

To Seek and Save the Lost . . . Journey to Easter #4

Luke 19:1-10

March 29, 2020

Today, we continue our sermon series entitled *Journey to Easter and Beyond*. We're exploring encounters Jesus had with different individuals in the last weeks of his life on his way to Jerusalem and the cross. Individuals in these stories experienced life-changing encounters with Jesus. Exploring these encounters can open our eyes to God's desired work in our lives.

Our story today comes from Luke chapter 19. It's the passage that Alana just read.

Slide 1 - It's about Zacchaeus, the wee little man who climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus. Like the encounter with blind Bartimaeus that we explored last week, Jesus encounter with Zacchaeus also takes place while passing through the city of Jericho. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and the cross.

Through this story we are presented with clarity about Jesus mission on earth. Through Jesus' example, we are also presented with principles and a pattern for engaging our world today.

The first thing that we should note is this: **Jesus took the initiative in fostering relationship with those without faith.**

How do we see this in today's passage?

Slide 2 - Zacchaeus hears that Jesus is passing through town and he runs to have a look at this miracle worker. But Zacchaeus is a short man with a tall problem. He is so short that he can't see over the head of the large crowd to see Jesus.

Slide 3 - So, he has a bright idea. He runs ahead of the crowd to where a large sycamore tree is positioned along the side of road.

Slide 4 - He climbs the tree to get a perfect birds-eye view of Jesus as he passes by. But Zacchaeus is in for a big surprise.

Slide 6 - When Jesus passes under Zacchaeus perch, he stops. Last week we noted that Jesus stopped for Bartimaeus. In this moment Jesus stops for Zacchaeus.

Slide 8 - Jesus looks up and says, *Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house*" (Luke 19:5 CSB).

Notice that Jesus doesn't wait for Zacchaeus to initiate relationship. Jesus engages Zacchaeus. Why does Jesus say it's *necessary* to stay at Zacchaeus house? It's because Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (v. 10), those who don't know God and who are spiritually dead.

Jesus calls us as his disciples to follow his example, to initiate relationship with those without faith. How do we do this? We do what Jesus did. We look for ways to build relationship and a sense of community with those whom God brings across our paths.

We love and serve them and include them in our daily activities. Jesus arranged to do something that nearly always leads to relationship. He chose to eat together with Zacchaeus.

You say, Kent how can I build relationship with others

Slide 14 during this Covid-19 crisis? I'm not supposed to congregate with others. We've all been told to maintain social distance.

So, what do we do? We adapt the principle. We demonstrate care to neighbours, friends, and co-workers by expressing interest in their well being. By asking them how they're doing and intently listening. By expressing words of encouragement and comfort and staying in contact with them by phone and social media.

We express love by meeting needs where we can. A tool we've made available to help you to do this are the *I Can Help* cards (**hold up - zoom in?**) available to print on our website. You can distribute these to neighbours offering to help meet their needs. You can also help us distribute *We Can Help* cards (**hold up - zoom in?**) to homes around the church. I passed out *I Can Help* cards on my street this week and some *We Can Help* cards to homes around the church. I encourage you to do the same.

Those of us who are well can meet needs like picking up groceries and medicine for those who are self-isolating, by joyfully sharing our financial resources, food,

Slide 15 - and, yes, even our precious toilet paper with others who are struggling because they been laid off or are facing illness.

By the way, one of the important reasons for us all to be faithful in the giving of our tithes is to allow HBC to continue to help meet financial needs outside our church, in the lives of people who don't know Jesus. Even if you are physically unable to get out and help others with needs, you can be a part of meeting needs through your faithful giving.

Slide 4 - Just like Zacchaeus was watching Jesus as he passed by, others are watching you and me during this crisis. What do they see? Do they see someone who is expressing interest, care, and help, who is engaging them in relationship?

Or do they only see more self-occupied individuals focused solely on our own needs and safety? Jesus has called you and me to follow his example and initiate relationship with those who are lost, even in the middle of Covid-19.

We also see in this passage that **Jesus went after those whom others had written off**. Zacchaeus had been written off by others. He was considered to be pond slime. Why? Because he was a tax collector. And not just any tax collector. He was a *chief* tax collector.

This means several things.

Slide 16 - He oversaw other tax collectors and received a cut from their takes. Tax collectors in Israel were Jews employed by the Roman occupying forces. They could collect more than the amount the Romans expected.

Tax collectors regularly overcharged people and lined their own pockets and the pockets of their supervisors with the excess. Because of this, they were often quite wealthy. Verse 2 tells us this was the case with Zacchaeus.

The result was that tax collectors were despised and even hated by their fellow Jews. They were seen as traitors that had passed the spiritual point of no return. But for Jesus, no one is past the point of no return. He pursued those whom society and the religious establishment had written off.

Had do we know this?

