

Encounters With Jesus  
Luke 19:1-10

Each morning as I rise up and go about preparing for my day, like most of us, I usually have no idea what God has in store for me. Yes, I do make my plans, but as these scriptures remind us, "God guides our steps".

And yes, I know that God is trustworthy with His guidance and whatever He may have planned for me is "good". I know that because that is God's nature. He is "good" and he does "good".

But beyond my trusting in His guidance, I really have no idea what God has planned for my day.

And so it was for this man Zacchaeus that we'll study about today. Zacchaeus was a Jewish man who had chosen a very controversial vocation for himself, a tax collector for the Roman occupiers, a job that yes, brought him great wealth, but one that had also brought him much distrust and loathing from his fellow Jews.

Here in this scripture passage, we aren't told how familiar Zacchaeus was with the man Jesus. But when Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, he was strongly drawn to want to see him.

And no, Zacchaeus probably had no idea why he was feeling such a compelling need to see Jesus. Those feelings are not often well understood from a human perspective. They come from a whole other realm, from the "Spiritual realm". And Zacchaeus was feeling those strong feelings. And he responded rightly.

I'm reminded of the Billy Graham Crusades that all the many thousands of people attended. Most of those people probably had no idea why they were drawn to go to hear Billy Graham preach. Yes, they were probably invited by a friend. But why they agreed to go was probably a mystery to them. But still they went and because they did, their lives were changed forever.

And so it was going to be for this man Zacchaeus as he was drawn to this crowd who had gathered to see this man Jesus.

Listen carefully to all that took place in this special encounter that Zacchaeus had with the Lord Jesus, here given in the words of Luke chapter 19,

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. <sup>2</sup> Now behold, *there* was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. <sup>3</sup> And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. <sup>7</sup> But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; <sup>10</sup> for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:1-10)

Here, once again, we are able to observe and to delight in the first purpose for which Christ came to the earth, and that is, to seek and to save that which was lost."

And here in these words God also, graciously allows us to see exactly how His seeking and His saving of lost souls takes place, even when that lost one is one of the worst of the worst of sinners, a chief tax collector.

Zacchaeus, having willingly become a consort with the Romans by agreeing to be a tax collector for them, his decision bespoke that he was willing to reject both his people and his God in order that he might gain wealth.

And he had been very successful in his efforts. He was a very wealthy man, much like the Rich Ruler Jesus had just counseled to sell all that he had in order to gain eternal life. And Jesus had said of that rich ruler that it is easier for a rich man to go through the "eye of a needle" than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

But here, in Zacchaeus, Jesus would demonstrate that even though an “eye of a needle be small”, there is really no obstacle too difficult to prevent Him from bringing salvation to those who are lost.

May we again take the opportunity to observe that just as with the blind man that Jesus ministered to in the verses given just before these, all these encounters with Jesus are providentially planned and carried out by God Himself, carefully arranging for each man to be in the right place at the right time so that each might have their special encounter with Jesus!

But let's go back even further in this providential plan and observe that in God's plan to seek and to save all those who are lost, we see clearly that Jesus is the “first cause”, the beginner, the initiator of salvation. He came to us.

Was that necessary? Are we able to “first” come to Him, on our own, by our own initiative? Unfortunately, No! Our hearts are too depraved. Even from our first moment of birth, we are totally depraved. We enter into this life completely devoid of any ability to perceive the depth of our own wretched condition and our desperate need for a Savior.

So, yes! It was absolutely necessary for Jesus to be the “first cause” of the salvation of our souls, for Him to come from heaven to earth to seek and to save us.

And here, especially demonstrated by the fact that He came to the city of Jericho, that accursed city that was intentionally destroyed by God and not supposed to have been rebuilt, Jesus showed us that He will go into the most wretched of places to seek and to save our lost souls.

