

OSS, Regeneration, Calling, and Repentance

We have been studying our salvation story. We first covered creation and the fall, then last week we noted that our salvation started in eternity past through God's foreknowledge, predestination, and election. Today we are going to examine a more temporal period and that is the time in our lives just prior to and at the time of faith. What does God do to bring us to a decision point? What goes into our belief?

Our text is a familiar Bible story found in Luke 19:1-10:

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. ² There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. ³ He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." ⁶ Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. ⁷ But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. ⁸ Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" ⁹ Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man^[a] came to seek and save those who are lost.

We need to start with verse 10, for this verse sums up the other 9 and reveals God's heart and desire to rescue us.

Vs 10a, *For the Son of Man^[a]*

The phrase *Son of man* refers to Christ's humanity and is the title Christ used most when talking of himself. It refers to him as a man but it also the messianic title used by Daniel in Dan 7 describing Christ as the all glorious one who will one day rule over the Messianic Kingdom.

10b, *came to seek and save those who are lost.*

I go to two men's groups, and a familiar theme in both is "what is my purpose?" After a lifetime of employment many of these men are wrestling with what they are here for. They know God has something for them, but they are puzzled as to what. This was never a problem for our Lord. Jesus's purpose was to come and seek, then save those who are lost. This is why Jesus came to earth. It caused all his suffering and death. Jesus came to seek you out and save you. God's seeking started in the garden after the fall for He asked Adam, "where are you?" Ezk 34:15-16 states, "I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak." Paul said in 1 Tim 1:15, *here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst.*

We need only to be reminded of our own heart apart from God for Ps 14:1-3 which is quoted in Rm 3:11 states, "there is none righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away and they have together become worthless." Eph 4:18 describes our

sinful state, as *we are darkened in our understanding and separated from the life of God*. As MacArthur notes, "In our sinfulness, in our fallenness, in our reprobation, in our blindness, in our ignorance, in our association and relationship to the kingdom of darkness and under the power of Satan, we cannot seek after God. We do not seek after God. There would then be no reconciliation, no salvation, no forgiveness, no hope of heaven if God did not seek after us. God does the initial seeking. God does the saving of those who apart from Him would hide themselves from Him like Adam and Eve, running from His presence with no capacity in them to ever turn and pursue Him."

It is indeed an irony that God sends his son to seek and save people from his own judgement and wrath. The Greek word for lost (*apollumi*) is a strong word. It means doomed, ruined, destroyed. So, Jesus was incarnated to save us from a state of ruination, and destruction. But God loves us and seeks us out. Luke is especially keen to this theme as his gospel is full of examples of God seeking lost souls. In Luke 15 we see three parables: the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and finally the lost son, all demonstrating God's desire to find and save us.

So, now we come to our story in Luke 19, which is an amazing story of how God seeks us and saves us and in it there are three great theological truths; the ideas of regeneration, calling, and repentance.

Vs 1a, Jesus entered Jericho

Jesus is nearing the end of his Perea ministry. He is entering Jericho because he must go through town to get to the road to Jerusalem where He will complete his earthy ministry. Jericho is located about 6 miles north of the Dead Sea and about 6 miles west of the Jordan river. As you know it was destroyed by Joshua and the Israelites in one of the stranger military campaigns in history as its walls were breached by the sound of trumpets and shouts as the Israelites marched around it (Josh 6) Once destroyed, Joshua pronounced a curse on the city stating that whoever rebuilt it, would lose his firstborn son (Josh 6:26). This prophecy was fulfilled in 1 K 16:34 when during Ahab's reign, Hiel of Bethel laid its foundations at the cost of his son Abiram. During the time of Christ, the city was an active trading center at the intersection of routes both north-south, and east-west. Fed by neighboring springs, it had ample water and was a thriving agricultural area and known for its magnificent gardens. Because of its strategic location and trade, there many diverse people there. Caravans from the North, South, West, and East flowed into the city. Goods were reorganized and sent thither. Camel drivers, merchants, slaves, tradesmen, farmers, Roman soldiers, administrators, inn keepers, animal brokers, merchants, were all present. It was a bustling place.

Vs 1b, and made his way through town.

No doubt a crowd is following him. A few weeks earlier he had raised Lazarus at Bethany, so most likely the news of this event had reached Jericho. So also, as Jesus had approached the city, Luke records he had healed a blind beggar (Lk 18:35-43). Certainly, this miracle was now known throughout the city. Jesus now enters Jericho. Jesus the healer, Jesus the teacher, Jesus the religious agitator who confronts the Scribes and Pharisees, and now Jesus who can raise the dead to life, has entered the city. It is also Passover, so there are many moving through town on their way to Jerusalem. It is crowded. It is noisy. It

is bustling, and there is a sense of excitement as the most controversial figure in the country has just come into town.

Vs 2, There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich.

We are now introduced to Zacchaeus. We are not told where he grew up or where he came from. We do not know if he is old or young, married, or with children. All we are told is his profession and his means; *he was the chief tax collector and very rich*. The scheme of taxation in Israel at the time was as follows: First, Israel was an occupied country. As such, the Romans often recruited locals to collect their taxes for them as locals knew the language, tradesmen, customs etc. Rome demanded a certain amount from each area, but backed by the authority and power of Rome, these tax collectors could collect most anything they wanted, and often did so, paying Rome what Rome wanted and then keeping the rest for themselves. Hence, they were extortionists, thugs, and thieves. They were like the mafia with the full backing of the Roman Authorities. The people also had to pay a yearly temple tax for the maintenance of the temple sacrificial system. This tax was close to 20% of an average person's income. Additionally, each adult was expected to come to Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover, Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot (feast of tabernacles). Pay in rural areas was made in shekels whereas in Jerusalem money had to be changed into Roman currency, hence the need for money exchangers at the temple so people could buy a sacrifice. This was big business and corruption was rampant. If you were a pilgrim from an outlying area, you were thus taxed on three levels; to Rome, to Jerusalem for the Temple, and lastly you would often be cheated when exchanging your money in Jerusalem. Lastly the economy in Israel was overwhelmingly agrarian. It was also mostly feudal. Over time larger landowners would loan money to smaller neighboring farmers. Either a portion of their crops or their land would be used as collateral. If the crop was not good, the small farmer would either borrow more or forfeit their land to their larger neighbor. Hence many lived as tenant farmers on larger spreads. It was an oppressive system. Some estimate the total tax rate at between 40-60%.

