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WHY JESUS CAME

Luke 19:1-10

By

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Luke Lesson 87

Why Jesus Came Luke 19:1-10

Sohan Singh has banned customers from his grocery store in England. He told a London newspaper that he was forced to take such drastic action because of people's bad manners. First, he banned smoking, then crude language, baby strollers, pets and finally customers themselves. Shoppers now must look through the window to spot items they want and then ring a bell to be served through a small hatch in the door. "I have lost business, but I cannot say how much," Singh said. "I am a man of principles, and I stand by my decision." (In *Flagstaff Live*, June 4-10, 1998.)

It seems to me that a grocer who bans customers from his store has lost sight of his purpose! If your aim is to sell groceries, then you must put up with some people whom you may dislike in order to achieve your purpose.

Just like that grocer, many churches have forgotten their Savior's purpose: to seek and to save those who are lost. We don't like the sinful habits and worldly ways of outsiders. If they want to come to the door of the church and tell us what they want, we will serve them. Otherwise, let them shop elsewhere! We must maintain our principles!

The Lord Jesus always kept in view the purpose of His coming to earth. He states it in Luke 19:10, the theme verse of the Gospel of Luke: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus is stating this purpose in response to the crowd, which grumbled that He had gone to be the guest of a man who was a sinner, the chief tax collector, Zaccheus. Jesus is saying, "Precisely! I am going to be the guest of a great sinner because that is the express reason I came to this earth as the Son of Man: to seek and to save those who are lost in sin."

If you had taken a poll in Israel in Jesus' day, you would have found that tax collectors were not popular fellows! They were the scum of the earth. For personal gain they served Rome, taking unfair advantage of their own countrymen. Zaccheus was not just

a tax collector, but a *chief* tax collector, which made people despise the man all the more. The average tax-paying citizen would have said, "If I could get that little runt alone in a dark alley, if he lived through it, he would go into another occupation!"

In light of the public hatred of tax collectors, it is significant that every time they are mentioned in Luke, it is in a favorable light (3:12; 5:27; 7:29; 15:1; 18:10; 19:2). In fact, Jesus picked one (Levi, or Matthew) as one of His twelve apostles! This shows Jesus' heart for sinners and the transforming power of His saving grace. Luke tells the story of Zaccheus' conversion shortly after the story of the rich young ruler. After that young man walked away from salvation because of clinging to his riches, Jesus said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" In fact, it is impossible, just as a camel cannot go through the eye of a needle. But, before we despair, He added, "The things impossible with men are possible with God" (18:24, 27). Zaccheus' story shows us the salvation of a rich man by God's grace and power.

If you follow Jesus, then His purpose must be your purpose. If you do not yet follow Jesus, then Zaccheus' response to Jesus should be your response. This story shows us that ...

Since Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, sinners should respond to His call quickly with joyful repentance.

We will look first at why Jesus came to this earth; and, then at how sinners should respond to the Savior.

1. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

A. Christ came to seek the lost.

Jesus refers to Himself here as the Son of Man, His favorite way to refer to Himself. Although it took great condescension for Jesus Christ to lay aside the glory of heaven and to take on human nature, He always delighted in being a man. In Jesus we see perfect humanity, apart from sin, living in total dependence on the Father. Son of Man emphasizes that Jesus was in every way human, except for our sin. He used it with increasing frequency as He anticipated the cross. Thus, "Its meaning for Him was inextricably bound up with His work of redemption" (D. Guthrie, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* [Zondervan], 3:568).

But the title also affirms the full deity of our Lord. Jesus used it when referring to the fact that He existed in heaven before descending to earth and that He would again ascend into heaven (John 3:13; 6:62). He used it to assert that the Father had given Him all authority to execute judgment (John 5:27). He said that as the Son of Man He had authority on earth to forgive sins (Luke 5:20-24). He used it often in reference to His second coming in power and glory (Luke 17:22-30; 18:8; 21:36; Matt. 24:30; 25:31).

