

Sought And Saved

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this morning I'd like us to turn back for a wee while to Luke 19 and the account! And we're going to read again verses 8 to 10. And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

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.

Our title this morning is Sought and Saved. And these words, as you can see, come from the great words of verse 10.

And they capture the goal that Jesus sought to accomplish in coming into this world. And these words also describe what happened to Zacchaeus. And I hope that for every single one of us here today, these words describe you as well.

These words come in the midst of a fascinating incident between Jesus and Zacchaeus. And one of the things that Luke does in these verses is that he draws us right into the narrative of what happened that day.

[1 : 1 3] And the way Luke describes this means that we can kind of come right into the story. You can imagine yourself with Zacchaeus in Jericho. And there's this commotion as more and more people realize that Jesus is approaching the town.

And as Jesus enters, the crowds gather. And you can picture Zacchaeus, a small man, but no doubt one who had a position of prominence in the city as chief tax collector.

He would have been known. But as we'll see, he would also have been disliked. He wants to see Jesus. The crowd is blocking him.

And so he runs ahead. He climbs a tree. And he wants to see this man going by. And in many ways, everything's going according to plan for Zacchaeus. And he gets a good view of Jesus. And no doubt he expected Jesus to walk past. And then he would climb down and return to his tax booth. And all of a sudden, Jesus stops. And he comes to the tree.

[2 : 1 5] He looks up. And he says, Zacchaeus, come down. And Zacchaeus' life is changed forever. And in many ways, the fascinating thing about this passage is that in verse 3, Zacchaeus is seeking.

But, of course, the truth is, he is the one who has actually been sought and saved by Jesus. As we look at this passage together, what I hope we're going to see is that this short narrative has got a huge amount to teach us about the gospel.

So I'm going to highlight seven lessons from this passage. So it's a seven-point sermon. But we're going to do them all very quickly. One, the gospel meets you in real life. Two, the gospel must involve reckoning with Jesus.

Three, the gospel is initiated by Jesus seeking us out. Four, the gospel is offensive to man-made religion. Five, the gospel transforms our attitudes and actions. Six, the gospel brings us into a united family.

And seven, the gospel results in the lost being sought and saved. Excuse me. So we're going to whiz through these one by one.

[3 : 3 4] First of all, the gospel meets you in real life. When we look at these verses 1 to 4, it can feel like a million miles from our lives because we're 2,000 years and 2,500 miles away from Luke chapter 19.

But what I want us to recognize is that what these words are describing is very much the language of real life. You've got a city. You've got a crowd.

You've got a man. He's got a job. We even know how tall he is. And there's this moment of opportunity for him to see Jesus. In other words, none of this is happening in a kind of mystical

trance or a fancy temple or a spiritual oasis or a heavenly vision.

All of it is just real life. When Zacchaeus got up that morning, it was a normal morning. And the same is true throughout the gospels. Real cities, real villages, real people, real families, real jobs, real challenges, real sorrows, real joys, real mistakes.

It's all real life. And the crucial thing to remember is that this is where the gospel meets you. And this is one of the reasons why it's so crucial and so wonderful that God works out his plan of salvation through history.

[4 : 47] God works through real moments in the real lives of ordinary people. And all of it's reminding us that the gospel meets you and me in the realness of our lives.

In other words, it meets you where you are. That means it meets you in everything that you're experiencing in your home, in your job, in your health, in your family, in your friendships.

It meets you where things are going really well or where things are going really badly. The gospel meets us in our real lives. And there's two really important implications from this. One is that the gospel doesn't meet you in ideal life.

And that's massively important to remember. Because there's a ton of things that weren't ideal about Zacchaeus. But Jesus was not looking to meet him in ideal life.

He was looking to meet him in real life. And that is so important to remember because you do not need to make your life seem ideal in order for you to meet Jesus.

[5 : 53] It's so easy to think like that. You think, man, I've got to sort myself out. I've got to put things in order. I've got to change things before I can become more involved in the church or before I could admit publicly that I was a Christian or anything like that.

