

Divinely Seeking the Hidden

Luke 19:1-10

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”

Introduction: On May 7, 1915 the Cunard luxury liner RMS *Lusitania* was on a final leg of a voyage across the Atlantic with passengers from New York City to Liverpool, a voyage that would have taken just over a week. It carried 1959 souls who enjoyed the lavish accommodations along with the trepidation of travelling during WWI in waters that possessed German U-boats (or submarines). It was unthinkable to many that a ship carrying civilians would become a target of war, but lines of morality often get blurred in the hell of war. Germany had empowered their U-boat captains to sink as much tonnage as they could, hindering war supplies and crippling the Allies resolve. Sub captains were often given freedom to make decisions as they were out of radio contact often. They were hidden hunters, silent killers, and unseen executioners to unsuspecting travelers and soldiers alike.

On this fateful day, a German boat called the U-20, captained by a shrewd and ruthless man named Schweiger identified this massive ship with its four funnel stacks and put himself in a position to fire one of his 3 remaining torpedoes as the floating platform of decadence. In an eerie ending, many on the ship could see the ripple in the water as the submerged missile propelled through the water into the side of the monstrous ship, with the submarine never coming up beyond periscope depth. In a matter of 18 minutes, multiple explosions, and a ship designed to avoid icebergs not torpedoes, this once beautiful piece of human ingenuity went down, killing 1198 passengers, 128 of whom were Americans. This hidden attack led to a condemning of German tactics, provided the impetus for America to join the war, and was a rallying cry for recruiting.

Hidden things can be dangerous. They must be brought to the surface in order to be neutralized or damage will be done. Jesus said that He came to seek and save that which was lost. The lost are those hidden, those who don't even know they are lost, and are in great need of salvation. This morning we will look at a story of how and why Jesus saves those who are far off, of whom salvation is hidden, and how He is on a **divine search and rescue mission**.

We pick up the narrative days before Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He was passing through Jericho on His final descent up to Jerusalem, a trip that would have taken 8 hours and changed elevation over 3300 feet. The city would have been dense with people who had heard Jesus was coming since He healed the lepers on His journey down the Jordan Rift Valley (Luke 17:11-19), and the crowds were wondering if He'd do more miracles, like raising Lazarus from the dead. Right before this interaction with Zacchaeus, He healed two men who were born blind, which would have left the crowd amazed and in a frenzy to make sure they had good seats for what would happen next. This was His last miracle that He'd perform until the resurrection. Jesus was passing between the residential part of Jericho and the municipal, and it is here that we pick up the story of a *wee little man, a wee little man named Zacchaeus*.

Divine Search

Luke 19:1-4 He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

A Sinner who sought to see

- **Chief Tax Collector**

We have been introduced to multiple tax collectors in the Book of Luke, but it is clearly one of his favorite people/professions to highlight. They were the worst of the worst, loathed by the common Jewish person, excluded from worship in the Synagogue so essentially cut off from the community. Why were they so hated?

How they got their job – One obtained this status by buying the rights from Rome, meaning you had to pay Rome for the right to tax your own people.

How they abused their job – Taxation was not really the problem, since even God set up a standard of taxation in the OT and Jesus declared that what belonged to Caesar should be given to him. The problem was found in 1) Though there were standard taxes for men and women, there could also be shifting and changing taxes in a long and convoluted tax manual (sound familiar). 2) Tax collectors would have to give Rome a certain number, so whatever they charged the people on top of this, they kept. This was organized crime. It was the streets of Chicago during prohibition. And if you crossed a tax collector, you had to deal with Rome, since Zacchaeus was Al Capone & Elliot Ness!

The Power Zacchaeus possessed – Jericho was one of three key taxation cities: Capernaum in the North, Caesarea in the West, and Jericho in the South. This meant the money flowed in this upper class city. He was the **chief tax collector**, which meant he swam at the top of the food chain, and he would be in the pockets of all the other tax collectors.

- **Rich**

The text says plainly that he was rich, which is no surprise. He would be rich by position, but add corruption on top of this, he would be one of the wealthiest men in town. There is no moral statement made about his wealth, but the Bible is full of cautions concerning it:

It provides false grounds for boasting - Jeremiah 9:23 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the **rich man boast in his riches**,

It tempts us to trust in it, rather than God - Proverbs 11:28 Whoever **trusts in his riches will fall**, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.

It can never satisfy - Ecclesiastes 4:8 one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and **his eyes are never satisfied with riches**, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

It is deceitful by nature - Matthew 13:22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the **deceitfulness of riches choke the word**, and it proves unfruitful.

It creates a roadblock to salvation - Matthew 19:23 And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, **only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven**.