In fact, at His trial the high priest adjured Him by the living God to tell them whether He was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus replied, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of glory." He was quoting from Daniel 7:13, 14 and applying it to Himself. At this the priest accused Him of blasphemy. If Jesus did not mean that as the Son of Man, He is God, surely He would have corrected the priest's mistaken impression and absolved Himself of the charge. By letting it stand, Jesus affirmed that they were correct: the Son of Man is the Son of God, one with the Father.

When Jesus says in our text that "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost," He was thus referring to the fact that as the second person of the Trinity, He had taken on human flesh and had come to this earth to offer Himself in the place of sinners. He took our penalty on Himself, so that we could be saved from the penalty we deserve. God would not have taken such extreme measures as the incarnation and death of His Son if lost people were able to save themselves. They are lost and so they must be sought and found. Christ came to seek the lost.

(1) Christ seeks the lost by taking the initiative.

Zaccheus was not seeking Christ; Christ was seeking Zaccheus. We are not told what motivated this despised little man to fight the crowds in order to see Jesus on that day. Most commentators agree that he was probably curious. Perhaps he had heard that this Teacher had chosen a tax collector named Levi, to be one of His disciples. Perhaps he had heard the common complaint of the Pharisees and others, that this Man socialized with notorious sinners. Hearing that news may have given Zaccheus a glimmer of hope. Perhaps his guilty conscience nagged him, and he thought,

"Maybe Jesus could forgive my sins." But whatever tugged at Zaccheus to fight the crowds and finally to climb into that tree so that he could see Jesus, it was not because Zaccheus was first seeking Jesus. It was because Jesus was first seeking Zaccheus.

We know this because the Bible plainly declares, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God" (Rom. 3:10-11). Jesus Himself plainly taught, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him." He repeats in the same context, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" (John 6:44; 65). If Zaccheus was in that tree to seek Jesus, it was because the Father was drawing him to Jesus.

We don't know if Zaccheus would have been content just to get a glimpse of Jesus as He passed by under that sycamore tree, because Jesus didn't give him a chance. Jesus easily could have passed under that tree and never looked up. The crowd was thronging around Him. He was passing through Jericho (19:1), steadfastly moving toward Jerusalem and the cross (18:31-34; 19:28). But when our Lord came to the place, He took the initiative. He looked up and said, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house" (19:5). Zaccheus had wanted to see Jesus, but he had no prior clue that Jesus wanted to see him!

John Calvin notes "the astonishing kindness" of our Lord who took the initiative to seek out this notorious sinner from whom others recoiled before there was any request on Zaccheus' part (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], "A Harmony of the Evangelists," 2:434). Charles Spurgeon said, "Christ does not leave it to ourselves to seek him, or else it would be left indeed, for so vile is human nature that although heaven be offered, and though hell thunder in our ears, yet there never was, and there never will be, any man who, unconstrained by sovereign grace, will run in the way of salvation, and so escape from hell and flee to heaven" (*Spurgeon's Sermons* [Baker], 6:105). Thus if you are seeking God today, you can know that it is only because of the Savior's kindness in taking the initiative to seek you first.

(2) Christ seeks the lost personally and particularly.

We don't know how Jesus knew Zaccheus' name, whether by divine omniscience or whether someone told Him. But out of all the people in that great crowd, the Savior zeroed in on this one little man. There were probably some boys up in that tree or in other trees, but Jesus focused on this chief tax collector. On several other occasions, Jesus accepted the hospitality of others, but this is the only recorded instance where He invited Himself to someone's house. He was going after Zaccheus personally.

Jesus does not call the mass of humanity to Himself, hoping against hope that somehow, somewhere, someone will respond and come to Him. Rather, He calls individuals by name and His call is effectual—it powerfully accomplishes His purpose. He saw Matthew sitting in his tax office and said, "Follow Me." He left everything behind and began following Jesus (Luke 5:27). He saw Peter and Andrew fishing and said, "Follow Me." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Shortly after, He saw James and John mending their nets and He called them. They also immediately left the boat and their father and followed Him (Matt. 4:18-22).

