

Jesus' Mission Statement

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning and may I add my own word of welcome and my own word of appreciation. It's a great pleasure for me to be here. Thomas is a great friend and he's been a great help to me this year so I'm delighted to be able to join with you this morning and to share something from what the Bible has to say. I teach down in Edinburgh, I teach theology and I teach practice both what we believe and what that looks like in our lives and that's constantly the theme of the Bible, what we believe and what it looks like. So I'd like to read to us now from the New Testament we've heard from Isaiah. I'd like to read now from Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 19 and I hope to be able to connect the threads of both passages together because that's exactly what happens continually. Old Testament promise, New Testament fulfillment, Old Testament picture, New Testament reality. Luke chapter 19, Jesus, he entered Jericho and was passing through. Now just to remind yourself of the chronology here is that Jesus is now on a final journey so each place that he encounters is his last time. He is moving up, Jerusalem is in a dip, it's a low place, but this is the last occasion that

Jesus will ever be in this place. He entered Jericho and was passing through and there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich and he was seeking to see who Jesus was but on account of the crowd he could not because he was small of stature so he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him for he was about to pass that way 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. So he hurried and came down and received him gladly and when they saw it they all grumbled. He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner and Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, behold Lord, half of all of my goods I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I restore it fourfold and Jesus said to him today salvation has come to this house because he also is a son of Abraham for the son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Especially those last words I hope will echo in our ears this morning because this describes who Jesus is that he is the son of man which is not just a general description of a human being but this is an exalted description of one who has all power and all authority and is given a kingdom by God and a people by God so we are told who he is and we are told what he has come to do. You see he has come to seek and he has come to save. We often speak of the work of Jesus as work that is completed and of course that's true. He lived a perfect life. He died a sacrificial death. He rose triumphant from the grave and we can all use the past tense verbs for these events. He lived, he died, he rose, he ascended, he seated at the right hand of the father on high and yet the Bible also tells us that the work of Jesus continues and is ongoing so he's continuing to seek. He's continuing to save. He's continuing to follow and to search and to find. I don't know if you've ever played hide and seek.

I think maybe we've all played hide and seek with your children but if you have the opportunity of playing hide and seek with a child it's quite funny because the child will maybe get a blanket and pull the blanket over them but it's really not that difficult to find them because the sofa has a large lump on it or you know there's you can see that somebody is standing behind a curtain. Now we think we're good at hiding but just like the child who hides in obvious places we hide in obvious places but Jesus has come to seek us out not only to seek us not only to find us but he's come to seek and to save. And I'd like to spend just a few moments looking at Isaiah chapter 49 because what we have in Isaiah you see Isaiah is a prophet that means he has a message for the people. He also has something to say about the future but

Isaiah interestingly is a songwriter. We often think of David as a songwriter and Ethan is a songwriter the sons of Korah they're songwriters but in Isaiah there's four songs of the servant and these songs are kind of like extended descriptions of who the servant is and what the servant has

come to do. If you're interested you could find the first one is in Isaiah 42 the second one here is in 49 the third song is in 50 and then the fourth and final song straddles 52 and 53 it's probably the most familiar of the servants songs one that we often read at communion times but if you think of the songs as kind of extended descriptions of this servant who and what. So this last week I was asked to help out at another university and I needed to update my CV I hadn't updated my CV for 15 years and you have to update your CV to kind of tell people you know what you've done where you've studied what you've you know what qualifications you have so that the prospective employer or the perspective you know person that wants your services because okay this is this is the person. Now ordinarily if you're applying for a post you would ask for a description tell me the job that you want done and if I look at the job description I look at my own qualifications I can see that there might be a match. Well let's look at the description here in Isaiah 49 of this person who is called the servant because it's quite a remarkable job description but it begins in quite a humble way. You see this word in verse three and he said to me you are my servant in verse six my servant also there is repeated and this word then and now is quite a humble word you might hire a servant to tidy up the house you might hire a servant to tidy up the garden you might hire someone to do things that you don't want to do you know actions or things that just are not that interesting or not that attractive so you hire a servant but this humble title doesn't do justice to the work that the servant is given to do so if you think of this job description

