

HIDE AND SEEK
LUKE 19:1-10

Introduction

Illustration—A pastor phoned the home of some recent visitors to his church, and a voice on the other end of the phone answered with a whispered "Hello."

The pastor said, "Who is this?"

The whisperer said, "Jimmy." The pastor said, "How old are you, Jimmy?"

"Four."

"Well, Jimmy, can I please speak to your mom?"

"She's busy."

"Well then, Jimmy, can I please speak to your dad?"

"He's busy."

"Jimmy, are there any other adults in your home?"

"The police."

"Can I speak to one of the police officers?"

"They're busy."

"Jimmy, who else is there?" "Firemen."

"Well, Jimmy, can you put one of the firemen on the phone?"

"They're all busy."

"Jimmy, what are they all busy doing?"

"They're busy looking for me."

Hide and Seek was one of our favorite games to play when we were children. But, like Jimmy, a lot of people in life are hiding and its not a game. Some may be hiding from their parents! Some may be hiding from the law! Some may be from someone else for some reason!

But could I tell you that **many people today are also trying to hide from God!** However, in light of the fact that **God is everywhere** and **He knows everything about us**—That is impossible to do! But, that doesn't keep people from trying to do it anyway!

Now, **what could possibly motivate someone to want to hide from God?** There are probably a lot of answers to that question, but I think Biblically speaking one of the key answers is **that we have a tendency to hide from God because we know we've done something wrong!**

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I. THE GUILT OF SIN CAUSES US TO HIDE FROM THE LORD GOD! (Vs 1-5; Genesis 3:10)

A natural human instinct is, when we've **done something wrong** or when **we are doing something wrong**, we want to run and hide from the authorities — whoever the authorities might happen to be!

Illustration — I love to watch the program "Cops" on TV. Have you noticed how many of their stories deal with someone who tries to run away from the authorities because of a relatively minor offense and they wind up compounding their problem by trying to flee?

That's the story of humanity with God ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. Remember how God placed them in Paradise setting?—everything was wonderful and perfect. There was full disclosure, and complete, total intimacy with God—no hiding!

But then they chose to disobey God! And, because of their sin, they fell from their innocence. Later on, the text tells us God came into the garden looking for them, calling out for them, and Adam responded to God, *Genesis 3:10—“And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”*

So sin and hiding go hand in hand. All of us at different times in our lives are going to try to hide from God. In fact, this morning you're here in Church, but something could be going on in your life that has you hiding from God. The full disclosure and the intimacy with God are gone! **There is only one way to deal with our hiding and its cause—which is the guilt of our sin.** The answer comes to us from our text this morning here in **Luke 19.**

Luke here directs us to the story of Jesus and **vs. 1** says, *"And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho."* In the larger context of this story we know Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and this event takes place in the last few days or so of His life. As He goes toward Jerusalem, He passes through the city of Jericho.

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As Jesus is passing through, Luke tells us in **vs. 2** that a man was there by the name of *Zacchaeus*. The Bible says that he was the **“chief publican”** that is, **he was a tax collector who had a number of tax collectors working for him, and he was rich or wealthy.**

These **publicans** in the ancient Roman world were viewed as the scum of society. In Israel there were some occupations that were considered immoral occupations and those who were in them were looked down on by the Jews.

For a woman, the lowest you could go was to be a **harlot**. For a man there were several occupations that were looked down on. One was to be a **gambler**. The second was to be a **usurer** (or what we would call today—a *“loan shark”*)—a person who lends money to others at an exorbitant rate of interest.

A third occupation considered immoral for a man was to be a **pigeon trainer**. Nothing against the pigeons, it's just that they were used in gambling. The fourth and the lowest and least esteemed occupation, the one considered the most immoral, was to be a **publican—a tax collector!**

There were two reasons why. **Publicans**, first of all, worked for the Romans, and Rome was the imperial oppressive authority over the Jews. So tax collectors were considered to be traitors.

The second reason tax collecting was considered immoral was that tax collectors almost always financially ripped off those they collected taxes from. The Romans would hire a tax collector, and they'd say, *“You need to collect this amount for us. Anything beyond that you can keep for yourself.”* And so they did.

In fact, one Roman writer tells us that the idea of an honest tax collector was so rare that when one city in the empire had a tax collector who was somewhat honest they erected a statue to him!

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Well, this story tells us Zacchaeus was a *chief publican*, which meant he had numbers of tax collectors working for him. It also tells us that he was wealthy. This meant he had probably ripped off a whole lot of people for a long period of time. He was not a good guy; he was a bad guy. No doubt he was hated and looked at with great disdain!

But somewhere along the way he heard about this Rabbi named Jesus, a religious person Who, on occasion, hung around morally ragged people and happened to go to dinner parties where there were prostitutes and sinners and even tax collectors. So he was curious about Jesus!

Luke says in **vs. 3** he wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man, he could not. He was *vertically challenged* because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Him, since Jesus was coming that way.

We can imagine the scene: The crowds pack the streets, and Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. He runs to the street, but the crowds are there. They are taller than he is, and he can't see. I also suggest to you that the crowd knew who he was and did not like him, and so they wanted to exclude him from the view. He has one option. He runs down the street and climbs a sycamore tree to see Jesus.

That's an interesting detail in the story. Why would Luke say Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree? Why not just a tree?

Here's what one expert said: *“Because the branches of the sycamore tree are strong and wide spreading, and because it produces many lateral branches, it was an easy tree for Zacchaeus to climb and in which he could easily be hidden.”*

Now, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, but I'm not so sure that he wanted Jesus- to see him. He's hiding.