You don't need to do that. You do not need to make your life seem ideal in order to meet Jesus.

Often real life is actually rough and sometimes it's rubbish.

That's exactly where Jesus meets you. So the gospel doesn't meet you in some kind of ideal life.

The second crucial implication is that all of this is reminding us is that the gospel isn't weird.

Now you might be thinking, well, sometimes it looks weird. And sometimes Christians have made it look weird. And lots of people think that it's weird. But properly understood, the gospel is not weird. It is always, always relevant. It always makes sense of our lives. It always meets us in the reality of where we are.

[6 : 58] And that's why you can pray about real life. You don't need to pray weird, fancy, elaborate prayers. You just pray about real life. Pray about the emails that you've got to reply to tomorrow morning.

Pray about anything that you're feeling in terms of anxiety. Pray about your children, your grandchildren, your friends. Pray about your relationships, your dreams, your hopes, whatever. Just all the real stuff. That's what we should pray about. It doesn't have to be fancy, weird stuff. It shouldn't be fancy, weird stuff. It should be real stuff. When we read the Bible, we should expect it to speak about real life.

That it gives us answers that we can take with us into this week. The gospel is for Jesus meets us in lives. It's not some weird thing that sits in the corner.

Jesus meets us in real life. Number two, the gospel must involve reckoning with Jesus. Again, back to verses one to four, they describe a crucial moment of opportunity for Zacchaeus.

[8 : 02] So he's heard that Jesus is coming to Jericho, sees that he's approaching, realizes that he's about to pass by. And as we read about the crowd and the tree and the fact that Zacchaeus is short, one of the things that's been emphasized in this passage is that Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus.

And of course, the amazing thing is that he actually ends up doing far more than just see Jesus.

There's lots that we could say about that. The big point I want to highlight is that here we're seeing that the gospel must involve reckoning with Jesus.

Now that might seem totally obvious, but it is of the highest importance. The Christian gospel has to involve you engaging with Jesus Christ.

And I think this passage illustrates this so powerfully because it could have been so easy for Zacchaeus to have been in the crowd and for him to have had no idea what Jesus was actually like.

He was short. He couldn't see. He could have been in the crowd, in amongst everybody, and everyone's thinking, oh, Zacchaeus is really interested in Jesus. And actually Zacchaeus is sort of surrounded by people who are way above him, and he's like, I have no idea who Jesus is.

[9 : 08] I'm in the crowd, but I can't see anything. And this can happen so easily. We can be drawn towards Christianity. We might be very respectful of the Bible. We might even be involved in the life of the church.

And yet we're not really paying attention to Jesus. And if you think about it, Zacchaeus could so easily have been drawn into the crowd for another reason.

Maybe he thought, oh, there's a client I want to do business with. There's somebody who owes me money. There's someone I haven't seen for ages. There's a girl that I like. Any of these reasons could have drawn him into the crowd.

If those were the reasons he went into the crowd, he'd have never climbed the tree. He'd have never encountered Jesus. And it's so important that we recognize this. The gospel must involve reckoning with Jesus.

The crowd is not the cross. And attendance is not atonement. And the church is not the Christ. We have to meet with Jesus.

[10 : 13] We have to speak to him in prayer. We have to reckon with him. We have to respond to him. The gospel must involve reckoning with Jesus.

Number three, the gospel is initiated by Jesus seeking us out. So verses three to five, you have this wonderful irony that we've touched on and that we'll pick up again and again.

It's one of the key points in the crowd. Zacchaeus is seeking to see who Jesus was. And he goes to great lengths to achieve this. We've heard this. Gets into the crowd. Realizes he can't see.

Runs ahead. Climbs the tree. Wants to be able to see Jesus. And by the time he got up into the tree and by the time he had a good view of Jesus approaching, he must have thought, mission accomplished.

But then we see, of course, in verse five, that things do not turn out as Zacchaeus expects. Jesus comes to the tree. Jesus stops in front of it. But Jesus looks up and he says, Zacchaeus, come down.

[11 : 13] I'm going to come to your house today. And all the time, Zacchaeus thought that he was looking for Jesus. And the truth is, Jesus was looking for him.