Have you had that experience, where the Spirit of God was dealing with *your* soul? Perhaps you were listening to a sermon and you felt that it was aimed directly at you. Jesus was calling you very personally and individually. Perhaps even now you can hear the Savior calling you by name and saying, "Follow Me." Jesus Christ seeks the lost individually by name and calls them into a personal relationship with Himself.

B. Christ came to save the lost.

Salvation refers to God's rescuing a perishing soul from His eternal wrath and judgment, which the person deserves due to his sin. Christ does not just seek the lost and then try to persuade them to decide to accept Him as Savior. He seeks *and saves* the lost. He announced regarding Zaccheus, "Today salvation has come to this house." This shows us three things about Christ's saving us:

(1) Christ actually saves the lost.

In other words, He did not come just to make salvation *possible* for everyone, but rather to make salvation *actual* for those whom the Father had given to Him. In John 6:37 Jesus declared, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me." Then He adds, "And this

is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." (6:39). Our salvation does not depend on our weak will, but on the mighty and certain will of God and on the keeping power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus told Zaccheus, "Today I *must* stay at your house," it was the must of divine necessity. It is the same "must" of John 4:4, where it says that Jesus "*had to* pass through Samaria." Why? He easily could have walked around Samaria, as all the Jews did. He had to pass through Samaria because He had a divine appointment there with the woman at the well, and with her whole village. If Christ's reason for coming into this world was to seek and to save those whom the Father had given to Him before the foundation of the world, then that intention will be accomplished. Salvation is not due to the will of man, but rather to the will of God (John 1:12-13). His purpose in saving the lost is never frustrated by the rebellious will of sinners.

(2) Christ saves the lost, not the found.

You may be thinking, "How do I know that Christ will save me in particular?" Do you see yourself as lost? Do you know that apart from God's grace, you would justly spend eternity in hell? Do you recognize that if God left you to yourself, you would never seek Him or believe in Him? If so, then the good news is, "Christ Jesus came ... to save *sinners*" (1 Tim. 1:15). He died for the *ungodly* (Rom. 5:6). If the words, "lost," "sinner," "ungodly," fit you, then you can have hope, because Christ came to save such people from their sins.

But if you say, "I may have my faults, but I'm not *lost*," then I cannot offer you a Savior. Jesus came to save the lost. If you say, "I'm only human, of course, but I'm not a *sinner*," then Christ did not come to save you. He came into this world to save sinners. If you say, "I know that I have done plenty of wrong things, but I wouldn't call myself *ungodly*," then I'm afraid that Christ did not die for you. Scripture says that Christ died for the ungodly.

(3) Christ assures those whom He saves.

Jesus proclaims, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham" (19:9). He does not mean that every member of Zaccheus' family automatically got saved because

Zaccheus did. A man's salvation does not extend to his wife and children, unless they personally repent and believe. Salvation is always individual and personal. But, when the head of a household believes, the entire household comes under the influence of the gospel and in that sense is set apart from the unbelieving world (1 Cor. 7:14; Acts 16:31-34).

When Jesus says that Zaccheus is a son of Abraham, he does not mean simply that he is a Jew by birth. He meant it in a spiritual sense, that Zaccheus was now a true son of Abraham, in the sense that Paul put it, "It is those who are of faith that are the sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). Jesus used that phrase because the Pharisees self-righteously thought that they were right with God because they were physical descendants of Abraham and they outwardly kept the law. But Jesus is saying that this sinner whom they despised was a true son of Abraham, possessing salvation, because like Abraham, Zaccheus believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3).

Jesus proclaimed Zaccheus' salvation before the crowd, in Zaccheus' presence, to give him assurance of God's forgiveness. You can be sure that as soon as Jesus left town, Satan would come to Zaccheus and say, "It was just a flash in the pan. You know how wicked your heart is! How can you call yourself a child of God?" The self-righteous crowd would have taunted him, "So you've become a follower of Jesus, have you! It won't last! Just wait! You'll go back to your old cheating, greedy ways!"