May I pause here and mention that these were the days that intervened the time in which Jesus was traveling to Bethany, having been summoned by His dear friends Mary and Martha to come to the aid of their dying brother. But you will recall that Jesus chose to wait for a few days, until after Lazarus had died and was buried, so that He could demonstrate to them, and to us, that he was not only able to heal sicknesses, He is also the “resurrection and the life”, able to resurrect the dead back to life. Again, each encounter being carefully planned and carried out by God Himself.

But here, in the intervening days, we see that Jesus did not waste even one of the precious moments He had on the earth. He continued about the business of His Father, to seek and to say that which was lost.

As to Zacchaeus, why was he there in that place at that very special moment in time? He was a very wealthy man, a chief tax collector, one who supervised other tax collectors who worked under him. He, no doubt, had many other important demands on his time, certainly more important than involving himself in such demeaning efforts as climbing a tree just to get a glimpse of this man Jesus.

I would think that not even Zacchaeus himself knew why he was so drawn to get so close to Jesus. In human terms, we might call it “curiosity”, perhaps much like people today who try so hard to get to the front of the line to greet a celebrity. And in human terms that might truly have been Zacchaeus’ reason.

But from the scriptures we know that that is not the real reason Zacchaeus was there. We know that “no one comes to Christ except the Father draw him”.

And so, beneath the surface of our visible reality, the Holy Spirit was doing His work, and Zacchaeus found himself perched on the limb of a tree, straining to get a quick glimpse of Jesus.

And as to Jesus, He not only came from heaven to earth to seek and to save Zacchaeus, and He not only traveled to that wretched city of Jericho, He also reached out and spoke directly to this one who was considered to be a most wretched of sinners, a tax collector.

And again, please, let us understand that God is this specific in His drawing and His calling of our souls to Him. He has and He will come to us.

And as He did with Zacchaeus, He will reach out specifically to each one of us and ask us if we will allow Him to come and dine with us, to eat of His broken bread, bread that will become to us the “Bread of Life”. Revelation 3,

<sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. <sup>21</sup> To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (Revelation 3:20-21)

More often than we can imagine, we have these very encounters with Jesus. But too often our minds are so busy with other things that we don't realize they are taking place. But they are! That is why Jesus also said in these words of Revelation 3, "let him who has ears to listen, let him hear the voice of the Spirit.

And just as with Zacchaeus, to add to the difficulty brought on by our busy minds and other such things, there are also people around us, sometimes even church leaders, or perhaps our closest of friends and family members who would discourage us from our salvation. That is the way of the enemy of our souls, the "devil". He will use anyone, even those who love us most in his efforts to keep us from salvation.

And folks, we must understand that "conversion", the "turning of our souls towards Christ" is only the beginning of our journey with Him. And it is so easy for us to become discouraged and misdirected along the way. Great care and complete surrender must accompany us all along our journey in salvation.

Here, in these words of Zacchaeus, we can observe the change that takes place within a soul that responds rightly to the call of God. Listen!

<sup>8</sup>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." (Luke 19:8)

There is no mention here of any preparatory work taking place within the life of Zacchaeus. He is simply changed, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye.

I'm reminded of a song that we used to sing during our years in ministry with the young people at French Camp. The words of the song were,

To come into the presence of the living Lord is to be changed.  
You cannot come into His high and holy presence and stay the same.  
So change me Lord, remake me Lord, till Father, Spirit, Jesus, we are one.

This kind of instant change obviously took place within the heart of Zacchaeus, and he was forever changed.

And Zacchaeus immediately spoke about that change. Listen again, verse 8,

<sup>8</sup>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." (Luke 19:8)

These words tell us that Zacchaeus stood and spoke in a strong voice, both for Jesus to hear his words and for those around him to also hear.

Dear friends, repentance before God and public confession before men are both very important steps toward salvation. Listen to these words given in 1 John chapter 1,

<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

And then also in Romans chapter 10,

<sup>9</sup> . . . if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

Here, we find both of these confessions at work in the life of Zacchaeus, first to Christ and then before men.

And let's not miss out on the tone of his words. These are words of repentance, of a broken and contrite heart!

