. Jesus looks up and says, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."
 2. Now, there are at least three things worth noting about that sentence.
 3. First of all is the fact that Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name.
 4. Can you imagine how surprising this would have been for Zacchaeus?
 5. Jesus knows who he is!
 6. Jesus knows him because Zacchaeus is one of his sheep.
 7. The good shepherd is calling one of his sheep to himself.
 8. And Zacchaeus is shown to be one of Jesus's sheep by his response.
 9. This is a picture of what Jesus is talking about in John 10 when he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."
- D. The second thing to note about what Jesus says to Zacchaeus when he sees him up in the tree is that he doesn't say anything about Zacchaeus's sin.
1. This is a man who has enriched himself by preying upon his own people.
 2. Why doesn't Jesus confront him for his sin?
 3. Why doesn't Jesus call him to repentance?
 4. He doesn't do so because he can see that it has already been taken care of.
 5. The fact that Zacchaeus is up there in that tree makes it clear that the Holy Spirit has brought him under conviction for his sin and has opened his heart to the forgiveness and new life that is offered

in the gospel.

6. We can understand why some of the things that Zacchaeus had been hearing would have drawn him to Jesus.
 7. One member of Jesus's inner circle was a former tax collector.
 8. Jesus had a reputation for dining with tax collectors and sinners.
 9. Jesus told a parable in which he declared that a tax collector rather than a Pharisee went home from the temple justified before God.
 10. But we have to realize that if Zacchaeus had heard about those things, he also would have heard about Jesus saying that he came to call sinners to repentance.
 11. Zacchaeus knew that coming to Jesus meant coming in repentance, yet he came anyway.
 12. He came because God was irresistibly drawing him.
- E. The third thing that is noteworthy about what Jesus says here is that he does not politely ask if he can come over to Zacchaeus's house.
1. He says that he must be a guest at Zacchaeus's house.
 2. He is inviting himself over for a meal.
 3. He even has the nerve to tell Zacchaeus to hurry up.
 4. Jesus is issuing a command, not making a request.
 5. Zacchaeus doesn't have a choice in the matter.
 6. He is being commanded by the King of kings.
 7. But this is not burdensome to him.

8. On the contrary, it is better than anything he could have imagined.
9. This is made clear by the fact that he obeys Jesus immediately and joyfully.
10. Here is a picture of how our Lord subdues sinners to himself when he effectually calls us.
11. He renews our wills in such a way that we are persuaded and enabled to embrace him as he is offered to us in the gospel.

III. Saved by Jesus

- A. Luke tells us that the people who witnessed Jesus's interactions with Zacchaeus were scandalized.
 1. They grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."
 2. That comment is reflective of the teaching of the Pharisees, who said that a person who had table fellowship with "sinners" would be defiled by those people.
 3. According to them, a Jew who wanted to maintain a righteous standing with God had to avoid close interactions with people of such bad character.
 4. Now, it is certainly true that need to be wise about our associations.
 5. We should avoid putting ourselves into situations where we will be drawn into sin.
 6. Nevertheless, when these people grumbled about Jesus being a guest in Zacchaeus's house, they were implying that Jesus was sinning merely by being present in the tax collector's home.
 7. This simply was not true.

- B. Perhaps in response to the crowd's grumbling, Zacchaeus stands up and tells Jesus that he is going to give away half of his possessions to the poor and make fourfold restitution to anyone he defrauded.
1. The law required 20% restitution for cases of extortion (see Lev. 5:16; Num. 5:7), but Zacchaeus goes far beyond this, committing himself to 400% restitution.
 2. This indicates that a remarkable transformation has taken place in this tax collector's life.
 3. It is fair to say that prior to meeting Jesus, money was Zacchaeus's god.
 4. He disregarded God's law in order to enrich himself.
 5. But now, Jesus is more important to him than money.
 6. Coming to Jesus has changed everything.
 7. Here we see Jesus bringing about the very thing that he told his disciples in the previous chapter was impossible for man to do.
 8. He is causing a rich man to enter heaven.
- C. Upon hearing Zacchaeus say these things, Jesus declares, "Today salvation has come to this house".
1. This does not mean that Zacchaeus was saved because of the good works that he has just promised to do.
 2. What it means is that these good works stand as evidence of Zacchaeus's salvation.
 3. When Jesus saves a person, he brings about a radical transformation in that person's life.
 4. The things that used to be of the utmost importance to the person, the things in which that person used to find his identity and

