

To Seek and Save the Lost

Long before Jesus, the Son of God, appeared on earth, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed:

For [Messiah] grew up before [the LORD] like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty that we [the Jewish people] should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isa. 53:2-3).

Jesus did not introduce Himself to Israel as an elite member of that society – He was not a member of the rich, powerful, and famous of His age. He wasn't the typical tall, dark and handsome man that would have caused people to turn and stare at Him to catch all of His beauty. Nor did He parade around in expensive clothing, decked in precious jewels and metals. No! He came into our world as a mere man – a member of the common folk, or even more so, a slave of all men (cf. Phil. 2:7). He did not come to be served, but to serve [to serve you] and give His life as your ransom (cf. Mk. 10:45).

Why? Why did Jesus come so plainly, so lowly among men? He did, so that you would respond to the man Himself and not the mere externals of man, which some of us instinctively know, make very little difference in life. In other words, God wanted us – His people – to look to the heart of Jesus, who He really was, even as God Himself looks not at the outward appearance of a man but God looks at the heart (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7). Many people in Jesus' day, as well as down to today, completely missed who Jesus was because they couldn't, or they wouldn't, put away that infantile manner of judging a man by his outward appearance. As the Prophet testified, Jesus “had not stately form or majesty that the people should look upon Him NOR appearance that they should be attracted to Him” (Isa. 53:2). Jesus did not appear to most who met Him on a first glance that by knowing Him, He would make them more famous or advance their bottom line with earthly riches. In other words, most did not see Jesus as someone who was advantageous to their daily lives.

Because of this, some simply took one look at Jesus and turned their nose up at Him. Do you remember Simon the Pharisee who refused to honor Jesus in his own home and even when a former prostitute came into his home to honor Jesus – to show Simon the proper way that someone in this world OUGHT to honor the Son of Man come to earth – all Simon could think of to himself was, “If **this man** were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner” (7:39). To Simon, Jesus was beneath him – so far below Simon that he offered Jesus no water for his feet, no kiss for his cheek, and no oil for his head (7:44-46). Yet, how do you think Simon would have responded had the chief priest or the head of Pharisees had dined with Simon that day?

Others saw something in Jesus that produced an **inquisitive curiosity**, as when Herod the tetrarch had heard all that Jesus was doing throughout Galilee, thinking either John or one of the prophets had risen from the dead and because of all that was being reported to him, Herod kept trying to find a way to see Jesus (**9:7-9**).

Yet, others responded to these same things Jesus was doing with **paralyzing fear**. When Jesus commanded the storms to be still, Luke tells us that the disciples were afraid and in awe of Jesus saying, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?" (**Luke 8:25**). At another moment, when Jesus cast out Legion from the Gerasenes man, Luke reports that "all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Jesus to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear" (**Luke 8:37**).

At other times we are told that instead of fear, some of those who followed Jesus were simply confused – they didn't know what to do with Jesus. For instance, long after Jesus had showed the disciples all the amazing signs and wonders He had performed throughout Galilee, proving to them He was sent from God, He then explained to them that as the promised Son of Man, He was going to Jerusalem to be mocked, mistreated, spit upon, and after being scourged, He would be killed by the Gentiles (**Luke 18:31-33**). Luke reveals that His disciples "understood none of these things, and that the meaning of Jesus' words were hidden from them, and therefore they did not comprehend the things Jesus was saying" (**Luke 18:34**).

Still others, for some reason or another, just didn't want Jesus near them, for instance we are told that when the disciples went on ahead of Jesus to make arrangements for Him to stay in a village of Samaritans, they did not want Him to stay with them (**Luke 9:51-56**). Like the town of Bethlehem, they had no room for Jesus and so He and His disciples went on to another village. You can imagine what great loss that village had by simply turning away the Son of Man who came into the world to save sinners!

While some didn't want Jesus to come around them, others hated Jesus so much they wanted Him dead. There was not enough room in all of Israel for them and for Jesus. Herod's curiosity soon turned to to such murderous hatred of Jesus that some of the Pharisees came to Jesus and warned Him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you" (**Luke 13:31**). Such warnings were surprising seeing that the scribes and Pharisees themselves were "pressing Jesus hard and trying to provoke Him to speak about many things, lying in wait for Him, to catch Him in something He might say" (**Luke 11:53-54**), which will soon turn their own murderous thoughts toward Jesus as Luke reports towards the end of our chapter, "The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy Him" (**Luke 19:47-48**). The only difference between these men and the previous ones who did not want Jesus around is that these burned with greater hatred and had the courage to raise up their hands against God and His Anointed (**Ps. 2:2**).

But others – others were drawn towards Jesus. They could "see" who He truly was! – now we know that the only reason they could "see" was because the Holy Spirit had removed their spiritual

blindness and made them to see the Son of God (cf. **Luke 10:21-24; John 3:3, 5**). They knew Jesus was someone special, someone they could lean for repose, someone in all the world they could finally trust. They knew He truly cared for them and loved them. We certainly remember Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and was drawn deeper and deeper into Him as she heard Him teach (cf. **Luke 10:39**). For Mary, the dishes could wait, she had found her true portion of the promised inheritance and it was not going to be taken from her (**10:41**). Or we remember another woman, a prostitute, who was so grateful to have all her sins forgiven that she again fell at Jesus' feet and caressed them with her tears and hair, returning love to the one man who ever truly loved her for her (cf. **7:36-50**). Or the blind beggar, who in the midst of all those around him who couldn't see who Jesus was, he alone cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (**Luke 18:38-39**).