But whom the Lord saves, He keeps. And whom He keeps, He assures repeatedly with His love and kindness that they are His children forever. As Paul put it, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:33-34). As he goes on to show, nothing can "separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Since salvation then is totally of God, are we to sit back and do nothing? Clearly, not! The same Bible that says that we cannot seek after God commands us to seek Him (Rom. 3:11; Isa. 55:6). We should respond to God's command as Zaccheus did:

2. Sinners should respond to Christ's call quickly with joyful repentance.

Perhaps you came to church today without much sense of your need for salvation. Like Zaccheus, maybe you were curious. You heard that the music was good and that even the sermons were sometimes interesting, and so you came. But now you realize that you are a sinner and that the Lord Jesus is calling you to come down out of that tree where you're perched to watch the parade. He wants to come and stay at your house. What should you do?

- A. You should respond with haste.

Jesus said, "Zaccheus, *hurry* and come down" (19:5). It's not easy to hurry down out of a tree, but Jesus told him to hurry! And, Zaccheus "hurried and came down" (19:6). I don't know if he jumped or whether he scratched himself on the branches as he climbed down. But he didn't waste any time.

Neither should you! The Bible says, "*Now* is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). It says, "*Today* if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 4:7). You may not have tomorrow. If you put off responding to Christ's call, you may be in hell tomorrow. Even if you get scratched up, hurry down from that tree!

- B. You should respond with obedience.

Jesus commanded and Zaccheus responded. He didn't debate with Jesus, "Who, me? Do you know about my past?" He didn't protest that he wasn't the religious type. He didn't say, "I've got some important appointments at my tax office I need to attend to. Could we make it some other time?" He obeyed. If Christ is calling you to Himself, don't debate with Him. Obey!

- C. You should respond with joy.

Zaccheus received Him gladly (lit., "rejoicing"). Zaccheus was up there in the tree, enjoying the parade, when suddenly Jesus stopped and looked up at him. Uh oh! What would Jesus say? Would He condemn Zaccheus for his cheating, greedy ways? Would He use him as a bad example to the crowd? Would He despise him as the Pharisees did?

Then Zaccheus saw what looked like a smile on Jesus' face. Instead of a condemning look, Jesus' eyes twinkled. Then he

heard, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." Zaccheus rejoiced! Even so, when the reality of God's grace floods your soul, great joy will be your response.

D. You should respond with repentance.

Zaccheus' faith is not mentioned directly, but it is evident by his repentance. We don't know specifically what Jesus and Zaccheus talked about in his home that day, but the fruit of it is evident. Zaccheus announces, probably in front of the crowd, that he is giving half of his possessions to the poor and he is repaying those whom he has defrauded fourfold. The law only required adding one-fifth to the amount, but Zaccheus is going all out. Everyone who has truly believed in the Lord Jesus for salvation will show it by righting wrongs that he has done and living in a godly manner in his future dealings with others. One of the surest tests of genuine repentance is when God gets a hold of our money!

Conclusion

I hope that you see through Zaccheus' story that Jesus Christ is a great Savior for great sinners. Spurgeon (*Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* [Baker], 3:445) illustrates this truth by saying, suppose that you came and told me of a great doctor in London. I asked, "What does he do?" You said, "He has many patients." "But, what does he do?" Finally, you reply, "He cures bad fingers." Well, that's not too impressive. But suppose, instead, you reply, "There have been many patients whom no one else could cure. They were near death, but he healed them." That's the kind of man whose praises we would sing. If we were sick, we would go to Him for the cure.

Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the worst of sinners. If you will respond to His call with joyful repentance, you will hear Him pronounce concerning you, "Today salvation has come to this house!" I pray that those of us who know His great salvation will ask Him to use us in seeking and saving those who are lost.

Discussion Questions

1. How can we become a friend to sinners without falling prey to the warning of 1 Corinthians 15:33?
2. Is it right to give a person assurance of salvation before there are any signs of repentance? Why/why not?
3. Why is it important to affirm that salvation is totally of the Lord, not at all of man?
4. How should we respond to the charge that the doctrine of divine election is not fair?

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