

Finding Jesus.

Text: Luke 19:1-10

Suggested Hymns:

317, 447, 335, 571, 309

1) Zacchaeus Found Much More
Than He Had Expected To Find

2) Zacchaeus believes in Jesus Christ as his Saviour

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 19:1-10, ¹ *Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.* ² *Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.* ³ *And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.* ⁴ *So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.*

⁵ *And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”* ⁶ *So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.*

⁷ *But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.”* ⁸ *Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”*

⁹ *And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;”* ¹⁰ *“for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Charlotte Elliott is the author of the hymn we just sang.¹ She came from a pastor’s family. She was brought up in a pious home, but somehow or other, she had not found that peace and joy which comes from the conviction that Jesus is her Saviour. There seemed to be something which kept her from Jesus.

The story is told of a friend of the family, an old pastor, who came to visit the Elliott family. He noticed that there was something wrong with Charlotte. He began to speak to her about the one thing needful. The subject seemed to be distasteful to Charlotte, and the matter was dropped.

Later on Charlotte opened the subject again and confessed to her pastor friend, that she would like to come to Jesus if only she knew how. The pastor said, "*Charlotte, come just as you are.*" By and by Charlotte found her Saviour and that peace of mind which only Jesus can give. The result of that conversation was the beautiful hymn

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.

In our text we have the story of another soul that found Jesus and was made happy. It is written for our comfort and for our encouragement.

We have a similar message in the Gospel lesson for today where we read, "*If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!*"² Therefore our theme is *The Man who Found Jesus*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Zacchaeus Found Much More Than He Had Expected To Find.

Rich people have not fared well in the Gospel of Luke to this point. Jesus tells several parables in which He portrays rich men who abused their wealth.³ When a rich man turned away from discipleship, Jesus spoke of the great difficulty that those with riches have in entering the kingdom of God.⁴ Yet Jesus added, "*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*"⁵ As Jesus passes through the city of Jericho, that possibility becomes a reality. Luke tells of a rich man who is a true son of Abraham, who was a rich man himself.

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. He was going there to suffer and to die. Great crowds of pilgrims are with Him. It is the time of the Passover Festival. As the pilgrim band passes through the villages and towns and cities, the people gather to hail them and bid them well on the way.

So they come to Jericho. All eyes are centred upon the great Prophet of Nazareth. As Jesus walks through one of the beautiful streets of the city, Jesus suddenly stops. There, hidden partly by the branches and the foliage, sits a man in the tree. It is none other than Zacchaeus, the chief of the tax collectors, rich but yet so poor. He has all that money can buy. But money cannot buy everything. He must see Jesus.

The name Zacchaeus comes from a word meaning “clean” or “innocent.” He was the chief tax collector in Jericho, an important commercial city. He had to work closely with the Roman governor in his position. Over the years he had accumulated a great amount of wealth. This wealth might easily have kept him from entering into the kingdom of God.

One wonders why Zacchaeus must see Jesus. Was it only curiosity? There were many strange and conflicting stories told about Jesus. His life, his teaching, the controversy about Him, all of these things must have been familiar topics of conversation in Jericho.

Was Jesus a good man? Did Jesus perform His miracles through the power of God, or was He under satanic influence? Would Jesus bring salvation, or would He only cause another disturbance? Was Jesus the Messiah who would establish the kingdom of David, or was He just one more impostor?

Not so far away from Jericho lay Bethany, nestling in the hills. There Jesus had very recently, only a few weeks previously, raised Lazarus from the dead. All of Jericho must have known that. Half of the priests who ministered in the Temple in Jerusalem lived in Jericho. People must have known all about Lazarus. Did the rumour also filter through that the leaders in Jerusalem had decided to put a stop to this whole business?

Did Zacchaeus hear that Jesus had been called the friend of tax collectors and sinners? Was that perhaps the reason why this friendless rich man wished to see Jesus? Or was there perhaps some deeper interest? Who knows!

Zacchaeus had certainly heard about Jesus. Perhaps he was even acquainted with one of the followers of Jesus who had himself been a tax collector: Levi, also called Matthew.⁶ Zacchaeus was a short man and could not see over the crowds surrounding Jesus. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree.

God often leads people strange ways to bring them into the Kingdom. Was it all just accidental that you and I were born of Christian parents? Or if we were brought to Jesus later in life, was it all just accidental? Did God have nothing to do with it?

Is God not behind of all the big and the little things in our lives, and does He not use them to carry out His good and gracious will with us? Did God not also shape the events that Zacchaeus must see Jesus? He certainly did!

