

Iain Macritchie: Luke 19 - Zacchaeus

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] We can turn then back to God's Word as we find it in the Gospel of Luke chapter 19. Luke 19 and we can read verses 1 to 9 once again together.

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

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

[1 : 21] And Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham, for the son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

And in particular if we could focus our attention on the words that we find in verse 5, and when Jesus came to the place, he looked and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.

I think if we were to give this portion of scripture a title, I think the conversion of an unlikely candidate might be suitable. Here we have the second in our mini series of encounters with Christ. An encounter that I think you'll find gives hope for even the greatest of sinners. Now last week we saw how the woman of Samaria met with Jesus at the well. He needed to go through Samaria for this encounter to take place. And here in this chapter this morning we read once again of Jesus going through a place. Jesus is here going through Jericho. Now although we read in the Old Testament that Jericho was cursed, it was nonetheless a city in terms of worldly value was really doing quite well.

It was at the heart of a vast trade route and it was famous for the bam that came from the Bamsum tree and it would have been a buzzing hive, a metropolis. But like many cities, it was riddled with corruption. The rich were rich and the poor were extremely poor.

This divide can be seen through the actions of the man that we have before us here this morning. In this chapter Zacchaeus, now Zacchaeus, the name Zacchaeus is derived from the root word which means to be pure or to be righteous. A good start you might think, what a great name to have, a name that says that you're pure or you're righteous. But sadly for Zacchaeus that is where the positives end. You see this man had one of the most despised and hated occupations of his day.

[4 : 08] He was a tax collector. He was employed by the civil service of the Roman empire to collect taxes for them. But he didn't just collect taxes. In the process he would take an inordinate amount of commission from the people stripping them of all that they had and often leaving them financially crippled. It's plain then to see that here we have in Zacchaeus a ruthless, greedy, godless man. Now if we go back to chapter 18, if we read the end of chapter 18, we would think that Zacchaeus has absolutely no chance of ever getting to heaven.

Because in this chapter when speaking to the rich young ruler Jesus says in verses 24 and 25, how difficult is it for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God? For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle and for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

And the picture of a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle is almost comical. It defies all logic, all sense. It's an impossible act. And so if it's impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, so too according to scripture it must be impossible for a rich man like Zacchaeus to inherit

the kingdom of God. What is it? You see the story doesn't quite end there. In fact in many ways it's just beginning. Because in spite of all this man's sins, in spite of all his weaknesses, his greed, his cruelty to others and taking their livelihood from them, in spite of all these things, he hears that Jesus is passing through the city. He hears that Jesus is coming into Jericho and astonishingly he wants to see him. Now let's remember that this is a man who would have lacked for nothing. He would have had absolutely everything that he would have wanted in terms of worldly possessions. And he was in a really good position to enjoy all the many things that money could buy. And so looking in from the outside we would ask ourselves well if this man has so much, why on earth is he interested in seeing this prophet Jesus coming through the city? But no, we see that here he does want to see Jesus. I can't help thinking at this point that perhaps all that this man had, all that's a case, had all the many things that he had to fill his life. He enjoyed them at the time, he found pleasure in them. But he was looking for that something else, something bigger, something bigger, something better, something that would completely fill that void in his heart. Yes, all these things that he he had would no doubt have given him pleasure, but only for a time. I wonder if you here this morning can identify with that case. Perhaps you have everything that you could possibly want in terms of worldly possessions, a night's house, a car, maybe one or two foreign holidays a year and a healthy bank balance. But still there's just something missing from your life. You can't quite put your finger on it. You enjoy all these things and they, they're blessings from the Lord. Don't get me wrong. The problem comes friends, not when we enjoy the blessings from the Lord, but when we rely on these things, like perhaps the case did at one time, when we rely on these things for our happiness and contentment.

[8 : 45] Now coming back to the end of chapter 18, being rich is not wrong. And you know, it's always important that we interpret scripture with scripture, that we don't read verses like this in isolation, but rather that we look at the bigger picture of the Bible. Yes, it says that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven. But that was written in the context of the rich young ruler who absolutely refused to give up what he had to follow Christ. His possessions were more important to him than the one who gave them all that he had. Being rich then is not wrong, but it's the love of money that is a root of all kinds of evil. And if it was announced next week that Her Majesty the Queen was coming to

Carlyle Way, I'm sure it's true to say that many crowds would flock from all over the island and lie in the streets outside here to see her. There would have been a sense of anticipation and people would be desperate to catch a glimpse of the Queen. And here in our chapter this morning, in the verses that we've read, that is exactly what we see when Jesus is entering Jericho.

