

Luke 19:1-10

A Sinner Plucked From A Fig Tree

While living in the United States, I can remember going to a place called Anderson Orchard in Indiana. Anderson's is famous for their wide selection of apples. Our favorite kind were called mutszu apples. They tasted delicious and were great for baking pies.

At the orchard you had the option of either picking your own apples or buying apples at their store. We usually picked our apples. I always tried to pick the ones that were the most ripe because they were the ones ready to eat.

Our Scripture passage in Luke 19 reminds me of my experience picking apples at Anderson's Orchard. We read of a man by the name of Zacchaeus who climbed a tree to see Jesus Christ. The Scripture tells us that Zacchaeus was a short man. He needed a place high enough to see Christ. A Sycamore Fig Tree served that purpose.

The Scriptures doesn't reveal why Zacchaeus wanted to see the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps he was just curious and wanted to see for himself the One who everyone in Palestine was talking about? Maybe he felt an emptiness in his own heart and wanted Christ to fill it?

Whatever the motive was, it is clear from the text that Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. Is this your desire today, to see Jesus?

Little did the chief tax collector know that this day would change his life for ever. Not only did Zacchaeus see Jesus, he met him personally, and later had Christ dine in his own home as an honored guest. What a difference a day can make when Christ comes and calls a sinner to salvation.

We read in verse 9, "And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

Just like when I plucked apples from the orchard tree, so too the time was ripe for Zacchaeus to be plucked from the Fig Tree by the Lord Jesus Christ. Here was a soul, the chief of tax collectors, the little man called Zacchaeus, hand picked by the Lord Jesus Christ, and

he was ripe for salvation. It was time for Zacchaeus to be saved.

Therefore, The title of my message is simply, “A Sinner Plucked From A Fig Tree.” Salvation is illustrated in the life of Zacchaeus. There are four things from Zacchaeus that are true of every believer in Jesus Christ.

1. The sinner identified.

Zacchaeus was a sinner. Many people of his day believed Zacchaeus was the worst kind of sinner. He was a publican. Back then, people thought publicans were the dregs of society. Morally bankrupt. The scum of the earth. Why did the publicans have such a bad reputation?

Historians tell us that, “In Judea, the Romans were forced to employ publicans from the moral outcasts of society, from among Jews that agreed to go over and work for the Romans, and force their Jewish brethren to pay tribute to Caesar. The acceptance of such a position was bound up with a most profound moral fall.

It was associated not only with national, but, above all, religious betrayal. To become a tool for the subjugation of the divinely chosen people by coarse pagans, one had to deny the hopes of Israel, everything holy to it, its dreams, and, what is more, since the Romans did not take into account the spiritual tribulation of their agents, upon accepting his position a publican had to swear a pagan oath of fidelity to the emperor, and bring pagan sacrifices to his spirit.

Of course the publicans served not only Rome's interests, levying taxes upon their own country men, but pursuing their own greedy goals and becoming wealthy at the expense of their subjugated brothers, they made the yoke of Roman oppression feel even more difficult to bear. This is who the publicans were. This is why they were surrounded by justifiable hatred and scorn.”

Zacchaeus was not your run of the mill publican. He was the chief among publicans which fueled even more hatred and animosity against him. In the minds of everyone, Zacchaeus was the last person in the world to deserve a meeting with Jesus Christ. His sins were great and many: Greed, Covetousness, Idolatry, Extortion, and Corruption. But what we see

in Zacchaeus is true of everyone of us here today. We are lawbreakers, and undeserving of Christ's grace and mercy.

The Bible identifies all of us as sinners.

Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"

Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"

Who deserves to be saved from sin? Not one of us. The Lord would have been perfectly just to condemn the whole human race. Christ could have passed, and left Zacchaeus up in the tree but in his amazing grace he reached up and plucked Zacchaeus in salvation. Christ plucks the burning bands from the fire, doesn't he? He did this for Zacchaeus, and he does this for all of his blood bought people.

Christ died on the cross not for good people but for the ungodly. He laid down his life for sinners so that they might be saved from the punishment and wrath of Almighty God.

Do you identify yourself as a sinner? Maybe you see yourself as a pretty good person in the sight of men. You might reason, “I try my best to live a good life. I love my family. I work hard. People think you are a good person. Perhaps, you even hope that that will be good enough to get you into heaven. But how does God see you? He sees all of us as sinners. The only way we can be saved from our sins and enter heaven is through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Christ came to redeem sinners. He paid the price for our sins on the cross. On one hand Zacchaeus was a rich man. But on the other hand he was poor. He was empty. Christ filled his heart with grace and salvation. Do you see yourself as poor and empty before God?

All of the money in the world couldn't buy Zacchaeus eternal life. He needed Christ. Do you sense your need of Christ today? “Nothing to thy feet I bring; simply to thy Cross I cling.”

We see the sinner identified.

2. The means employed

The famous missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, learned later in his life how Christians should not be ignorant of the means God uses in leading and saving His people. We read an excerpt from his biography when he was a young man, “In September 1835, two years to the day after he visited the Crystal Palace, Taylor terminated his medical studies without finishing his degree, and sailed for China as an “agent” of the Chinese Evangelization Society with instructions to proceed forthwith to Nanjing.

Before the ship reached Land’s End, he had a spiritual crisis. The square-rigged sailing ship -the doomed Dumfries- ran into a storm off the coast and was almost shipwrecked. The young Taylor was wracked with guilt: should he wear a swimming belt during a storm? Did a swimming belt constitute “means,” which would indicate a want of faith and, “remove me from the direct and immediate leadings of God.”

