

The Jerusalem Road

3. "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost"

Luke 19:1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (NIV)

Our series called the Jerusalem road tracks the last journey that Jesus made as He approached Jerusalem from the last time. Last week we saw how a blind man saw much more in Jesus than the people who could see, and as a result found spiritual and physical healing.

This week we find a similar story - a man who wanted to see, not because he was blind but because he was short! Like the blind man, he was also a social outcast. He was also the sort of person that others didn't want to know or care about. Yet Jesus was also able to stop for him and he found life.

One of my first jobs was with the Inland Revenue - yes, I worked in a tax office. Tax Officers are not popular people - because they are responsible for getting our taxes out of us. None of us like paying tax, but I always found it an irony that those who most appreciate tax cuts are also the first to complain when the government does not provide the services.

The taxman had just read the story of Cinderella to his four-year-old daughter for the first time. The little girl was fascinated by the story, especially the part where the pumpkin turns into a golden coach. Suddenly she piped up, "Daddy, when the pumpkin turned into a golden coach, would that be classified as income or a long-term capital gain?"

As the taxman woke up after surgery, he said, "Why are all the blinds drawn?" The doctor answered: "There's a big fire across the street, and we didn't want you to think the operation was a failure."

*Why don't sharks eat taxmen?
Professional courtesy*

Some things never change. Dislike of taxmen certainly hasn't. Zacheus was a taxman - a publican. He collected Roman taxes. This made him very unpopular. But it made him rich as he could be as corrupt as he liked and get away with it.

We don't know any more than Luke gives us - all we know is that when Jesus came, he wanted to see him. Well, so did everybody else. I think that Zaccheus' response to Jesus indicates that he really had a desire in his heart to repent and turn to Christ, but the best he could do was sit in a tree. A good vantage point but not particularly good for meeting Jesus. Seeing Him, yes but meeting Him, no.

But that's the amazing thing - Jesus stops and addresses him. , *"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."* 6 *So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.* 7 *All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a `sinner.'*

And what did the crowd say? Why HIM? He's a sinner. We're not. The implication is offence and insult. How dare Jesus do that. Taxmen just ain't worth it!

But that's the issue. In our first study, we have the contrast between what Jesus knew and what the disciples understood. Last week we had the difference between the crowd and the blind man. Now we have the difference between the crowd and Jesus.

Who is our faith for? Is it so that we can indulge ourselves? Or is it *came to seek and to save what was lost.*" (NIV) The truth is that the Son came to seek and to save the lost, not the people who follow Him they are more worthy than anyone else to do so.

We as His people I believe are called to seek and to save that which was lost. People, lost without Jesus and with no hope in this world. *Luke 5 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and `sinners'?" 31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ."* That is the message of Christ. That's why He came and as His people we continue that work. And that is our challenge here in Swaffham today.

As you know, we invite people to our service. Many won't come because they have issues in life that make them too guilty to attend. Please pray for such people, these are the ones God is calling. He doesn't call the great and good - He calls sinners to repentance.

If we are to see conversions in this church then we must emulate Jesus in recognising He came to seek and save that which was lost. That's our call. Not to sit and watch Jesus in action, be a spectator.

So how does Jesus minister to Zaccheus:

1. *He called Zaccheus by name*

He called Him by name. How could he possibly have known. Well He does. He knows every part, every little bit. There isn't any sin we can hide or any thought we can conceal. But that isn't the end of it. For many people, their perception of God is one who is there just to judge and say the word guilty.

Jesus called Zaccheus, the tax collector, the sinner - he knew exactly who he was - and invited Himself around for tea!

Jesus wants to know us. He wants to know the men and women of Swaffham. Not because they are good, but because they aren't. And He asks to come in. He calls them by name.

But He calls us by name too. Guilt is a problem I find in this Church too. As I talk to people about their lives, I realise that for many of us, we feel that somehow we can't or haven't reached what God desires of us. It makes us feel guilty - it makes us hide.

Praise Him! He calls us because we're like that. In fact we're all like that! We have all sinned and come short of His glory. But the same call comes - I want to come into your house, into your heart.