And this is a crucial point for us to recognize in our understanding of the gospel. We will sometimes, and it's not wrong to do this, we will sometimes describe people as seekers.

And maybe even you've described yourself as that. At times, maybe even that's how you feel today. You feel like you're seeking something, seeking answers, seeking the Lord. And that's not wrong.

And to some degree, that's what Zacchaeus was doing. He was seeking something. There was something that drew him to Jesus. And he made efforts to kind of get that view and have some kind of sight of him.

But the big point, one of the big points in this passage is that all the time, the real seeker is Jesus. He's the shepherd. He's the one who seeks out sheep that are lost.

[12 : 16] He's the one who pursues us. He's the one who brings us home. Jesus is the one who's doing the seeking in this passage. And what we see between Jesus and Zacchaeus is just a beautiful example of what Jesus does with every single one, every single person who believes in him.

Jesus seeks us out. And this raises an incredibly important point. In the gospel, you've got to remember that Jesus is the one who doesn't give up.

Jesus is the one that doesn't give up. So often we can get this the wrong way around. We think that we have to be the ones who don't give up. In other words, we think that I need to seek Jesus and I need to seek him enough.

And I need to make sure that I know enough and I understand enough and I make enough effort. I need to make sure that I do this enough. And I need to make sure that I never give up. But if we do that, then we're actually kind of basing our salvation on the quality of our religious pursuit, as though we're the ones doing the finding.

We're the ones doing the chasing. We're the ones who do it. But the gospel is not about you seeking Jesus and never giving up. The gospel is about him seeking you.

[13 : 36] And he never gives up. And this is what you see so beautifully in this passage. Zacchaeus stood in Jericho that morning and he thought, I'm going to find Jesus.

And yet all the time, Jesus is heading towards Jericho and he's saying, I'm going to find Zacchaeus. And this raises a couple of just very important theological points. One is that the gospel rests on

what we call divine initiative, that God loves us before we love him.

God pursues us before we pursue him. God finds us before we find him. God initiates it all. The gospel rests on divine initiative.

But the second crucial theological point is that the gospel rests on divine relentlessness. God initiates it all. And what I mean by that is the fact that as God seeks you, he does not give up. And this is massively important because sometimes people think that your chance with Jesus has gone. Sometimes people think that. I had an opportunity. There was a moment.

[14 : 41] I had a chance. I let it slip. People think that a chance has gone. It's not true. As long as you are breathing, that is not true.

Jesus does not give up. And he seeks us out. And so it's so important that we recognize that the gospel is initiated by Jesus seeking us out.

Number four. The gospel is offensive to man-made religion. You see this all over the gospels. And you see it here in the incident with Zacchaeus. Verse six and seven.

Jesus tells Zacchaeus to come down. He hurries down. Receives him joyfully. And everybody saw it. And they grumbled. And they said, he's going to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.

Now, Jesus going to do that was very controversial. We've been told that Zacchaeus is chief tax collector. Now, as soon as you know, today we think of somebody who works for HMRC as an upstanding member of the civil service.

[15 : 46] That, of course, was not the case back in the New Testament times. A tax collector was somebody who collected tax for the Romans. The Romans were the unwanted conquerors of the land.

And so for a Jew to be a tax collector was basically to be a traitor. And not only were they traitors, they were rich traitors because it was a lucrative industry, often quite corrupt.

And so tax collectors were thoroughly disliked. And so for Jesus to go and eat at his house was a very bold step. For the religious elite, Zacchaeus was the last person that Jesus should be associating with.

And you see this pattern several times in the gospels. The people that Jesus spent time with, so often they're the people who are viewed as sinners and as the kind of people that should be avoided.

And this is where we see a contrast, a stark contrast between the gospel and man-made religion. Now, I'm using religion there in its broadest sense. So in the sense of any strongly held beliefs that hold a position of authority and power in someone's life.

[16 : 52] And so that means that when we say religion, it can go far beyond the question of whether or not you believe in God. It's more just whether you believe there are overarching truths that should shape life.