So we read in verse 3 that there were crowds of people here to see him. Crowds of people desperate to see this miracle maker, desperate to see this prophet. But along with this buzz and this hype, there was a problem. There was a problem specifically for Zaccheus because Zaccheus is a short man. And because of his height, in amongst all the crowds of the people, he was unable to see. I'm sure we all know what it's like when we're in a crowd and we're desperately trying to see and we're hopping up and down to try and get a glimpse of whatever it is or whoever it is that we're trying to see. It can be quite frustrating. And so you can imagine Zaccheus there frustrated trying to catch a glimpse of Christ. But he wasn't frustrated in that he didn't give up. He didn't just leave it there and say, oh, well, I can't see this man. I'm going home. What did he do? Well, he took, he took it upon himself. He took matters into his own hands and he did everything in his power to make sure that he would see Jesus, everything. He runs past the crowd. He runs ahead of the crowd and he climbs right to the top of a sycamore tree we read. Now, his determination story is such that he really doesn't care what he looks like. Now, bear in mind, this is a tax collector, a crook, someone that you don't mess with, someone that you really don't want to see. And here you see him, this short man running along the road and scurrying up a tree like a squirrel. I'm sure the people were standing astonished as they saw this hated man doing such a ridiculous thing. But he didn't care and at least put people thought of him by hook or by crook. He was going to find out about Jesus. He wanted to see this man. I wonder if you would like to find out more about Jesus. I don't know your what's in your heart or what motivates you to be here this morning, but I wonder, would you like to see Jesus? Would you like to run past the crowd and climb up that tree so that you would get a better view? Would you perhaps love to come to the prayer meeting here on a Thursday so that you can see more of Christ in his word preached in the prayers of his people and in the fellowship of his people? Maybe you would. Maybe that's a desire of your heart.

But maybe something's stopping you. Maybe something's blocking your view so that your view of Christ is obstructed. And unlike Zacchaeus, you actually do care what people think. You're worried about looking daft. Maybe you're scared of what people will think of you if you show that you want to know more about Jesus. You'll be scared that they'll start talking about you and maybe they will.

[14 : 00] But I can guarantee friends it'll be a five minute wonder. It'll come, it'll go and they'll be on to the next thing and boy will it be worth it because you will have put yourself in that place of obedience. Scripture tells us that the fear of man is a snare. It's a trap. I think we can all identify with this. But all these thoughts that slow us down and stop us, they're not from God.

It was William Gernel who said that we fear men, these are challenging words, we fear men so much because we fear God so little. Wow. Don't let that be said of you. Don't let people slow you down, hold you back. You're never too young, you're never too old to follow Zacchaeus's example. And I was reminded of this just recently, a lady in my congregation in Cross who I've visited often over the years. She's always, well as far as I can see, she's had a love for the Lord and a real desire to come to the midweek meeting and to gather with his people. She could identify with the people of God but she was so scared about what people would say. I never pushed her, I encouraged but I would never push her until last year, eventually in her eighties, she went. There she was sitting there as if she'd always been there. Now I'm not making the prayer meeting to being something that's big and super. No, I'm not but it's a reality that in our culture here it's a problem for people, maybe it's a problem for you and it's important that we look at this.

The next year she professed her faith and you know what she said to me, she said, I wonder often to myself why on earth I didn't take the steps you know what was all the fuss about.

You see the devil had made this such a mountain tour but in the end she absolutely had to run past the crowd and climb that tree so that she too would see more of Jesus. Now it's a case, it's obviously seeking Jesus before us here. He went to great lengths to see him. That's a term that we often hear, I am a seeker. Would you call yourself a seeker here this morning? Truly would you call yourself a seeker?