It gives false hope and faulty pride - 1 Timothy 6:17 As for the rich in this present age, **charge them not to be haughty**, nor to **set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches**, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Wealth offers much and delivers little. It holds out the promise of position, satisfaction, identity, and meaning yet only leaves a gaping hole around each of these. It promises to fix problems, the golden carrot of the underlying issues, "If only we had more money, we would finally be _____". The real

deception is that most of us have to learn this lesson the hard way because we instinctively think we are impervious to the destructive nature of riches ("we are not really rich anyway"). Riches deceive because we never have enough, always want more, and want to be like everyone else around us who always seem to have more - and more would mean MORE HAPPINESS!

- **Miserable**

In a few short verses we get a glimpse of a man who had come to the end of himself and searched to see Jesus. He had achieved the height of what most believe will bring happiness. He had worked the system to achieve **power and control** over a city and industry. He had a **title** that gave him the assurance of identity (*I am the CHIEF tax collector*). He had attained **immense wealth** so that whatever material possession he desired he could have, buying influence as well as comfort. He had overcome a short stature to achieve tall feats, and according to all paradigms of happiness, ancient and modern, he should be the happiest man alive.

Yet, he could not overcome the growing emptiness in his soul and life. Often we think that people turn to Jesus when they reach **rock bottom**, when they have made poor choices or end up destitute and having no other place to go but up, reach out for forgiveness and life (much like the younger son in the parable of the Prodigal God - Luke 15). Zacchaeus did not hit rock bottom - he reached the zenith, the **pinnacle of success** and found it incapable of sustaining happiness and joy

- **Seeking to see**

It was then that he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was in town and had already healed **two blind men**. So desiring to get a glimpse of Him but realizing the crowd was thick and his height negating, he ran ahead to a thick, easily climbable **Sycamore tree** to get a glimpse of this man who seemed to offer something different from what he had ever heard or experienced. Maybe if he could get close he could gain some insight, some understanding of what this man was about.

A Savior who sought to save

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "**Zacchaeus**, hurry and come down, for I **must stay** at your house today." ⁶ So he hurried and came down and **received him joyfully**. ⁷

- **Personal, not general**

What seemed like a story about Zacchaeus is revealed to truly be a story of Jesus. In a massive crowd kicking up dirt and deafening noise, Jesus stopped the procession and looked up to a small man in a thick tree and addressed Him by name. A man He had never met, a man that in the culture was part of the sinful outcasts, a man that **easily** could have been ignored and marginalized. Notice that Zach did not call out like the blind Bartimaeus, nor did he ask for mercy, he simply was there in a tree. It was Jesus **who was seeking**, not Zach. This was not a general, generic call but a call by name, since Jesus knows OUR NAME, and calls His own by name (Isa. 40:25-26; Jn 10:27). God is a personal God, and even though we are joined to a larger group called the church, He calls us to a personal relationship with Him.

- **Irresistible Command**

The statement to Zach was not a suggestion, it was a command. He told him to come down and that He WAS coming to his house that day. In God's search and rescue mission, He loves us so much and knows our immense inability so much that He cuts through our sin and selfishness and moves toward us, commanding us to respond. This shows us the **heart of a Savior**, who seeks after us when we have persistently sought ourselves.

A Crowd who sought shame

⁵ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

The crowd that followed Jesus, the same crowd that would come into Jerusalem during Passover, the same crowd that would lay down palms were the same ones who questioned Jesus choices of lunch locations. They grumbled as they had done before. This man was among the sinners! How could Jesus not only dine with him, but the protocol would have been to spend the night at his house. What shame! But Jesus cuts through cultural normative. He saves those whom He chose and grants faith and repentance. This is corrective and informative for us, especially with such division today over politics and moral stances. When God saves, He brings sinners together regardless of their past and makes them equal members of His family.

Divine Declaration

Luke 19:8-9 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, **Lord**, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today **salvation** has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

A Response of a repentant sinner

- **A New Name**

It is interesting that Luke does not record an explanation of sin, faith, and repentance to Zach, though there would have undoubtedly been that discussion. What Jesus offered was Himself, and Luke's emphasis was on the response of this chief sinner. Zach responded in a bounding joy and proclaiming Jesus as **Lord!** This signals a change of relationship. He did not call Him rabbi, teacher, or king, but referred to Him as the Lord. This meant that he **recognized** that He was not only Savior but the one who had authority over all things, from his life to this world to all of his possessions. Remember, we do not **MAKE** Jesus Lord by believing in Him, since He always is, was, and will be Lord. But when God opens our eyes through Jesus we now understand, yield to, and follow Him as Lord. He owns our life, time, money, and family so that we view each of these as a means of worship, not selfish gain.

- **New Priorities**

The word "*repentance*" does not appear in the text, but the outflow of it sure does. When Zach understood Jesus as Lord, understood where joy came from, and now finally understood what life was all about, worshipping and glorifying God, he set out to do it immediately. He also went to the **extreme**. OT law laid out qualifications of paying back those that one would have cheated: from 20%, to double, and all way to four times. He had gained his wealth in some legitimate ways, but there would be a massive line of people that he would pay back four-fold for what he stole.