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Let me ask this question this morning. Is there anyone in this room who is hiding from Jesus? Oh, you can run, but ultimately you can't hide. Jesus sees you, just like He saw Zacchaeus that day!

Jesus found Zacchaeus anyway—Look at vs. 5!

Jesus can find us even when we may be attempting to hide from Him!

Jesus didn't care about his occupation. Jesus did not care about his reputation. Jesus was concerned about his SALVATION, because Zacchaeus was a human being made in the image of God!

Yes, he was morally ragged, and yes, he may have been hiding; but that's what Jesus does! In the midst of our hiding, He comes and He finds us. The reason He does that is because He loves us more than we can comprehend.

Jesus traveled all the way from heaven down to earth to save the scum of the earth like Zacchaeus AND even like me and you!

Let me ask you once again this morning: Are you emotionally or spiritually or morally in some way like Zacchaeus, up a tree (so to speak) and hiding from Jesus?

Well, He loves you so much He's coming to your hiding place today and He wants you to come down out of that hiding place and He wants to come over to your house today and have fellowship with you!

II. ONLY JESUS CAN CURE OUR REASON TO HIDE! (Vs 6-7)

Oh, Zacchaeus was excited! Jesus was coming over to His house! But look at the crowd. The crowd that saw this began to mutter, *“that he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.”*

Well, that was no news to Zacchaeus! He knew he was a sinner! He knew he was immoral! He knew he was morally ragged!

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But one of the keys to coming out of our hiding is finally to admit that—get it out in the open and let Jesus deal with it! That's true for you; that's true for me! I have sinned and so have you! Zacchaeus was a sinner, but so were those who looked down on him!

The only cure for our sin is the death of Jesus! If we were to turn over just a few pages and move a few days ahead in Jesus' life, we find Jesus walking that painful road to Calvary where He was hung naked on a Roman execution stake (a cross) before all His enemies.

The reason Jesus did that was because He had to pay the penalty of our sin to a holy God. Jesus died for us! (*Romans 5:8*)

He made that huge journey from heaven to **find us** in our hiding place so He could **forgive us** of our sin!

The Bible says that we were ALL born sinners! (*Romans 3:10, 23*) Ain't nobody got to tell us that. Sins grip on our lives is proof enough!

And there is none of us who came here into this world **not needing** to be found and **not needing** to be forgiven of sin! Sin grabs us and holds us! It binds us and tangles us up, and then it pulls us down! The guilt of our sin causes us to hide, but Jesus cures our reason to hide with His forgiveness!

III. ONLY JESUS CAN FREE US FROM SIN'S GRIP! (Vs 8-10)

Look at verse 8—Zacchaeus makes an incredible claim. The Old Testament law did not require him to compensate his victims this much. It certainly didn't require him to get rid of half of his wealth or more. So, why does he take such a radical step?

Jesus gives us the answer in verses 9 and 10. That's what salvation is. Salvation is being found by Jesus and forgiven by Jesus!

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But salvation, in the fullest sense of the term, is to be set free from the power of sin by Jesus!

The thing that had Zacchaeus's heart, the thing that had tangled him up was money, materialism! He figured out the way to gain significance and security in this life was to become a tax collector, and it didn't matter if you ripped other people off. So, money got his heart, and it was the sin that kept pulling him down.

Only when he met Jesus did he realize that significance and security come not in stuff but in the Lord.

Conclusion

In closing, would there be someone here like Zacchaeus? You have legitimate needs, but you are trying to meet them in illegitimate ways.

Or maybe you are seeking to find significance in your life and you're tangled up in things that may be culturally respectable, like achievements or higher education, but you're hiding from the reality of the guilt of your sin.

Maybe some are tangled up in guilt. Something happened in the past or is happening right now. Some bad choices were made and, consequently, you're living in guilt! Someone once said "*guilt is the gift that keeps on giving.*"

The only person in the entire universe Who can set us free from the power of sin **is Jesus!** He came to find us! He came to forgive us! But He wants us to stop hiding and let Him come into our lives and by His grace set us free from sin's power in our lives! Is the Lord telling you to "Come down" today?

I close with a couple of *Illustrations*—

In the 1840s and 1850s, major portions of the United States of America were dominated by the institution of slavery, and it was expanding fast. On one occasion a young congressman from Illinois by the name of Abraham Lincoln heard about a slave auction being held near where he lived.

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So, he went and as he stood at the edge of the slave auction, he observed as black Americans were led onto the block and auctioned off. Finally a young slave woman was led up to the block, and they started the bidding on her, and Lincoln bid. Somebody outbid him, and then he bid higher. Somebody outbid him, and he bid higher still.

After a few moments they said, "Sold." They took her off the auction block and brought her to Lincoln, and he had the slave master let her out of her chains.

Then Lincoln looked at her and said, "Now you are free." She looked up at him with a curious look and said, "Free? What does it mean to be free?" Lincoln said, "It means you can think anything you want. You can say anything you want. You can go anywhere you want." It sunk in, and the tears streamed from her eyes down her cheeks. She looked at him and said, "Then I will go with you."

Friends, that's why Jesus left His throne in heaven and came to planet earth! It was so He could find us, so He could forgive us, and so He could set us free from the power of sin!

Slavery in the United States was abolished by the 13th Amendment on December 18, 1865. How many slaves were there on December 19, 1865? In reality none, but many still lived like slaves. They did because they never learned the truth. Others knew and even believed that they were free, but chose to continue living as they had always been taught.

Have you been set free by Jesus only to continue living under the bondage of your sin? You don't have to! You've been set free!

This morning I'd like us to meditate on three questions as we close:

Are we hiding from Jesus?

Have we allowed Him to forgive us?

Have we invited Him home into our lives to set us free from the ,
power of sin?