Very often, man-made versions of this, man-made religion, very often will involve some kind of elitism. And so that can take various forms. Sometimes it's the idea that there's certain standards that you have to reach.

Other times it can be there's certain opinions you must hold to. Sometimes there's certain people that you have to make sure that you're in with. And with that comes a distinction between those who are good enough, those who aren't good enough, insiders, outsiders.

And there's often a gravitation towards a kind of posture of judgment towards others, to those who think differently. The Pharisees in the New Testament fell into this trap all the time. They had their expectations for what it meant to be acceptable to God.

And anybody who did not conform to those expectations was an outsider that you should avoid. And many people do the same today. That can happen across worldviews.

[17 : 55] Cancel culture today is a great example of that. It's the mindset of the Pharisees resurrected again. And we have to acknowledge that this can happen and has happened in the life of the church many, many times.

Where we create categories and we use these categories to judge people. And very often we have a kind of very, very strong insider, outsider kind of mentality that doesn't align with the gospel.

But it aligns with our own personal preferences, customs or expectations. All of this stands in contrast to the gospel. Because the gospel seeks sinners and welcomes sinners and helps sinners and loves sinners.

And by sinners, the gospel means everyone. In other words, there's no elitism in the gospel. Instead, there's the universal reality of the guilt of our sin.

The fact that we need to be rescued. We're precious but powerless, like we said to the kids. And there's the magnificent free offer of the gospel to all to come to Jesus and be saved.

[19 : 05] And that means that if our religious views involve being better than others. Or if they involve conforming to certain expectations. If they involve impressing certain people. If they involve keeping other people at arm's length.

Then the gospel is going to offend us. Because the gospel is seeking out everyone and anyone. And calling us to come to Christ.

So the gospel is going to be offensive to man-made religion. It was in Luke 19. It has remained that way ever since. Number five. The gospel transforms our attitudes and actions.

Verse eight demonstrates this so powerfully. Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord. Lord, behold, half my goods I give to the poor. And if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

Now, this is the kind of verse that's easy to misunderstand. Some people can look at it and think, well, okay. Does this mean that to be a Christian, I need to give all my money away or half my money away? And it's not saying that. Because it's important to recognize here that money was the issue for Zacchaeus.

[20 : 06] Money was the idol for Zacchaeus. So he's turned away from his people, the Jews. He's sided with the enemy. He's signed up as a tax collector.

He's climbed his way to the top. He's got himself embroiled in all the corruption that involved in the tax collecting kind of machine that there was. Very often, the tax collectors would demand more than they had to give to Rome.

They would pocket the difference. You can see why he speaks about defrauding anyone. He's saying that because he has. And he did it all to get rich. And you've kind of got this sort of trade-off where it's like, okay, I'm going to lose my reputation.

Everybody's going to hate me. I'm betraying my people and my nation, but I'm going to get money. And so it's worth it. And this is why money is the thing that he has to change his attitude towards. Because money is the thing that has led him astray. And so this is the way that you see the visible evidence of a transformation in Zacchaeus.

[21 : 09] And there's this change in his attitude and his actions. And so his attitude towards money has changed. And Jesus has reorientated his desires.

And that change in attitude leads to a change in action. And he takes deliberate steps to help others to provide restitution for the wrongs that he's done. And the big point, as I said, is that this transformation is the visible evidence of an internal change in Zacchaeus.

And that's exactly what the gospel does. It transforms our attitudes and actions. The crucial thing here, though, is to recognize the order in terms of what happens.

It's not that these actions saved him. It's not that he says, I'm going to give my money away to the poor. And then it's like, oh, well, okay, because you've done that, you're saved. It's not that these actions save him. It's that these actions show that he has been saved.

Because for the religious leaders, Zacchaeus should have made these changes before Jesus should ever have gone near his house. So if you're a Pharisee, you're saying, well, Zacchaeus, give up your tax collecting.

[22 : 21] Give your money away to the poor. Restore anyone you've defrauded. And then we might come to your house and interact with you. With the gospel, it's the opposite. It's because Jesus has come to him.