Numbers 5:6 "Speak to the people of Israel, When a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the LORD, and that person realizes his guilt, ⁷ he shall confess his sin that he has committed. And he shall make full restitution for his wrong, **adding a fifth** to it and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong.

Exodus 22:4 If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, **he shall pay double**.

Exodus 22:1 "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and **four sheep for a sheep**.

Two other important notes: **1)** When is a thief no longer a thief? When he stops stealing? No, its when he begins to use his money to help others (Eph. 4:28). The power of the gospel in repentance is that a swindler and thief could be transformed into a philanthropist immediately. There is no sense that there was duty filled drudgery, but a real sense of freedom in Z's gift. Though change in holiness takes a lifetime and we continue to fight our sin everyday, we CANNOT underestimate the power of God's work in our lives. The gospel gives us freedom from the power of sin, so allows us to STOP our movement toward lust and move us toward God and our spouse, moves us away from laziness to determined hard work, moves us away from anger to peace. When we say we CANNOT, we are liars who call God a liar as well. **2)** The juxtaposition of this passage should not be missed. In **Luke 18:18ff** we saw the story of the rich young ruler who struggled with the same issues as Z. When confronted with following Jesus or keeping hold of his possessions and wealth, he chose the latter. He left disappointed and without salvation, where Z followed Jesus willingly. Giving this amount of money away would have left Z in a position of dependency, a place he had never been. Our cultural norms would have said he was an idiot and this message stupid. They would be right. This is the type of foolishness that breaks the chains of sin, of materialism, of deceit, and gives us new life. Z. had tasted all the world could offer and found it wanting. Jesus gave Himself and that was not only enough, it was abundant. Not only did Z have new priorities, he had **new affections**. There was a willingness in his heart to make much of God by loving others.

Is that the same way with you? Are God's commands a burden or a drag for you? What are areas of your life that you have a hard time yielding to Jesus, to recognize are His? If He called you to give up that area to follow Him today, would you?

A Declaration to a repentant sinner

- **Salvation has come**

Jesus' response to Z's response was to say that **salvation has come to his house**. Note the beauty of this phrase. Not only was this an assuring declaration to Z of the nature of his salvation, but it qualified that salvation is literally Jesus. He is not only the one who *brings salvation*, He is the epitome of it. We remember that salvation is NOT found in our response to Him, it is found IN HIM. It was Jesus who invited Himself into His house, and Jesus who saved him.

- **A True son was made**

As a parting statement to the crowd He stated that Z was a true son of Abraham, not one that came by birth but one that came from New Birth. Zach was rejected by the people and they grumbled at Jesus' interaction, but this was one of the few who was truly saved, who was given faith and responded in repentance.

Divine Mission

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Desperate plight of all mankind

This is the fourth mission statement given by Luke as to Jesus' purpose of coming to earth. Jesus came on a **search and rescue mission**, one that came to seek after those who were lost and save them. In the bleak news of our day, in the angry rhetoric and volatile actions around us, **this is the best news possible**. Jesus sought out Z to save him. Yes there was a recognition and longing in his heart, but he had no ability to save himself or desire to do so. The reason is that ALL OF US, each person breathing here today are/were in a desperate plight because of our sin. We like to think that what resides in each

of us is mixed parts of **good and bad**, that all we have to do is respond to the good and shun the bad and we will be good people. Or that there has got to be some good in everybody that can be redeemed given the right circumstances. The problem is that this is a **deceptive lie and is NOT WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES**. This is what we learn from Scripture:

Romans 3:9-18 What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin,¹⁰ as it is written: "**None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.**"¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; **no one does good, not even one.**"¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips."¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood;¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Ephesians 4:17-19 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.¹⁸ They are **darkened** in their understanding, **alienated** from the life of God because of the **ignorance** that is in them, due to their **hardness of heart**.¹⁹ They have become **callous** and have given themselves up to **sensuality, greedy** to practice every kind of **impurity**.

We are under God's wrath because we are sinners. We are in desperation because we do not seek after Him. We are hopeless because there is NOTHING IN US to save us. So we receive this news with joy.

Deliberate plan of the Son of Man

Jesus came to seek after those who would reject Him. He came to die so that we could live. He came for a collective made up of individuals that He knows by name. He came for the unrighteous to give them righteousness. This causes us not only to **rejoice** this morning, but should cause us an amount of **sobriety**. Our world is caught into a Satanic trap that calls bondage freedom, murder as human rights, and a rejection of God as self-empowerment. We can be tempted to grumble like the crowd, but what we need to do is pray, to move toward, to love in the truth. We can be confident and assured of our salvation **because** Jesus sought us and saved us. We must continue to pray that God will continue. If you know that truth today it is because God sought you out, not because you "get it" and other do not. So our joyful sobriety leads us to compassionate action in bringing the life giving message of the gospel to others.