In all of these diverse ways that people responded to Jesus during His life here on earth, we can learn something about how it is that we too can and should respond rightly to Jesus. At the end of our passage today, Jesus will present to us a simple, straightforward summary of why He came into our world to visit us – He came "to seek for" and then "to save" those who were lost (**Luke 19:10**). We might call this, in today's vernacular, Jesus' mission statement, which itself has a very long history behind it. Let's unpack it first and then we want to try and place it within its immediate context of Jesus' salvation of Zacchaeus, the tax collector.

Jesus came into the world to do something for "the lost" - but who are "the lost"? Within the immediate context of Luke's Gospel we already heard three parables of something that was lost – a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son – a prodigal son (cf. **Luke 15:3-32**). Jesus told these three parables in response to the scribes and Pharisees who were grumbling among themselves that Jesus would "receive sinners and eat with them" (cf. **Luke 15:1-2**). In each parable, there is great joy when what was lost, was found (**15:7, 9, 32**) – the last story ends with the father having to explain to the other son, "It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found" (**Luke 15:32**). That gives us a better idea of what Jesus is talking about here in chap. 19:10 that He came to seek and to save "the lost".

But the language goes back much further in the Scriptures to the prophets, who themselves were sent to call "the lost" of the children of Israel back to Yahweh. For instance in **Ezek. 34**, the LORD rebukes the false shepherds who have scattered God's sheep on account of their unfaithfulness and abuse of God's people. The LORD rebukes them:

⁴ "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. ⁵ "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. ⁶ "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek *for them*." (Ezek. 34:4-6).

While the LORD will certainly deal justice upon those false shepherds, He promises His sheep:

¹¹ For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹² "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. ¹³ "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. ¹⁴ "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ "I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; (**Ezek. 34:11-16**) ²² therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. ²⁴ "And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken. ²⁵ "I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ "I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. (**Ezek. 34:22-26**).

What we have here is the language of the promised new covenant that God will make with His people and with all the elect of the nations who come to rest in God's Messiah, the Son of David. It is the language of the "restored Israel," who along with the elect of the Gentiles, will stream to God's holy mountain to worship God and to live and walk in His ways (**cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 4:2-6; Mic. 4:1-3; Zech. 8:20-23**).

Yahweh uses the language even here of "seeking" (**Ezek. 34:11, 16**). But what exactly is He seeking? In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of His Father as "seeking" - seeking worshipers (**cf. John 4:23**). What Jesus says specifically is "but the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; **for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him**" (**John 4:23**). Jesus uses the same verb in **John 4:23** that He uses in the form of the infinitive here in **Luke 19:10** "to seek". Yahweh is seeking - is searching for within this world - "worshipers," who will worship Him in spirit and truth. The Chronicler writes:

⁹ For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. (**2 Chr. 16:9**).

Yahweh is building a people to rejoice over and be glad in them - a people who are enabled to enjoy and delight in the LORD and to walk in His ways - to share in His glory. We might even say that this truly expresses the heart of God that He is seeking His elect from among this world to make up that people of worshipers.

Now, if we add in here, Jesus' mission statement that He has come into our world, as God's own Son to do that divine work of seeking, and because we are sinners, of saving, those who are lost. This is why God sent His Son into our world. The Son comes in obedience to His Father to locate each one of us and to save us for the worship of God.

Zacchaeus is an example of the kinds of people God has sent His Son into the world to seek and to save. Again, this week we find Jesus in Jericho (**Luke 19:1**), about 18 miles from the city of destruction, Jerusalem. But unlike Christian in Pilgrim's Progress rather than fleeing from the City of Destruction, Jesus is advancing forward to make war with what holds His people in bondage, keeping them from worshiping God in spirit and truth. It is because the promised Day of the LORD has finally arrived that so many are rejoicing in Jesus' presence, the Son of David – God's promised Messiah (**cf. Luke 18:38-39**). As Jesus makes His way through Jericho, a large crowd begins to form – this makes sense especially if this scene immediately follows Jesus' healing of the poor, blind beggar (**18:43** – “and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God”).

As the large crowd began to form around Jesus, another man wanted to see Him (**v. 3** – literally, he was seeking to see – same word that is used of Jesus in **v. 10**). But he couldn't have been more different from the poor blind beggar. Luke tells us that he was a chief tax collector and was very rich (**v. 2**). Further, not only was the crowd very large, keeping the tax collector from seeing Jesus, but Luke tells us that he was rather small in stature (**v. 3**). So, Zacchaeus climbs into a sycamore tree to get a bird's eye view of Jesus as He passes by (**v. 4**). But Zacchaeus got much more than what he had hoped for – what a surprise when Jesus comes over the Zacchaeus' tree, looks up at him and says, “Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down here, for I **must** stay at your house today!” (**v. 5**).