[7 : 46] I want to just highlight three words from Isaiah 49 and we're going to see how those three words are fulfilled when we fast forward to the New Testament so the first word is servant and that's a noun so that the verb would be serve so the this one who is described here is one who will serve but when you begin to explore the service it's quite remarkable because despite an unpromising beginning you know where it looks as if the servant's labor in verse four has been spent in vain but the description continues that God has something to say to this servant and he has given this servant certain responsibilities in verse six we're told that the servant is going to raise up the tribes of Israel of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel that's quite a job that's quite a responsibility because the people of God have a tendency to wander and the people of God then and now have a tendency to be far from where they're meant to be so this servant is called to restore God's people but notice in verse six that the description is prefaced with this it is too light a thing so not only is the servant going to bring back the people of God as if it were that job description would be too easy because we're told that actually the servant is going to do more than that not less but more because the servant is also going to act as a light for the nations so that the salvation of God may reach to the end of the earth so if the first word is serve the second word is save so this job description is one who will serve God this job description is one who will save on behalf of God but even more than that we're told that the people who are to be saved are quite remote you see they're at the ends of the earth they're members of the nations they're scattered to the north and to the south and they're scattered to the east and to the west and we're told that this servant not only is going to serve he's not only going to save but he's going to seek and find these lost people if you just read down a few verses it is verse 8 we're told that the God says in a day of salvation I have helped you in a day of favor I have answered you I will keep you I will make you a covenant to the people and the servant will say to the prisoners in verse 9 come out and to those who are in darkness appear but if you think of it logically how can you say to a group of prisoners come out unless you are in the proximity of these people you don't say this from a distance but you say it up close so the servant who is going to save has to find these remote people and they're in all different places in all different circumstances and none of the circumstances seem that promising the nations the ends of the earth the prisoners those who are in darkness one of the roles that I have in Edinburgh as I'm a prison chaplain been there for about 22 years and there's I've met thousands of people over the years and I remember one very vividly we used to have young offenders at Edinburgh young offenders are 16 to 21 and I remember meeting this young guy and he must have been 16 but he looked as if he was 12 and I explained my I said

my name is Bob I'm one of the chaplains you know are you new here yes I'm new here is there anything I can do to help you and he looked at me he looked up because I'm tall I was taller than him and he said can you take me home and I said that's the one thing I can't do I can't take you home you're here and you have to stay here but you see the servant can say to the prisoner come out the servant can say to the ones in darkness be free or appear so this description is quite remarkable because not only does the servant serve and save and seek but we're told then that this

servant will provide and will care so these scattered people who are vulnerable and weak these scattered people who are isolated and oppressed they're now going to be a people who no longer hunger verse 10 nor nor thirst they're not going to be subject to the you know to the danger or to the threats or or to the harshness of the weather because the servant is going to lead them and he's going to guide them he's going to give them springs of water so that they can be third their thirst can be quenched he's going to guide them along paths that are safe and secure and he's going to bring them back to God himself so think of these three words there's one who is to serve there's one who is to seek and to save serving and seeking and saving

Isaiah is a unique book in the Old Testament over 66 times the New Testament author goes back to the old and quotes from Isaiah because Isaiah so vividly describes the Lord Jesus he vividly describes who Jesus is and he vividly describes what Jesus has come to do Jesus has come to serve Jesus has come to seek and Jesus has come to save and I think at least three times in the New Testament Isaiah 49 is quoted verbatim because the New Testament authors see in Isaiah 49 a vivid picture of Jesus Christ himself so those three words one who serves and one who seeks and one who saves we fast forward to the New Testament and remember that scene and this is actually in Mark's