<sup>8</sup>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." (Luke 19:8)

Please understand folks, this was no small step for Zacchaeus. He obviously valued his money highly. He had sometime earlier been willing to join himself to the hated Romans to gain his great wealth. And here, he was willing to give up a great portion of it.

Note here also, that God deals with each person individually. Jesus required the Rich Ruler to give up all of his wealth and even his position. But with Zacchaeus, Jesus accepted his relinquishing of only half of his wealth and He allowed Zacchaeus to remain in his position as a tax collector.

Why would that be so? It is because God knows each of our hearts. And He deals personally with each one of us according to His plan and according to the measure of need within us.

With Zacchaeus, perhaps it was important that he remain somewhat wealthy and within his influential position, both with the Romans and within the community. Perhaps there, he would be of better benefit to the Lord and to the people.

But note here also that Zacchaeus was convicted to deal with an additional form of sin, that of thievery and scheming and fraud. He said,

<sup>8</sup> and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." (Luke 19:8)

Once our conscience has become open to Christ and once we have come face to face with Him, our hearts cannot help but be convicted of all manner of sin and corruption that is taking place in our lives.

And take note of Jesus' blessed response to this wretched sinner.

<sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house." (Luke 19:9)

These words remind me of two of the things Jesus said while hanging on the cross. There He said to the thief hanging beside Him, "today you will be with me in paradise." And He also said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!"

Folks, we have no idea just how wretched we truly are! But we are wretched and Jesus is ready to accept us, just as He did with Zacchaeus. He said to him, and He will say to us,

<sup>9</sup>"Today salvation has come to this house." (Luke 19:9)

This is "Grace" folks, the amazing blessed free gift of "Grace". When Zacchaeus first awoke that morning, He had no idea how the day would turn out for him. He went from being a self-seeking, manipulating thief, to being a humble follower of Christ.

And oh, please don't let these words of the Lord Jesus get past your understanding. He could have said, "Today, salvation has come to you

personally Zacchaeus", but He did not say that. He said "Today, salvation has come to this house".

Folks, not only Zacchaeus himself was saved, but also his whole household, his wife, his children, his man-servants and his maid-servant, all of them were saved! That promise is included within Jesus' words to Zacchaeus, and they are effectual.

<sup>9</sup>"Today salvation has come to this house." (Luke 19:9)

Let me say that again! Jesus' words, "this house" were very intentional, meant to be all inclusive. This is part of what the bible scholars call "Covenant Theology". And yes, God can, of His own volition sovereignly choose to call a whole household to Himself.

Just as we saw God do in the Book of Acts with the House and family of Cornelius, and also with the family of the Philippian jailer, He can, by Sovereign Grace, call all of them into salvation in an instant.

So, that day, salvation came to Zacchaeus and to all the members of his house.

And let me pause here and acknowledge that this sort of theology can sound strange to some of us.

In our evangelical fervor to define salvation as coming to each person individually (and it truly does), here and in other places in these scriptures, we find that God is more generous and more gracious than we could ever hope or imagine.

Again, as He did here with Zacchaeus, He can and He will bestow salvation upon a whole household at one time.

Which brings us back to the words we began our study with today, and that is . . . in Zacchaeus, we are able to see clearly, and to delight in, the "first purpose" for which Christ came to the earth. He came to seek and to save that which was lost."

And may I say that He is also doing exactly the same with each one of us today. With each of these encounters that we witness in these scriptures, Jesus is



placing before us the opportunity to take the next step towards Him, to confess our sins and to surrender our lives to Him.

Are we willing to demean ourselves and climb a tree just to get a glimpse of Him?

And are we willing to give up half, or even all of our wealth in order to have a deep, loving relationship with Him?

I plead with each of us to have ears to hear the call of God upon our souls. He wants to say to each of us,

<sup>9</sup> . . . "Today salvation has come to this house . . . <sup>10</sup> for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:9-10)

Pray with me.