

Zacchaeus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Principal Clement Graham

[0 : 00] Let us turn again to the scripture we read in the Gospel according to Luke chapter 19. And we look at the story of Zacchaeus.

Maybe we can take as our text the words of verse 5. When Jesus came to the place he looked up and saw him and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must abide at thy house.

This is the story of a man's conversion. We don't know very much about the background details. The man is introduced to us just as the chief of the publicans and a man who was very rich.

We don't know any more than that about him. We don't know anything about his spiritual odyssey, what kind of religious or irreligious upbringing he had.

Nothing like that. What we do know is that he wasn't popular. People didn't like those who gave themselves to serve the Roman overlords and gather in taxes on their behalf.

[1 : 14] I suppose we could say that he wasn't the type of person that most people would expect to get converted. Indeed, a good many people might think that, and some even mutter aloud, that when this man was received so graciously by Jesus, he got a much better deal than ever he deserved.

There would be those of them, there were indeed, we are told, those of them who went about muttering something like, they didn't know what religion and the church was come to, when it was taking in people of this sort, people who had sold themselves to work for the enemies of the people of Israel.

What in the world was common decency coming to, when the church was, and when a man of God like Jesus was opening his arms to receive such a man as this?

So you may be sure, there weren't a lot of people who were hopping up and down and shouting hallelujah, when Jesus said, this day is salvation, come to this house.

And really that brings to our mind something for which we should be very, very thankful. And that is that Jesus chooses his own people.

[2 : 45] If those who were, if we may so express it, if those who were to be candidates for salvation, had to be nominated by those who already know the grace of salvation.

If nobody got into the house of God, nobody was received into the fellowship of God, and into the saving grace of God, but those who could muster a number of people, as it were, to certify, to sign nomination papers for them.

My, a lot of people would have no chance of salvation at all. But Jesus shows a concern for the outsider.

He showed throughout his whole earthly ministry a concern for those outside the pale of the recognized church of his day. He went to seek them, and when they came to him, he welcomed them.

Indeed, it caused a lot of ill speaking, it caused a lot of misrepresentation of Jesus. people began to speak ill of him, because they said, he receives sinners.

- [4 : 03] If you're to know a man by the company he keeps, what are you to think of this Jesus of Nazareth, when he receives sinners, and eats with them?
- And Jesus, in response, said to them, yes indeed, that is precisely the business on which I have come into this world.
- It's precisely for this that I am here, to seek and to save what was lost. I am come as the good shepherd to find the lost sheep, and what joy there is when the lost sheep is found.
- Or you ask the woman who has lost a treasured piece of jewelry, how she feels when after search, diligent search, she finds it, the joy, the relief, the gladness of heart she experiences.
- Or ask the man who thought that he had parted with his son forever, whose son had taken a road that he could no way approve, who has gone off into the far country to live riotously, to live in offense and defiance of every religious principle in which he had been taught.
- [5 : 31] Ask him, what he feels when that son comes back in penitence, the lost, found, and the dead come to life again.
- Well, that's what Jesus says, that's how it is, that is my attitude to the outsider, I want the outsider welcomed in, I want him brought in, I want him not to feel an outsider anymore, but a sharer in the fellowship of the people of God.
- and that's the story that is unfolded for us here in the experience of this one man. Let's look at it in a little more detail.
- I think we'll find that this story tells us about two-way eagerness, about a total change of outlook and life, and about a happy restoration.
- Well, let's think of the two-way eagerness that's brought to our notice here. There's eagerness for this meeting, eagerness both on the part of Zacchaeus and on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [6 : 47] No one, you cannot say that one is more eager than the other. Up to a point, we can quite easily appreciate Zacchaeus' eagerness.
- He wanted to see Jesus. But that's not all. It's not merely that he wanted a sight of somebody who was being spoken about.
- It wasn't simply a case of his wanting to see a figure of public acclaim at this time. Like we might join a crowd if we heard that Prince Charles or maybe some of you prefer to see Diana.
- Well, you might, you know who she is. You know who he is. That's not, that's not your concern. It's just to satisfy yourself that you've seen somebody that's being talked about, somebody who's in the public eye.
- But, as the story is told us here, that's not really what was in Zacchaeus' mind. The Greek text tells us very vividly the question that Zacchaeus was asking.
- [7 : 58] The question he was asking was not what like is he, but who is he? It was a question of wanting to know, wanting to ascertain the true identity, to come at the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, concerning Jesus of Nazareth.
- He wanted to get at the true identity, to understand the true authority and power of the man of Nazareth. death. We can remember that it was this same sort of quest that took the Pharisee Nicodemus to visit Jesus by night.
- He knew something about Jesus. He knew him as one who was working miracles and he knew that a man who did the things that Jesus was reported to have done was bound to be a messenger of God but he wasn't satisfied.