This is not just a message to anyone who is lost, but a reminder to those of us who have already had an encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ.. We are who we are BECAUSE we are sinners, because we can't reach God's standards. Yet he still wants to be in our house, despite the sin and despite the failures.

You'll all know that famous verse in Revelation 3: *20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.* You may have learnt it from the AV, but it is all just the same. It was written to the church in Laodicea, a church which had sunk into the depths of sin. Yet Jesus calls into that situation and says "The invitation is still there". Open the door, invite me in and let's get to know each other again.

That's the message to us tonight if we feel inadequate in His presence. If we feel weak. If we feel useless, If we feel guilty. That knock on the door is still there. Bang, bang, bank. "I want to come into your house!" How about it?

Chorus "Jesus is knocking, patiently waiting."

2. *He caused Zaccheus to repent*

Zaccheus became a changed man because of his encounter with the Saviour. True faith brings forth repentance. Repentance - bringing about a U turn in your life. Christian faith is all about repentance. Going a new way. God's way. There is no real faith without repentance. And repentance brings about change.

The experience of Rev. W. P. Nicholson in Belfast, at the turn of the century is needed today. The old evangelist would preach to the dock workers powerfully,

causing conviction, and insisting on repentance. Many men accepted Christ and started to bring back everything they had stolen from the shipyards. In the end the authorities had to make a public announcement: "Will all those attending the meetings of Mr. W. P. Nicholson please stop returning stolen goods. "We have nowhere to store them."

J John had the same experiences with his mission in Norwich last year.

Being a Christian is about changed lives. When we sent out our Sharing Jesus people last week we had only done half the gospel presentation. Which was a pity as it only dealt with the part that was about why Jesus died and the next half explains about repentance. I was watching a video this week where it was stated that in the USA up to 90% of the people who profess faith subsequently fall away. Why? The speaker suggested that the flaw was in the way the gospel had been presented to them. There was no repentance. Becoming a Christian is about CHANGE. If we understand what Christ has done for us, we have to be different transformed. Our Ukrainian friends the other week were nearer the mark. They don't talk about conversions, they talk about repentances.

Repentance does not finish near conversion, but I believe that in the battles of life Satan tries to draw us away from our Father and we turn back to old ways. He's cunning so that sometimes we don't even realise what the enemy has done. I believe as a church God is calling us to deeper repentance, to examine our lives afresh, anew so that we can be like Zaccheus, to be free from our past, free from things that currently stop us walking in the Lord's path and walk free.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

As we come around the Lord's table this evening, we come conscious of the fact that sin holds us back and keeps us from moving forward in Christ.

An african bishop once told this story

**Once a water system to a house was accidentally damaged so that a frog managed to creep into the supply pipe. As it moved through the pipe it became jammed and died and bloated up. Because the water ceased to flow, all sorts of other creepy crawlies got in the pipe. The householder realised that there was no water and dug up the pipe and cleared the mess. From just one frog, the pipe was filled with all sorts of mess.*

Just one sin in our lives can interfere with our fellowship with God. Do you feel you have a difficult relationship with God at the moment. Are you friends with Him? Or do you find your spiritual life difficult. We are called to be holy as He is holy.

3. **He pronounces salvation.**

*"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.
10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

The bottom line about Jesus is that he accepted Zaccheus. If we are Christians tonight then we are accepted. Why? Because the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. Message still needs to ring in our ears even now as Christians. We a saved people. When we repent, when we call on our Father for forgiveness we find it. There are three senses we can look at our salvation. We were saved, we are being saved and we shall be saved. The process of salvation is a present tense thing. We are being saved. As we walk the walk of life, repentance is not a single act but something we need to come to again and again in our lives as the light of Christ shines into them? We sometimes step back, He wants us to step forward.

Why is this message so important to us? This isn't a message for non-Christians: It's a message for us too. Repentance brings forgiveness and a new encouragement and enthusiasm to follow Christ . Zaccheus was a son of Abraham. Not because He was a Jew - that made him one anyway - but because He trusted through faith that He was forgiven and acceptable to God.

Have we been struggling with our sin and our guilt. Maybe it's failure in the past? I believe Jesus wants to bring us into a deeper repentance and therefore a deeper faith in Him.