Because Jesus has come into his house and come into his life. That this transformation occurs. And this, of course, sets the pattern for our spiritual growth. It's, if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, the gospel gradually transforms our attitude and our actions.

And I think one of the things that's fascinating is that it doesn't say it in the text. But I think that we can safely conclude that I'm sure that Zacchaeus would have had far more joy from giving away half of his wealth.

Than he ever got from storing it up for himself. Two more points. Super quick. Number six. The gospel brings us into a united family. In verse nine, Jesus says something wonderful.

Salvation has come to this house since he also is a son of Abraham. Now, this is the big point here. There's loads that we could unpack under that phrase son of Abraham. It had really important

connotations for the Jews in terms of their descent from Abraham.

[23 : 31] Even more important connotations for the church. Because the church is the covenant community connected to Abraham and the promises that God gave to Abraham. All of that's massively important theology.

The big point I want to emphasize is that prior to this moment, Zacchaeus was an outcast, a traitor, an enemy. In verse nine, Jesus makes it absolutely clear he's one of us.

Jesus. You're not an outsider anymore. And this is the wonderful emphasis of the gospel. It brings us into one united family.

And you see the two things going together. The universality of the offer is matched by the inclusiveness of the family that the gospel brings us into. And what that means is that if you're a Christian or who become a Christian, Jesus will never, ever, ever say to you, you don't belong here. So often we feel like just the baggage of our lives leaves us as outsiders. And the gospel heals all of that.

[24 : 35] It brings us into a wonderful united family. So the gospel meets you in real life. It must involve reckoning with Jesus. It's initiated by Jesus seeking us out. It's offensive to man-made religion. It transforms our attitudes and actions.

It brings us into a united family. And it results in the lost being sought and saved. That takes us to these amazing words that are the culmination of this narrative.

Again, I keep saying it. It captures the irony of this passage. Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus all the time. He was the one who was being sought. Because Jesus came to seek and to save people like Zacchaeus, people like us.

Two things that I want to say. If you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, I just want to say something that I hope you will never forget.

I want you to know that you are sought and saved. And I want you to press those truths into your heart. You are sought and you are saved.

[25 : 41] And both of those words are so crucial. Because sought means that you are wanted. You are pursued by Jesus.

Sought means that Jesus meets you where you are. It's not about you finding him. It's about him coming to meet you where you are. And whether you are just newly a Christian or you have been a Christian for years, sometimes we feel like we are not in a very good place.

Jesus will meet us there, wherever we are feeling. Sought means that he will meet you where you are. Sought means that you are his. That he has come to save you and to make you his own forever.

And saved means that you are safe. You are rescued. Saved means that you are forgiven. That every mistake you have made has been dealt with.

Saved means that there is so much to be excited about. Because he promises eternal life for all his people.

[26 : 47] So I want you to remember and I want you to spend this week thinking about the fact that you are sought and saved. Saved. Saved. The last thing I want to say is this.

Our title is sought and saved. And I think some of you here, maybe a lot of you here, are stuck on the end.

Now what do I mean by that? Well, I mean by the fact that you are absolutely sought. That's the whole reason Jesus has brought you here today.

He's seeking you out. He's calling you. He's inviting you. He wants you. That's what he's doing every week in a church service. He is seeking you. And so you're sought.

You're wanted. You're called by Jesus. But you're stuck on the end. Because maybe some of you are like, well, I don't believe this.

[27 : 53] It's not for me. Maybe you think that. But others of you, I think, are like, I want to be saved. But I don't know if I am.

And I'm stuck. And if you're stuck on the end, I want you to ask yourself another question, or kind of two-part question.

Like, are you like Zacchaeus? Can you recognize that Jesus is Lord? I know that you recognize that. Do you want to be able to say that you're saved? I know that you want that. And do you know what all of that means? I think it means that you are saved.

I think it means that you are saved. I think it means that you are his. And you don't need to stay stuck on the end anymore.
And instead, we can press on together as those who are sought and saved and living for Jesus.
Amen. Thank you.