Gospel remember when the disciples were were kind of arguing and they wanted the best places in Mark chapter 10 I think it was James and John they wanted to be at the right they wanted to be at the left when Jesus came into his kingdom Jesus had to correct them and in verse 45 of Mark 10 for even the Son of Man same title that we have in Luke 19 even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many so you think of the job description we need one who is able to serve we need one who is willing to serve we need one who was willing to serve even at a great cost that's ticked that box is satisfied because we're told that the Son of Man has come to serve and he's come to give and the life that he gives as a life that will be a ransom not for a few not for a select number but there'll be a ransom paid for the many so the one who has come to serve is none other than Jesus and we turn to our passage in Luke chapter 19 and those two other words are captured there so not only is he one who has come to serve but he's one who has come to seek in verse 10 of Luke 19 for the Son of Man the same title came to seek and to save the lost I was reading a poem an old poem it was written in 1890 my natural interest is history and when you're a history person some of your best friends are people who have lived hundreds of years ago so I like to read old books I like to read old stories and I was reading an old poem quite a remarkable poem the author was down and out a derelict lived on the on the streets of London but somehow pen paper wrote an 182 line poem and submitted it to a publisher the publisher was keen to publish it but they had no idea who the author was and they had to search the streets to find this very disheveled man he once had been training to be a doctor but alcohol and drug misuse overtook him and he was living rough on the streets but he wrote a poem and the poem captured what he felt was the story of his life he entitled the poem the hound of heaven and the hound of heaven was God himself seeking him out throughout the course of his life I'm not gonna read the 182 lines I'll read the first the first stanza I fled him down the nights and down the days I fled him down the arches of the years I fled him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind and in the midst of tears I hid from him an underrunning laughter up this dead hopes

I sped and shot precipitated down titanic glooms of chasm fears from those strong feet that followed followed after but with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace deliberate speed majestic instancy they beat and a voice beat more important than the feet all things betray thee who bestrided me so Francis Thompson was aware that there was a hound from heaven that was constantly following him constantly seeking to overtake him constantly reaching out he was frightened he was confused he felt that this this hound this force would would do him harm and would do him ill but then he recognized that actually this was the one who was to do him good to find him to rescue him to save him to set him free and this poem was a testimony of the grace of God and of the persistent seeking of God in his life and I think we need to recognize that God continues to seek people he continues to reach out he continues to speak he continues to search because Jesus said he's come on a mission he's come to serve and give his life he's come to seek and he's come to save you see Zacchaeus thought he would go to see Jesus but actually Jesus had a prior engagement and Jesus's prior engagement was the Zacchaeus himself I think that it's true that if you or I find Jesus we can use that language and people do in their testimonies I found Jesus I found Jesus when I was at my lowest or I found Jesus in a very dark or challenging time and that's true but I think biblically we need to say that the only way we find Jesus is that Jesus has first found us or Jesus

has placed himself right in our path so as we're moving forward we literally stumble upon Jesus it's not so much that we have found him but that he has placed himself where he may be found so he's come to seek and he's come to seek some of the most remarkable of people

[20 : 16] Zacchaeus Zacchaeus was not the good Zacchaeus was the bad Zacchaeus didn't have a reputation that you would that you would a reputation that you would envy Zacchaeus had a reputation that you would shun and yet it was Jesus coming to Jericho and if you know your Old Testament Jericho was a city under a curse it should never have been rebuilt it was destroyed in the time of Joshua you remember that but it was never intended to be rebuilt and yet in this unlikely city and this unlikely person Jesus deliberately went through Jericho in order to meet Zacchaeus each of us is living a life I'm 56 you might be older than me you might be younger than me each of our lives in many ways is very different different backgrounds or different cultures different experiences different desires different goals and yet I think we can say that there's something common to each and every one of our experience that there is one who is seeking after us there is one who is following us at a pace one who is not easily dissuaded one who is not easily put off one who is not easily rejected you see the language of Isaiah 49 is that even though there was a beginning of a hostility that the reaction to this servant was negative ultimately there would be a worldwide celebration the heavens and the earth would rejoice because this servant achieved his final purposes that the captives would be released that those sitting in darkness would experience light that those in despair would experience joy the hungry would be filled the thirsty their thirst would be satisfied and despite an unpromising beginning and as we know in Luke chapter 19 Jesus is moving in one direction and he's moving in the direction of a cross and it seems as if all is lost the Savior has died the righteous one has been crucified we had hoped you remember the language of the man on the road to Emmaus we had hoped that it would be him we had hoped that he would restore the kingdom to Israel but now now he's dead and now he's buried I find it striking the language that Jesus uses to describe himself because he is the one doing the seeking you see over many years I've been a