There were three large tax collecting centers within the country and Jericho was one (Capernaum and Caesarea were the other two). To collect more revenue, Rome would sell these regional tax franchises to the highest bidder. Note in our verse, Zacchaeus was the *chief tax collector*. This means he was one of the three regional chiefs of the Roman tax apparatus and had bought the franchise. He had multiple underlings and took a cut from their cut. He was at the apex of the skimming scheme. Hence, he was enormously wealthy. But this wealth came with a high social cost. Jewish tax collectors who worked for Rome were hated. They were viewed as traitors. They had literally sold out to a foreign pagan power occupying their country and now he was extorting his own people. Note in verse 7, he is called a *sinner*. This is the category his fellow countrymen placed him. He was a social outcast, polluted, despised, defiled, and he would defile you if you were close to him. He was expelled from the synagogue and inhabited the same social position as a leper, but worse as at least a leper did not choose to be one. Therefore, Zacchaeus was socially isolated as the only folks he could associate with were ones that occupied the same position as he did; fellow outcasts; and fellow sinners such as prostitutes, criminals, beggars, and the diseased and rejected (note physical ailments were often viewed as God's punishment for being unrighteous -see Jn 9:1-2). But he was also isolated from God as any guilt, any remorse, or any

regret, he had to keep to himself for he was forbidden to bring any sacrifice to the local synagogue. So, if Zacchaeus had any conscience, he bore the full weight of his extortion, his thievery, his abuse, his betrayal, and his corruption. Tax collectors were also disdained by the Romans, for although Rome needed taxmen, Romans also viewed them as having betrayed their own people. How ironic then, that Zacchaeus's name means clean, innocent, pure and righteous. Everything that he was not, by virtue of the profession he had fallen into. So here is Zacchaeus, rich, powerful, connected, yet despised, hated, and a man of illicit fortune, and then Jesus comes to town (as a side it is interesting to note that as Jesus entered Jericho, he healed a blind beggar, one who was also thought to be a sinner and under God's judgment. But a tax collector was thought to be even lower than a blind beggar See Lk 18:35-43).

Vs 3a He tried to get a look at Jesus

What did Zacchaeus know of Jesus? We are never told. He wants to *get a look at Jesus*. Was it just curiosity? Was it to get noticed? Did he want to see what kind of man he was? Did he want to tax him? Did he have some burning spiritual question on his heart? We are not told. We do know Jesus had recently raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany not to long before this and certainly that news had reached Jericho. Whatever the reason, something has changed in Zacchaeus' heart. He has a desire to see the Lord. The Bible often speaks of man seeking God. For instance, Pr 8:17 says, "*Those who diligently seek Me will find Me.*" Is 55:6, "*Seek the Lord while He may be found.*" Jer 29:13, "*And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.*" Amos 5:4, "*Seek Me that you may live.*" Mt 6:33, "*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added.*" Mt 7:7, "*Seek and you shall find.*" We are enabled to seek when God seeks us. As 1 Jn 4:19 says, "*We love because he first loved us.*"

MacArthur notes, "Once God begins that seeking, once He opens our understanding to our own sinfulness, once He illuminates us as to the glory of the gospel, once He takes away the blindness and the darkness, once He gives life to our deadness, the awakened sinner, the enlightened lost one, the one who has been given life responds by seeking the one who sought Him".

This ignition of spiritual interest is known theologically as Regeneration. It is the process whereby God begins to give spiritual life to a spiritually dead individual and awakens spiritual longings and interest that will bring them to a decision point. As John 16:8-11 notes, this initial spark creates a God consciousness that leads to a conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgement and through the mystery of God's will and election, enables us to repent and believe. This is what happened to Zacchaeus. A rich man. A wildly successful man with many material things, but now the spark of regeneration has started to burn in his soul, and he wants to see Jesus.

Vs 3b, but he was too short to see over the crowd.

Verse 3b reveals another attribute of Zacchaeus; he was short of stature. Another reason he may have felt ostracized. Research has shown taller males are associated with traits like competence, leadership, status, attractiveness, maturity, and confidence when compared to shorter peers. Certainly, Zacchaeus was richer than his peers so maybe this made up for it for you often see trophy wives with unattractive

but rich men. So, Zacchaeus has two problems: he is short and there is a large crowd obstructing his view.

Vs 4, So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

We see in verse 4, Zacchaeus runs ahead and climbs a sycamore-fig tree as he knew the road would take Jesus by it. We now come to verse 5.

Vs 5, When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."

Now Jesus walks by. There are his disciples with him and, no doubt, several of his followers and friends, and a large contingent of townspeople who wish to be healed or touched. Jesus looks to and calls out Zacchaeus by name. Did Jesus know him from a previous encounter? The text does not say. But most postulate Zachaeus was a stranger. Jesus may have heard of him, but did not know him. Yet Jesus did know him. In the foreknowledge of God as Jesus knew Nathaniel, he knew Zachaeus. This is the calling of God.