He didn't know the truth. He wanted to get at the truth. Who is he? There was a lot he wanted to learn about Jesus.

He wanted to get at the essential secret of the power, the essential secret of the identity of Jesus. And this was a search, this was something, a search of which Jesus himself approved.

[9 : 36] He himself indicated that it was most important that people should know who he is. Remember he stopped by the wayside once and asked the disciples about how people were identifying him.

Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? Well, they said some of them are saying that you are Elias, some are saying you're one of the prophets, come back.

Yes, but whom do you say? Who do you say? In what sense do you recognize? How do you identify me? Thou art the Son of God, Jesus the Son of God.

Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jonah, flesh and blood has not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.

This penetration into the secret, this recognition, this understanding of the secret of the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God, it's not just a matter of human logic, it's not a matter of deduction from the facts of the case according to our logic, it is a matter of divine revelation.

[10 : 56] Yet Jesus makes it clear that it is all important, it is essential that people should know who he is, the mission upon which he has come.

This is what John returns to in that part of his epistle, his first epistle that we read. What is the essence of understanding?

When have we penetrated to the very truth, the essential truth? Only when we understand, when we know him who is true.

When we know him who is true, when we know Jesus as the Son of God, this, he tells us, is the true God and eternal life.

This is the heart of salvation. To penetrate that secret, to know that truth, to be in that relationship with Jesus, recognizing him as the Son of God and come for our salvation.

[12 : 05] salvation. Well, that's the objective. That's the quest upon which Zacchaeus set out that morning. We don't know, as I said earlier, we don't know how long this particular quest had occupied his mind, how many questions he had asked, what information he had gathered, but we do know that this is the quest that brought him out this morning.

The chance not just to satisfy idle curiosity, but a compelling urge, the compelling urge to take an opportunity that he knew in his inner heart would be non-recurring.

And it was so all important that it didn't matter to him that he had to elbow his way through a crowd of people he didn't like and who didn't like him.

It didn't matter to him that he had to throw away his adult dignity and climb a sycamore tree like a schoolboy. In a matter of this importance, if we feel the urgency that Zacchaeus felt, we won't be put off by temporary embarrassment or by popular obstruction.

The blind man who sat by the wayside tells us the same thing. Remember how it was with Bartimaeus. He was sitting by the wayside and the crowd gathered and he asked what all the stir was about and they told him Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

[13 : 50] He knew that was the moment of opportunity. It was a bit embarrassing, no doubt, when he started to call upon Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.

And the people were telling him, each man, be quiet, behave yourself. But he carried on shouting. This was not an opportunity to let a little matter like personal embarrassment stand in the way.

And Jesus didn't turn a deaf ear to his shouting. He didn't mind being stopped. He called Bartimaeus to him.

And Bartimaeus knew that it was well worth having overcome the popular obstruction, having overcome the personal embarrassment involved, it was well worth it in order to receive his sight.

Well, without doubt, Zacchaeus must have heard some things about Jesus. And that's what made, what stimulated his inquiry and made his inquiry all the more urgent.

[15 : 03] Who is he? Can he meet my need? For the fact, can he bring me peace? Will he enable me to live with myself at peace again?

For what Zacchaeus is telling us in all this activity, for all his outward success, for all the fact that he's, for all that he's got on in the world and he's made money and no doubt there are some around who envy him the way in which he has acquired riches.

For all of that, what Zacchaeus is telling us, it hasn't met the need of my heart. There's something deep down that I may indeed, I may have got on in some things, but I'm now discovering there's something money can't buy.

There's something that my success in this world cannot bring to me. There are things, there are many people out there who will tell us that in making a success of things in worldly terms, they find themselves tainted, unclean, self-alienated, not what they wanted to be.

How many people who have got on in the world, if they were to unburden themselves to you, would tell you, but I'm not what I wanted to be.

[16 : 35] Indeed, I've become what something that in an earlier time, something that at one time in my experience, I myself would thoroughly have despised.

I can understand the people who have nothing but contempt for me, because in truth, I have a contempt for myself. And given that conviction, given this sense of self-alienation, given this recognition that there is nothing within but what is to be despised, and given also the knowledge that one is near who has a reputation for meeting this need, for dealing with people who are so inwardly, spiritually distraught, isn't there reason for urgency?