No matter what motives Zacchaeus may have had, one thing is very sure, namely, Zacchaeus found more than he expected to find. He found in Jesus his Saviour and Redeemer, who changed his entire life.

Jesus stopped when He came to the tree. He looks up to see Zacchaeus. ***“Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”*** What a shock that must have been for Zacchaeus!

Surely that was the last thing that Zacchaeus expected. If Jesus intended to stay over in Jericho for the night, there would have been hundreds of homes which would have offered a more likely place to stay, than the home of this wealthy sinner. But no, Jesus must stay in the house of Zacchaeus.

The crowd reaction to the entry of Jesus into the house of this “sinner” is highly predictable based on past performance.⁷ The people thought it despicable for a Jewish rabbi to set foot in the house of a tax collector.

Yet for Zacchaeus, the entry of Jesus was truly his day of salvation. He expresses his overwhelming joy at being accepted by Jesus by promising half of his possessions to the poor, and a fourfold restitution for anyone whom he had cheated.

How long did Jesus stay? What was the chief topic of conversation? How we would have liked to listen in!

We must judge all these things in the light of the result, which Jesus sums up in these few words, ***“Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham.*** Salvation — from what? Zacchaeus gathers it together in these few words, ***“Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”***

One wonders just how much Zacchaeus had left after all this. Half to the poor and out of the other half fourfold restoration wherever he had taken anything from any man by false accusation.

One wonders what Zacchaeus would have said if on the morning of that day somebody had told him that by night he would be a comparatively poor man.

Such is the power of the Gospel of Jesus. Such is the welding love of Jesus. Zacchaeus breaks with his entire sinful, selfish life. He is a new man. He starts life all over.

Has Jesus been in your home? Has Jesus entered your heart? Has Jesus changed your life?

2. Zacchaeus Believes In Jesus Christ As His Saviour

It all sounds so very easy as we read it in our text. So very simple. *I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.* But what a struggle that must have been! Only the all-powerful grace of the Lord could bring about such results.

Remember the position of Zacchaeus. He was *a chief tax collector*. The tax collectors were the men who had charge of the custom receipts. Customs were levied on exports and imports, upon the goods in the hands of the merchants when they entered Jericho.

The custom officials opened every parcel and bag which anybody might carry, and they would make their appraisal. Then they would fix the sum of the taxes to be paid. They kept everything beyond the given amount.

And Jericho was the headquarters for this crooked business. No wonder that Zacchaeus, the chief of the tax collectors in Jericho, was a very rich man. But he was also a very wicked man.

The general level of the morality of the tax collectors is indicated in these words of Jesus, as written in Matthew 5:46-47, ⁴⁶ *“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”* ⁴⁷ *“And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?”*

And so the tax collectors stand on the lowest rung of morality. And here is Zacchaeus, the chief of the tax collectors, probably a few degrees below the

average, just a little worse than the ordinary tax collector. Must we not marvel at the overwhelming power of the Saviour's grace to change such a person?

And this Zacchaeus was very rich. That did not make it any easier for him to come to Jesus. Earlier Jesus said that ***“it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”***⁸

At best, riches are not a help. And here are riches gained by fraud and dishonesty. The very purpose of this nefarious business was to amass money. Why else pay for the privilege of collecting taxes? An honest man would hardly hold the job which Zacchaeus held. How difficult it must have been for such a man to break away from all this dirty business! How difficult for this man to overcome these difficulties!

Friends, do you have any difficulties? Are you like Charlotte Elliott? or like Zacchaeus? What is your problem? - your family ties? your friends? your business? your education? your besetting sin?

Jesus has met with them all. Jesus had helped others to overcome these difficulties. Jesus wants to help you too.

The final comment of Jesus emphasises that He has come to seek and save the lost. The Pharisees and experts in the law regarded people like Zacchaeus as lost and beyond the hope of salvation because of their occupations and co-operation with the hated Romans.

Yet this man, Zacchaeus, proved himself far more righteous than the Pharisees who loved money⁹ and who failed to clean up their lives by giving to the poor.¹⁰

So let us conclude and summarise with these words of our text, ¹⁰ ***“for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*** That is the very purpose of our Saviour's life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 335, Just as I am

² Luke 19:41

³ Luke 12:16-21; Luke 16:19-31

⁴ Luke 18:24, 25

⁵ Luke 18:27

⁶ Luke 5:27

⁷ Luke 15:2

⁸ Matthew 19:24

⁹ Luke 16:14

¹⁰ Luke 11:41