He gave it away, preferring to rely on faith to protect him. Fortunately, since the ship passed through no more storms, he did not have to test his resolve.”

Later in his life, Hudson looked back at that time in the ship and said he should have worn his swimming belt. He realized that God appoints means to help and preserve His people.

In Luke 19, Zacchaeus did not allow a few obstacles get in his way of seeing Christ. He couldn't see Christ because of his stature. He couldn't see Christ because of the crowds. Despite these disadvantages, Zacchaeus utilized the means of climbing a tree to put him in a better position to see Christ.

I can remember how my public high school teacher was the means in leading me to Christ. Paul Gardner was his name. He was my history teacher, my baseball coach, and my friend. The Lord used him in my life to help me see Jesus.

Through this man I attended a bible study before school. I became a member of The Fellowship Of Christians Athletes. I started reading the Bible on my own for the first time. He was my tree or the means the Lord used to help me see Jesus? Was there someone in your life who was the means in leading you to the Lord. Maybe a co-worker, a neighbor, a teacher, or a friend? God uses means to lead us to Christ.

We've considered the sinner identified and the means employed. Let us look thirdly at the time appointed.

3. The time appointed.

Just like there is a time appointed for us to die, so there is a time appointed for sinners to be saved. In the case of Zacchaeus, it was appointed for him to be saved in Jericho. Christ went to Jericho for the specific purpose of plucking Zacchaeus from the Fig Tree, and saving his soul. There was nothing that could alter Christ's course to Zacchaeus. There was nothing that could change the events that unfolded that day in the life of Zacchaeus. The time is appointed for all of God's people to be saved, and this was decided before the world began.

We read in 2 Timothy 1:9, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,"

Titus 1:2, "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;"

Ephesians 1, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

When Christ called Zacchaeus he obeyed immediately. He didn't hesitate. He didn't wait and think about it. We read in verse 5, “And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.”

Theologians refer to this call as the effectual calling. The SCQ 31 asks the question, “What is effectual calling?” The answer: Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.”

How the SC answer aptly describes what happened to Zacchaeus when he heard the voice of Christ speak to him.

The Scripture tells us that Zacchaeus made haste and came down and received Christ joyfully. Zacchaeus responded to the effectual call in obedience and joy. The Holy Spirit enlightened the mind of Zacchaeus and empowered him to embrace Christ as His Savior. Christ calls sinners from a world of darkness into the marvelous light of the gospel.

Do you hear the voice of Christ calling you today? Will you respond to the call of Christ? Will you gladly submit to the Word of the Lord in your life?

The time is appointed for sinners to be saved.

4. The Fruit Displayed

Zacchaeus was a changed man after Christ called him. We read in verse 8, “And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”

The words of Zacchaeus indicate that there was more going on in this man than moral reformation. He wasn't merely turning over a new leaf.

Zacchaeus was a regenerate man. He was born again. He was a new creature in Christ. A mark of a regenerate man is he repents of his sins.

A Bible commentator tells us, "While repentance is not a work that earns salvation, repentance unto salvation does result in works. It is impossible to truly and fully change your mind without that causing a change in action. In the Bible, repentance results in a change in behavior. That is why John the Baptist called people to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8). A person who has truly repented will give evidence of a changed life (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:19-23; James 2:14-26).

Albert Barnes writes, "This was not a proclamation of his own righteousness, nor the ground of his righteousness, but it was the evidence of the sincerity of his repentance, and the confession which with the mouth is made unto salvation."

John Gill writes in his commentary, “The Israelite, when he brought the basket of the first fruits to the priest, confessed before the Lord his God, Deuteronomy 26:4. Zacchaeus directed his speech to Christ, being, as he was now convinced, the discernor of the thoughts, and intents of the heart; who knew the genuineness of his repentance, that it was hearty and real; and the sincerity of his expressions and resolutions, and upon what principles he acted, and proposed to do as follows:

behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give unto the poor; not to make satisfaction for the sins he had committed, but to testify his sense of them, and his repentance for them, and as willing to do good with what he had gotten; which shows, that the disposition of his mind was altered, and of a covetous oppressor, he was become tender, kind, and liberal.

and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation; or by extorting any thing from him on any pretence, by making an unjust demand upon him; or in any oppressive way, by defrauding and tricking, and by doing him any injury, in any form or manner:

I restore him fourfold: the same that was done in case of sheep stealing, Exodus 22:1 but in such a case as this, the law only required the principal, with the fifth part added to it; But Zacchaeus proposes as much as in the case of theft, and which was rarely used. This was done by Zacchaeus, to show the truth and reality of his repentance.”

Zacchaeus shows us that a regenerate man repents of his sins. He doesn't make excuses for them. He doesn't take them lightly. He doesn't continue in them. He confesses them to Christ and makes things right with his neighbor.

Is there the fruit of repentance in your life? Do you confess your sins to Christ? Is there enough evidence in your life to find you guilty of being a Christian?

Jesus Christ went to Jericho for a specific purpose and that was to pluck a sinner out of a Fig Tree, and save his soul. Zacchaeus was the least likely candidate for salvation. He was a chief among publicans. Like Zaachaeus, we are undeserving of God's grace and mercy in Christ.

Christ came into the world to save sinners. Christ saves sinners by using means and at the appointed time. There was fruit in the life of Zacchaeus, and that proved he was a regenerate man. Do you have this fruit in your life? Do you hear the call of Christ today in your heart? May the Lord help each one of us to heed the gospel call in our life. Let us pray!