Slide 11 - Look at the response in v. 7 from the crowd when Jesus chose to hang out with Zacchaeus in his own turf, his home. *“He’s gone to stay with a sinful man”* (Luke 19:7 CSB). The reality was that Zacchaeus was, indeed, a sinner who had made many wrong choices and was separated from God. But Zacchaeus was not beyond God’s saving power.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, including those who are so lost that no one believes there is hope for them. Jesus priority was to associate closely enough with those without faith that they might come to experience God’s love and grace. Jesus never condoned sin, but he loved the sinner.

He did this despite the strong disapproval of the religious establishment. The religious leaders even gave Jesus the title, “Friend of sinners.” This nickname was no compliment. It was a demeaning slur.

Slide 17 - Brothers and sisters, for too long many of us Christ-followers have worried too much about being spiritually contaminated by befriending those whom others have written off. To desire to live a moral life and stay clear of morally suspect practices is part of God’s call to us as believers.

But this principle can be applied so rigorously that we cease to associate with unbelievers for fear of what comes with the relationship. Without these relationships, those who are lost are not likely to find their way.

Zacchaeus needed Jesus to befriend him. Unbelievers in your sphere of influence need you to befriend them, to engage in relationship with them. To do this may cost you the approval of other Christians. But if you reach out, you will be in good company with the *Friend of Sinners*.

Jesus took the initiative in fostering relationship with those without faith, and he pursued those whom the world had written off. But there’s a third principle we learn from Jesus’ example. It’s this: **Jesus’ loving initiative leads to faith and repentance.**

What was Zacchaeus response to Jesus’ loving initiative in his life?

Slide10 - Zacchaeus came to faith in Christ. Look at v. 8. Just like Bartimaeus in last week’s message, Zacchaeus addresses Jesus with the word *Lord*. This indicates that Zacchaeus has embraced faith in Jesus as the Messiah, God’s Son. Zacchaeus sees that Jesus is the one to whom he owes total submission and obedience.

Slide 13 - In v. 9, Jesus acknowledges Zacchaeus' faith by saying, *"Today salvation has come to this house . . ."* (Luke 19:9 CSB) But Zacchaeus not only comes to faith in Jesus. That faith is demonstrated by repentance.

Slide 12 - Zacchaeus recognizes where he has sinned against God by sinning against others. He chooses to right these wrongs. He says in v. verse 8, *"Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much."* (Luke 19:8b CSB)

In biblical times, giving away 20% of your resources was considered generous. Zacchaeus chose to give away *half* of his possessions. But Zacchaeus doesn't stop there. For anyone he has cheated, he chooses to give back four times the amount wrongly taken.

This restitution is higher than the normal restitution standards set by the OT law. In fact, Zacchaeus penalizes himself with the standard of restitution required of cattle or sheep rustlers.

What is the motivation behind Zacchaeus repentance?

Slide 11 - Is he trying to impress Jesus with false humility? No. Jesus commends his response. His heart has been changed. Through Jesus loving initiative in relationship, Zacchaeus has experienced life.

He has experienced relationship with God. He has experienced change from the inside out. He also now recognizes that what God gives is to be used for others, rather than hoarding for one's self.

Jesus set an example for us by taking the initiative in fostering relationship with those without faith, by seeking those whom the world has written off, and his initiating love leads to faith and repentance.

I have several questions for you? Like Zacchaeus, have you come to faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord? Have you submitted control of your life to him? Have you experienced the kind of repentance that Zacchaeus embraced that leads to confessing your sins and doing everything possible to make things right with those you've wronged?

If not, you can today. Jesus is pausing under your tree. He's inviting you to experience a relationship with him that will transform your life forever. Why? Because he loves you.

Slide 19/20 side by side (if unable to use both slide at once, just use 19) - He loves you so much that he chose to die for your sins on the cross and to rise again from the dead to give you eternal life.

You say, Kent, that's sounds wonderful, but you don't know how far gone I am. You don't know what I've done. Jesus wouldn't accept me. Don't believe that lie. The Bible says, . . . *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved* (Rom 10:13 CSB). Everyone means everyone, no matter what you've done or not done. Will you respond to Jesus today in faith and repentance?

For those of you who have come to faith and repented of your sins,

Slide 18 - are you following Jesus example of fostering relationship with those without faith? With your neighbour next door, with your co-workers, with people you know from the gym or your child's soccer team?

Like Jesus, are you pursuing relationship those whom others have written off? Are you choosing to befriend those individuals despite what other Christians may think or say about you? Are you continuing to walk in repentance and allowing God to continually transform your attitudes and actions to resemble those of his Son?

If so, your Heavenly Father is delighting in your ongoing faith and repentance. If not, God is calling you today to confess your sin and to turn to him for his help. He's calling you to follow in the example of Jesus.

As you do, God will empower you by his Spirit to walk in the way of Jesus, the one who came to seek and to save the lost.