Did you notice Jesus' “must stay” at your house? Now, we know why Jesus had to go through Jericho. He was appointed by His father too look for one of God's appointed worshipers – Jesus came to Jericho to seek for Zacchaeus, to save Him and make Him a worshiper of God.

Notice Zacchaeus! He is beside himself. Can you imagine him stumbling and rushing down out of the tree, “receiving” Jesus joyfully (**v. 6**)? Now, the word “received” here probably doesn't mean a whole lot just yet, but as we will see this becomes at some point an act of saving faith and trust in Jesus – Zacchaeus accepts, rests and receives Jesus Christ alone for salvation (**see v. 9**).

Now, notice the crowds as the celebration of Jesus turns to grumbling and murmuring (**v. 7**). What are they so upset about? They are angry that Jesus would lower himself to be a guest in the home of such a notorious sinner (**v. 7**). Jesus was often despised because He welcomed “sinners” into His life. He did this so much that He became known as a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (**cf. Luke 7:34**). The Pharisees finally approached Jesus' disciples one day asking, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (**cf. Matt. 9:11**). When Jesus heard it, He answered them:

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

(**Matt. 9:12-13**).

Tax-collectors, also known as publicans, were especially despised by all Jews. While the Romans still made sure that Palestine paid their taxes, Roman citizens had long ago ceased from personally collecting them in Palestine. Instead, the Romans allowed the Jews to auction to the highest bidder the privilege to collect taxes. The whole system itself was ripe with corruption and abuse. The Romans permitted the tax-collector to excise a greater percentage of taxes than what was required by Rome to cover their own “expenses” and in order to do this, the tax-collector was accompanied by hired agents, or we might call “thugs” who would use the threat of violence to extort as high a percentage of taxes as these tax-collectors could squeeze out of their fellow Jews. Probably the closest analogy to the chief tax-collector of the ancient world would be a mob-boss of today's organized crime.

So when the crowds saw Jesus willingly choose to not only eat at Zacchaeus table, but to stay in his home, much like Simon the Pharisee (**cf. 7:36-39**), they were outraged at the company Jesus kept (**19:7**). But think for a moment what Zacchaeus would have continued to be like in the lives of those very people who grumbled had Jesus not stopped under Zacchaeus tree that day and asked him to come down so He could dine with him.

Look at the change that took place in Zacchaeus' heart once he joyfully received Jesus (**v. 8**). While we can't see into another man's heart, we can see the fruit produced out of his heart . Upon meeting Jesus with such joy – because Jesus first loved Zacchaeus – he determined to give half of his goods to the poor and to restore four times as much to anyone he had ever defrauded. Very clearly you can see the change that has taken place in his heart. Unlike the rich, young ruler who decided to keep everything he had instead of following Jesus, the rich man Zacchaeus has forever become an example of how by God's marvelous grace and mercy a “camel made it through the eye of the needle” (**cf. 18:25**).

God has once again fulfilled His promise to the children of Abraham – to be his God (**v. 9; cf. 13:16**) – even to the sinners and tax-collectors among them – whom the rest of the Israel long ago gave up on. And look at Zacchaeus – this mob-boss – this thug committing untold acts of violence to defraud his neighbors – look at what God does to a man of violence when He sends His Son into the world “to seek and save the lost” (**v. 10**). He turns a lover of mammon into a lover of God! A man who once lived for himself into a man who joyfully gives to others because he has found his true inheritance – his pearl of great price (**cf. Matt. 13:46**) – in Jesus Christ! Look at what is impossible with men now is possible with God (**cf. Luke 18:27**). What God has done in Zacchaeus is what He is doing in your heart. Jesus did not simply give sight to a blind man, but a completely new heart – He set Zacchaeus free from being shackled to the things of this world and set him free to love others.

Let's take a moment and think about what Jesus has just done in Zacchaeus' life. Jesus has come into our world to seek out and save sinners, of whom we now know Zacchaeus was one of them. He does this to save the lost, which means that Jesus provides in Himself the location, the place where sinners

can once again IN HIM have a restored relationship to God. As Paul says in **Ephesians 2:**

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (**Eph. 2:13-18**).

What God has done for Zacchaeus by sending His own Son into this world is provide a Savior for Zacchaeus, where he whom his world would have gladly discarded, so that He might reconcile Zacchaeus to God in Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus that Zacchaeus now has peace with God and through the Spirit full access to His heavenly Father. But something even deeper is going on in that IN CHRIST access. Paul goes on to explain what Jesus fully meant by the hour that is now here when the true worshipers will now worship God in spirit and truth:

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (**Eph. 2:18-22**).

Now, let's try and put this all together. God the Father has sent His only Son into the world to seek for and find worshipers of God. Further, Jesus is the agent who came to seek and save the lost to make them into worshipers who can BECAUSE OF HIM now draw near to God as the very holy temple in the LORD – the dwelling place for God by the Spirit. What Zacchaeus is as an example in the Gospel of what God is doing, you are a living example of why Jesus came into our world to find you, a sinner in need of a Savior, so that:

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (**Heb. 4:14-16**).

Amen! -SDG-