fulfillment and security, these things are now made subservient to the Lordship of Christ.

5. This is true of you if you are a Christian.
 6. If Jesus is your Savior, then all that you have, all that you are, and all that you do is to be placed at his disposal.
- D. We should also note that God's saving grace extends not only to Zacchaeus but also to his whole household.
1. Jesus does not say that salvation has come to Zacchaeus.
 2. He says that salvation has come to Zacchaeus's house.
 3. This does not mean that every member of the household was brought into a saving relationship with Christ at that very moment.
 4. What it tells us is that the members of that household now had an outward association with the covenant community.
 5. We see the same thing in the accounts of household baptisms in the book of Acts.
- E. Jesus identifies Zacchaeus as "a son of Abraham."
1. This would have been a surprising thing for people to hear, since the Jews considered tax collectors to be traitors to their own people.
 2. Jesus draws upon this in Matthew 18 when he tells his disciples that they are to regard an unrepentant member of the church "as a Gentile and a tax collector."
 3. While Zacchaeus was an ethnic Jew, he would have been regarded as a stranger to the covenant.
 4. Yet Jesus declares him to be "a son of Abraham."

5. He does so because Zacchaeus showed that he possessed the same faith as Abraham.
 6. All who have Abraham's faith, whether Jew or Gentile, are counted as Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.
- F. Our Lord's final words in this text are especially memorable: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."
1. These words are spoken at the point in Luke's Gospel where Jesus is completing his journey to Jerusalem, the place where he will fulfill his messianic calling.
 2. Because of this, we can say that these words sum up the message of this Gospel.
 3. This is why Jesus came into the world.
 4. He came to seek out his sheep and deliver them from their lost condition.
 5. In saying this, Jesus was probably alluding to a prophecy given in Ezekiel 34, which in God's providence is the text that we will be studying in evening worship tonight.
 6. In that chapter, the Lord rebukes Judah's kings for their failure to shepherd his flock, and he promises to send a new David through whom he will tend and care for his sheep.
 7. In light of that background, it stands to reason that Jesus's words in verse 10 should be taken as an assertion of his messianic identity.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The Bible clearly tells us that apart from Christ, every single one of us is lost.
1. The apostle Paul expresses this in a powerful way in Ephesians 2 when he tells the Christians to whom he is writing that prior to

their conversion they were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Eph 2:12 ESV)

2. That is the condition of every single person in this world who has not been united to Jesus Christ by faith.
 3. Of course, many who are apart from Christ feel happy, satisfied, and secure.
 4. They may even assume that God is pleased with them.
 5. But the Bible declares that they are lost.
 6. So let us endeavor to let them know that the offer of salvation is held out to them.
 7. Let us tell them that if they repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, he will deliver them, just as he delivered Zacchaeus.
- B. If you have placed your faith in Christ, never let yourself forget that the only reason why you are a Christian is because Jesus sought you and saved you.
1. Remembering this is what fuels a life that is marked by gratitude and an eagerness to do what is pleasing to Christ.
 2. You once were lost, but now you are found.
 3. You once walked through this world as one alienated from God, but now you do so as a child of God and heir of the kingdom.
 4. You once lived a life that had no meaning and no hope, but now you have a hope that will never perish.
 5. It was not by your power that you secured these glorious blessings.

6. They were secured for you and poured out upon you by your gracious Savior.

7. As we will sing in a few moments,

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of thee.*