Who wouldn't try to get at him? You've got to be sure, indeed, you've got to have some sense, some inward conviction that this is the right person, you've got to have some inward conviction already about who he is, you want to know if he knows you.

who? I think that was one of the things that shocked Nicodemus, when he came to try and find out who Jesus is, he found that Jesus knew him better than he knew himself.

It was certainly one of the things that astonished Nathaniel, when Nathaniel approached Jesus and Jesus said, behold, an Israelite in whom is no God.

[18 : 10] Master, since when have you known me? Before that Peter called you when you were under the fig tree. I knew thee.

And it was that recognition that Jesus, it was the recognition that Jesus had this penetrating and thorough going knowledge of himself that brought Nathaniel to say, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.

See if he knows you. See if he can make you what you need to be. See if he can meet the deep need of your heart.

That's the eagerness that characterized Zacchaeus that day that he set out and climbed the tree to see Jesus, who he was. But we said that there was also, that there was a two-way, a reciprocal eagerness.

An eagerness also on the part of Jesus. I don't doubt for a moment that in the popular phase of his ministry, Jesus was well acquainted with people crowding about to see him, just to look at him, some indeed to touch him.

[19 : 34] There were plenty of people, no doubt, often who climbed trees to see him or stand on walls to see him go by. But he didn't make a point to speaking directly to each and all of them.

But here, as he passed by, he stopped and looked up to Zacchaeus. Come down immediately, he said. I must stay at your house today.

the truth is that Jesus is never insensitive, never insensitive to the longing heart.

He's never unaware of or unresponsive to the shyest approach. Ask the woman who came behind him in the throng to touch the hem of his garment.

she couldn't bring herself to push forward more than that. And in the midst of all that crowd, so that his disciples, when he asked the question, who touched me, his disciples almost said to him, it's a silly question, you see how the people are pressing upon you, and you're asking, who touched you?

[20 : 44] Yes, but somebody, somebody has touched me with a touch of faith. And the woman comes to confess what she has done and what she has received, and to receive further benediction.

He's never insensitive to or unresponsive to the very shyest approach. He's never insensitive to the longing heart, because the truth of the matter is that it is his spirit.

The spirit of Christ is the one who creates and maintains and inflates within us the sense of longing. Jesus knew that he had an appointment with Zacchaeus.

It was, if we may so express it, part of the agenda for this day, part of the doing of his father's business upon which he was come. I must stay today at your house.

There's a divine imperative, the divine imperative upon the one who said, my meat and my drink is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work.

[21 : 58] He knows his lost sheep and he won't pass them by. And isn't that an encouragement to any seeker.

Maybe the seeker is a person who is too shy to speak to anyone here. Can't really unburden yourself to anybody here.

There may not be the equivalent of a tree in which you can hide yourself but you withdraw into yourself and yet at this moment you know that if Jesus be near and if he should pass by and you not be able to unburden yourself to him, that would be a heartbreaking, a ruinous experience because deep inside one, one knows the moment of destiny in the moment of confrontation with the one who is the truth, the true God and eternal life.

and the glorious and gracious thing is that he won't pass by. He knows the longing heart and he's as eager to meet and to stay with and to talk with his people about the way of life as ever the poor and the needy are to call upon him.

Never fear, never fear that eagerness on your part or anxiety on your part will be met with indifference on his part. He is eager too.

[23 : 38] He is aware of the divine imperative in all of this. Welcome is one of his favorite words. And that's the story of the reciprocal eagerness of Zacchaeus and Jesus of Nazareth.

Now we said that as the story unfolds it tells us also of a total reorientation, a total change of perspective and of life that took place in the man Zacchaeus.

He has found out who Jesus is. He knows him to be the Lord of life. He knows him to be the mediator of forgiveness.

He knows that that forgiveness and that peace has been granted to him in the grace of Jesus. And it's now his for keeps.

How do we know all this? How can we persuade ourselves that such a change, such a saving change has taken place?

[24 : 50] in the experience of Zacchaeus? Well we can see it in terms of what he is now ready to do. There is in his attitude, in his perspective on life, there is a total change in regard to his concept or his evaluation of things, of property, of money.

It had made this, it had almost been his God to make unto a mass of fortune. Indeed, just recently he'd have said that a fool and his money were easily parted and one thing he'd guarantee to you was that he was no fool.

And now he knows that he was a fool to think that riches could solve his deepest problem. money. His money is now an embarrassment to him.

His success in the world has turned sour. Now he's like the man who had seen treasure hidden in a field. All that he had himself is worthless by comparison.