Well if so I think the evidence of you seeking should be seen in you doing absolutely everything in your power. God does His work absolutely and we leave that to God but you need to do absolutely everything in your power to make sure that you make the most of every opportunity that comes your way to meet with the Savior. Then we come this morning to our text and we find in verse 5 and when Jesus came to that place he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today. Words that would change this man's life forever. This was a personal call. The Lord didn't say you in the tree come down. He said

[18 : 09] Zacchaeus naming him by name Zacchaeus come down. Sometimes I think that we can think that God is so great and so powerful which he is that somehow he's not interested in a little speck of humanity like you and like me. That he's not interested in what our name is. That he's not interested in our insignificant little lives. But this friends could not be further from the truth and we see that here when the Lord shows us his personal knowledge of Zacchaeus. I wonder if he's calling you this morning. Is he calling your name? Is he calling you out of the bondage, the trap of this world, this world that's got such a grip on you that you just cannot let go. Can you hear his voice telling you to come from that place where you've been looking upon Christ from a distance year after year after year. Now not only did he know Zacchaeus' name but he knew exactly where Zacchaeus was. Now if you were walking in the castle grounds the forest routes around in the castle and storn away. I'm quite sure that as you walked you would be looking ahead and maybe looking to your left and your right admiring the scenery but very rarely would you be walking along with your head looking at the tops of the trees. Was there to be whether to be a man at the top of the tree you wouldn't see them but Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was there. He knew his exact location and when as he was walking through Jericho all the crowds on either side as he walked through he stopped and he looked up to Zacchaeus. What a beautiful picture this is and what an encouragement to us that when in Christ when he has his eye on us he stops and he looks at us and he speaks to us where we are at whether that's at the top of a sycamore tree or at the depth of despair.

So his call was personal but notice that Christ's call to Zacchaeus was also urgent.

It was a message that was to be responded to straight away. Zacchaeus hurry and come down. He wanted to meet Zacchaeus face to face as soon as possible. I'm sure that if I were to ask each and every one of you in here this morning would you like to be a Christian? I'm sure most if not all would

say yes I would like to be a Christian. That's great. I wonder if I were to ask you would you like to be a Christian today? Would you answer with a definite yes absolutely. I would love to be a Christian today. I'm sure many of you would or would you swither would you think about it and say well I would like to be a Christian but not today maybe one day later on would you say yes I would like to be a Christian but only if this this and this happened you laying down your own conditions is that you friends I don't want to be morbid but the reality is that that one day that we're always looking for might never come. Thankfully we we don't have to think about death all the time and the reality but it is a reality and I was reminded of how fragile life is just the other day I was asleep in bed and it was about quarter to six in the morning when I heard this banging at my door. I woke up and of course I was a bit worried as to what this was and I came to the door and there standing at the door were two ambulance men with an ambulance on my drive the lights flashing they were looking for a man who had made a distressed call but they couldn't find his house. After some discussion I I put some pieces together and I pointed them in the direction of the house of the man who I thought they were looking for. I later learned sadly that when they got to the house the man had passed away. Now I couldn't help thinking about this all week since this man in my village not far from my own house he was there at one minute phoning up the emergency services he was alive he was here in time and then just like that he was taken into eternity. Life is precious this call from God it's urgent and you know the devil will be saying to you maybe even as you're sitting here today there's plenty of time don't worry about all these things but God is here saying hurry the devil might be saying to you don't rush into anything you need to think this through and go through the pros and the cons but God is here saying hurry the devil might be saying to you that's not for me that's for my granny I don't want that just now but God is here saying hurry why would we sensibly rationally and logically delay accepting this offer of salvation that has held to you so freely in the gospel that offer of an eternity an eternity of safety in Christ we cannot as we we found out by that encounter I had earlier in the week we cannot be sure of the next hour the next week or the next year in our lives because death is an appointment that absolutely none of us can miss the question is are you ready I'm not saying this to scare you or to alarm you or to dramatize these things but this is this reality I stand here friends this morning to out of love urgently remind you as Christ did a case urgently remind you to hurry and come down you know we'll never get to the the heights of heaven but first we don't come down if we don't come down from the lofty heights of our own and we've all had this and we all do have this the lofty heights of our own self-ambition and our own self-sufficiency will you not climb down this morning will you not see that the the branches that you're holding on to so tightly are are withered and they're dead as well as being a personal call an urgent call Christ's call to Zaccheus was also an intimate call Zaccheus hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today and what a house this was in these days tax collectors houses were often used to conduct their business their clients would come there this would have been a house that would have seen great pain and anguish within its walls as innocent people face the the cruel oppression of this abuser of power Zaccheus and yet in this dark habitation of cruelty this house that would have been one of the most hated and despised houses in the whole community here Jesus says that he must enter and dwell in it when we look at our own hearts this morning our own souls perhaps we see darkness in there perhaps we think to ourselves how on earth could a holy god make his habitation in such a sinful heart as mine but we can see so clearly from the verse that we have before us that nobody absolutely nobody is beyond the saving power of Christ perhaps you think you are you may think that you've gone far too far into sin you're you're in too deep that there's no way back that you are the greatest sinner and so you are but so is the person beside you and so is the preacher in front of you we are all sinners who have come short of the glory of God but yet scripture makes clear that there is no sin that God cannot save us from no heart so dark that he cannot dwell in and ends a case responded did he say to Jesus when Jesus asked him to come down hang on just for a while wait till I do this this and this absolutely not he came down and he received Christ joyfully you see Christ's call was an effectual call