Christian for 30 years now I've been teaching for 11 years and I'm constantly learning the old lesson I think that the kids learn in Sunday school that the answer to every question really is Jesus sometimes you think well this is what God does and this is what I do so God has done all that is needed for salvation and then he leaves it to you or to me to go out and to find people and to introduce people to Jesus and to bring people into the kingdom but Jesus has actually that's his work not only does he serve not only does he give his life but he's come to seek in order to save so actually the work is his oh we can be instruments in his hands yes we can be signposts we can speak we can encourage we can invite but isn't it refreshing and it and isn't it it relieves so much pressure that he is the one who does the work from beginning to end he's the one who gives his life he's the one who died he's the one who was raised to life he's the one who was seeking men and women boys and girls and the seeker is also the savior so often I think if we're honest we're a bit anxious we're a bit concerned I don't think I can sustain this life I don't think I can continue in this way I don't have the strength I don't have the wisdom I don't have the perseverance I don't have the motivation and you know what you're absolutely right I'm absolutely I don't have it and you don't have it but it seems to me in the Bible that this great promise in Isaiah 49 this great fulfillment in Luke chapter 19 says that he can that he can not only seek you he can not only find you he can not only save you but he can sustain you and bring you to his intended destination you see it's actually all of his work that's the great job description of the servant he will do all that is necessary he will gather a people from the north who are not all that interested he will gather a people from the south who might be quite hostile he's going to gather a people from the east that are previously uninterested and unconcerned and he's going to gather people from the west and he's going to make sure that they're there and maybe the events of our lives maybe the joys of our lives maybe the sorrows of our lives maybe the disappointments of our lives maybe these are just continued evidences that he's never far away he's constantly following he's constantly reaching out he's constantly seeking you and me so that he can rescue us you see that young boy in prison he knew where he wanted to be and he knew where he was and he realized that where he was and where he wanted to be we're so completely different but sometimes we don't realize that ourselves we think that we have arrived at our destination when in fact we are still in darkness we can still be in captivity but the son of man doesn't give up easily the son of man isn't easily put off those that aren't interested those that reject those that ignore he continues to reach out because he continues

to fulfill this great mandate some of the most unlikely of people from some of the most unlikely of places some of the most challenging of backgrounds he is able to do the impossible because as you

read that job description you think this is no ordinary servant not one of us has these credentials not one of us has these qualifications it seems as if the servant spoken of in Isaiah 42 and 49 and 50 and 52 and 53 it seems that this servant must be God himself and of course that's true this servant is God himself he has the power of God he has the wisdom of God he can do the work of God and doesn't that relieve us of all that pressure doesn't that liberate us from attempting to do what only God can do as a preacher I can tell you what God has done as a preacher I can encourage you to seek the Lord while he may be found but I can't seek you I can't save you I can't serve I can't give my life as a ransom for many all I can do is tell you the one who has and this one who has done all of this for you he well knows you just like he knows the kiosk by name he knows you by name he knows your joys he knows your sorrows he knows your disappointments he knows your unfulfilled dreams and he still is pursuing you he's going to the north and to the south and he's going to the east and to the west the Apostle Paul had Isaiah 49 on his mind when he wrote 1st 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 and he concluded that magnificent portion at the end of chapter 5 where he tells us that if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the oldest passed away behold the newest come all this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them not counting what we have done wrong not counting the good that we've never seemed to have time to do and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation therefore we are ambassadors for Christ God making his appeal through us we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to

God for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God and now Paul goes back to Isaiah 59 49 he goes back to that magnificent text and he says this working together with him then we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain for he says Isaiah 49 in a favorable time I listen to you and in a day of salvation I have helped you behold now is the favorable time behold now is the day of salvation maybe the one who is seeking you is at the point of finding you maybe all your life the one thing that's been missing is the one who has come to seek and to save and you wonder when when is the right time when is the right occasion and the apostle Paul using the language of Isaiah says that's an excellent question today is the right time now is the day of salvation do not receive the grace of God in vain but rather respond to the one who has come to seek you we're what respond to the one who has come to save you respond to the one who has come to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many what is required of you absolutely nothing what has he done absolutely everything his love his care his compassion I was reading a summary about Eugene Peterson you might be familiar with his translation the Bible he wrote many commentaries many devotionals and it was said that he had one message and his message was this

God loves you he is on your side he is coming after you he is relentless may God bless his word