He'll sell all, he'll get rid of everything he has in order to possess that. Or like the man who's seeking goodly pearls, sees the pearl of good price, of great price, and gets rid of everything he has in order to possess that, the true riches.

[26 : 22] What is anything in comparison of that? God, and not Zacchaeus, now has the ordering of his affairs.

Ask him but a little while before, who is master in your affairs? And he'd have told you, I'm master of my own affairs. I control my own destiny. I think no man, any man who, to be a man should stand on his own feet and be independent of any power whatsoever.

But now he knows that the ordering of affairs is not his own. He's not master of his own affairs. He's not master of his own goods.

They're not his to dispose of just as he sees with. With them he must fulfil the will of God. There's a total change of perspective in regard to things.

And there's a total change of perspective in regard to people. Previously, without doubt, he had regarded people as there to be exploited.

[27 : 35] Get what you can out of them, squeeze what you can out of them. the whole way of life, his whole professional life, had been built upon this. The Romans tell you they want so much for the district of which you are in charge.

Well, the business of the chief publican is to get as much more as he possibly can, because the surplus is all his own. Squeeze them, exploit them, don't listen to their excuses, don't listen to their complaints, don't pay any attention to their distress, their agony, the suffering that it involves.

But now the poor are his concerned. Lord, behold, the half of my goods I give to the poor. They're his concerned.

They've suddenly become, they've suddenly begun to weigh upon his conscience. The cheated are his concern. If I've taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

The cheated, the exploited, they're his concern. People have suddenly become important. But most of all, there's a totally changed attitude to God.

[28 : 58] For the new evaluation of people and of things is an outcome of his beginning to think God's thoughts after him. Previously his attitude had been, who is the almighty?

What prophet is there that I should pray unto him? Now his desire is, Lord, let me fulfil your will. And what he demonstrates and demonstrates very actively is that true penitence is not just a matter of saying I'm sorry.

The true penitence is not just a matter of word but also of deed. It's not just a matter of saying I'm sorry, it's a matter of obedience, of obedience and new obedience to the word and authority of God.

And then the story tells us of a blessed or happy restoration. Restoration of Zacchaeus. Restoration of Zacchaeus or restoration of his proper personal identity.

He set out to find out who Jesus is. And in finding out who Jesus is he finds out who he is himself. No longer estranged from himself.

[30 : 26] No longer that kind of almost that schizophrenic that the alienated the man alienated from God is bound to be. Disorientated self alienated disowned but now a son of Abraham for as much as this man also is a son of Abraham.

He's got his identity. He knows now who he is. He knows who he is in the family of God. God's name is named upon him. You know that's one of the things that the scriptures refer to again and again that the secret of a person's personality is so often bound up in the name that is named upon him.

That is why the Israelites spoke about God's name being named upon them. They had their true identity in relationship to God.

there's restoration of personal identity. There's restoration of covenant security because as soon as the man as Jesus speaks of him as a son of Abraham he speaks of him as a child of the covenant.

He speaks of him as one who has come within the context of that covenant that God made with his people when he says I will be your God and you will be my people.

[31 : 57] There's restoration to covenant security and there's also restoration to family affection. Maybe one of the things that had pressed most hardly and most bitterly upon Zacchaeus in the years that were past was the sense of not being respected not being wanted nobody liked to think nobody would want people to know if they were on good terms with the tax collector.

Now he is restored to the family affection. Maybe the scribes and Pharisees some of them will have a bit of hard swallowing to do before they can receive him.

But for the true people of God for those who know the grace of the Redeemer there is a welcome into the fellowship that is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Now he will have Jesus for his defender when people speak ill of him. You remember how ready Jesus was to defend his people to defend when Mary anointed him with the ointment that was very precious and Judas found fault Jesus springs to her defense.

She hath done it against the day of my burying. when the elder brother finds fault over the merrymaking upon the return of the prodigal the father defends the merriment and the rejoicing this my son was lost and is found he was dead and is alive.

[33 : 36] Restoration of personal identity restoration to covenant security restoration to family affection what it all amounts to is that this is salvation the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost it means that the lost has been found it means that the lost was found when he thought he was doing the seeking in reality another did the seeking and found him he thought he set out to find out who Jesus is and he discovered that Jesus knew who he is and indeed knew how to restore him and in his grace received him into the fellowship of the family of God and that's the grace that's offered to us that's the grace that's offered to every one of us in our personal need in our personal discontent in our personal sense of shame and self contempt that we come to the

Lord Jesus Christ and know the salvation which is in him this is the true God and eternal life let us pray though he was rich yet for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might be rich in his name Amen