it was an irresistible call a call that's a case was simply compelled to answer there was no fireworks there were no flashing lights just plain obedience to the voice of God now undoubtedly we must be born again we don't believe in these altar calls where people come down to the front of the church and they sign a piece of paper to say that they're a Christian we don't believe that becoming a Christian is just about signing a piece of paper we know that being born again is a supernatural act an act of the spirit that we are to be born of the spirit and I cannot emphasize that enough it's so important always to lay hold of that truth however I do think that sometimes we're mistaken as to

what to expect when this new birth takes place in our lives I can almost guarantee that there's at least one person in here this morning who's unsure whether or not they're a Christian maybe I am maybe I'm not and they're waiting for this this woe to Damascus experience this light from heaven that that tells them that they are a Christian when I started following when I started following the things of the Lord and I went out to the prayer meeting a number of years going back there was definitely a change in me the very fact that I went there showed that my desires had changed but it wasn't an overnight change it was a gradual change many of my desires changed as I said but I had a thirst and a hunger for fellowship with the Lord and with his people but still I would not say I was a Christian I wouldn't profess publicly that I was the Lord's and I remember telling my auntie an old Christian my situation and you know what she said to me she said you are just looking for jam on both sides and so I was what I was looking for I already had I'm wondering if there's anyone here who's looking for jam on both sides anyone who's still at the top of that sycamore plea who should have come down years ago and bowed at the feet of Jesus this encounter with Christ truly transforms a case his life it was plain for all to see that he was a changed man we read not only that he gave half of his goods to the poor but he also gave back four times the amount of what he had robbed from all those poor people what amazing grace what transforming grace and such a lesson to us if we are believers here this morning Zaccheus's example surely shows us how we as the Lord's people should strive to live our lives JC Ryle states again challengingly that faith that does not purify the heart and life is not faith at all grace that cannot be seen like light and tasted like salt is not grace but hypocrisy wow these are challenging words to you and to me and I'm sure that that's

[32 : 59] so many of us feel that we we fall so short of the mark and so we do but the point here is that we are to strive we are to strive through the dependence of the grace of God to show all those around us that we have been called down and that we too have had this encounter with Christ and so in Zaccheus as I said at the beginning we have the conversion of an unlikely candidate but is it not true that we are all unlikely candidates I was an unlikely candidate your minister was an unlikely candidate your elders all every one of us we were all unlikely candidates we're all riddled with that disease of sin and sometimes sadly when hospitals cannot find a cure for someone's illness they discharge them because they cannot do any more but you know as we close I have the most wonderful news that you will hear today here in carloy that there are no incurable diseases under the gospel any sinner every sinner can be healed if they come under the gospel whether that be Zaccheus or Donald or Murdo or Richard or Catherine I don't know your names but God does and he's calling you to come down Christ came down Christ came down for the lost he was rich in heavenly blessings blessings that we cannot go into but yet he took upon himself each and every sin the punishment of each and every sin of each and every one of his people plummeting to such depths of darkness and despair so that through his poverty sinners like you and like me could enjoy eternal riches at Christ's expense what love that is friends won't you listen to the voice of God as he speaks to you this very morning

Jesus of Nazareth is passing through this church won't you take him up on this the greatest offer that you will ever get that you would hurry down that you would allow him to dwell in the house of your soul he is so willing to receive you but the question is how willing are you amen we pray the Lord would bless these few thoughts to us