

Lost and Found

Luke 19:1-10

Everybody *always* looked at him like that. Like he was something they'd scraped off their sandals. He knew the words they used... 'Traitor... Thief... Scum.' And plenty of others best not spoken out loud.

'They're just jealous,' he often told himself. 'They'd do the same if they were in my position. They'd take their cut and line their pockets if they could. Just because I was smart enough to get in there first...' He wasn't just a tax collector pocketing a bigger commission than the Romans ordered. He was a *chief* tax collector. All the little leaguers had to pay him a percentage if they wanted to keep in the game.

Every time he suffered a dirty look or a raised whisper in the street, he consoled himself with the life he'd made for himself through all this. The house, the clothes, the stuff - yeah, he was more than comfortable. But he was less than satisfied too. He'd never got quite enough to fill up that empty feeling, that hole inside - a hole that seemed to get bigger when he thought about the road he was walking in life.

He wasn't stupid. He could see things through their eyes too. When they glanced at his house, they saw the luxury he was lining his life with, built off the back of *their* money. When that thought came up, he brushed it off with a gulp, and carried on with the day.

Then he heard the crowd gathering outside. The word on the street was, 'Jesus... did you hear, Jesus is coming through? He's heading through our town, right now!... Did you hear what He did? That blind man who was begging out on the road - He *made him see!* And did you hear about how He talks to the religious leaders?'

Zacchaeus had heard of this Jesus. And... well, he had to admit he was *curious*. No more than that. He thought he'd just wander out the house and have a quick glance at this man of the moment that everyone was getting excited about.

But of course, they wouldn't let him. When he tried to edge forward to the side of the road to see this parade of outsiders, waifs and strays led by a simple looking carpenter - they barged him back. They closed ranks; stood shoulder to shoulder muttering 'aye, back you go... *traitor.*'

Something happened inside him - his heart started thumping a bit quicker. Suddenly, the idea that he would miss seeing Jesus coming his way wasn't okay. He got a little more desperate; a little more determined. He took a breath, and thought for a moment - 'Right - how could I make this happen?' Then he saw the tree.

Climbing trees wasn't something he did everyday. A finely dressed man like him, hitching up a tree trunk? That would just give them more to talk about. But, quite to his own surprise, he was *beyond* curious now - the impulse to cast eyes on Jesus was strong enough that the first splinter didn't put him off.

Okay, there he was - in the tree, ready. Jesus was coming this way now. He could settle down. He'd see the famous man walk by. As Jesus came into view, Zacchaeus couldn't see much that was worth climbing a tree for. But there was something compelling about the guy - all these people trailing after Him. All these people at the roadsides stretching out for Him.

And then it happened. Jesus got to the tree. And... He stopped. Zacchaeus held his breath. *And Jesus looked up at him.* Zacchaeus hadn't banked on this. Their eyes locked. And all of the curiosity that had turned into a despite-himself impulse turned into something else now - a kind of out-of-control, out-of-my-depth, complete vulnerability about this attention that Jesus was suddenly giving *him*. 'Why is He looking at me? What does He want?'

'Zacchaeus! Yes, I know who you are. You know who I am too, right? Come down right away, I need to come to your house today.'

His heart was positively racing now. He almost didn't notice all the whispers and looks being exchanged in the crowd. He found himself at the foot of the tree and face to face with Jesus before he knew it. And now - now that he was actually looking at Jesus - what was going on inside was more than casual curiosity. And it was more than a determined impulse to see more. And it was more than a letting go of being in control of things. Now, it was: 'Yes! Please, Jesus, do come to my house! Come in right now!'

Do you know a story about someone going from 'a little bit curious about Jesus' to 'welcome into my home, Jesus'? How did it come about?

We don't read about what compelled Zacchaeus so much about Jesus. But we do read that what started as curiosity turned into full blown, saving faith in Jesus that transformed his life. Where you've begun to become a bit curious

about Jesus, don't be surprised if you end up welcoming Him home before you know it.

And where someone you've been praying for to come to faith in Jesus starts to show hints of curiosity, be encouraged about what might be coming - and pray for that moment that Jesus locks eyes with them.

As well as reading about where curiosity about Jesus can lead you, in this passage we learn a bit about welcome, a bit about change, and a bit about saving what's lost. First of all, let's see who is welcoming whom.

The thing about Zacchaeus was that he was a write off. A lost cause. In v.7 we read about the people of the town of Jericho gossiping about the sort of person Jesus has gone to eat with. You'll have picked up by now that tax collectors were scum to the Jewish people. They were traitors who served the occupying Romans and pocketed money on the side, and everybody knew it.

They made their fortunes preying on poorer people who couldn't do a thing to stop them abusing their power. Think drug dealer, pimp, human trafficker or dodgy banker and you've got an idea of the way people in town felt about Zacchaeus. What does Jesus think He's doing, treating someone like this as His *friend*? That's what going to eat at someone's house suggests, right?

Now you might think you're a reasonable, open-minded, non-judgemental sort of person. Or even that you're a Christian who's open to meeting and welcoming anyone because that's how you live out the grace you have tasted. But I think most of us hold on to our reservations about 'certain sorts of people' - 'Oh, yes, of course they'd be welcome - but, well, we'd have to be wise and careful about just how close we get how quickly, and...'

'Zacchaeus! Come down right now, I need to come to your house!' There's nothing cautious or reserved about Jesus' welcome to Zacchaeus. It's big, bold, brash and public; it is an unashamed 'I'd *like* to be seen with you, and you with me' and an unafraid 'let me into the intimacy of coming into your home.' Jesus offers this totally affirming welcome to the likes of him.

So God would love *you* to know that He holds out exactly the same welcome to *you*. Whoever you are. There are no black sheep to God - just people who have taken up His welcome, and people who haven't. There is nobody who has left it too late after leaving Jesus behind in childhood. Nobody who has gone too far in the path they've walked in life for Jesus to call for them.

Instead, Jesus says out loud to you - hear Him say it to you now, through these lips - 'You are welcome with me! I'd like to come home with you today. Will you let me in?'

That's the other thing about the welcome we're reading about. As much as Jesus is publicly welcoming Zacchaeus, He's also publicly asking Zacchaeus to welcome *Him*. He says, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately...' (the call from Jesus is always 'let's do this now, today, not later') '...I *must* stay at your house today.' The Greek word that's translated 'must' there is *dei* - literally, 'it is necessary that...'

What's ringing in Zacchaeus' ears is Jesus telling him that what *needs* to happen is for Zacchaeus to welcome Him. It's stronger than, 'I'd *like* you to welcome me,' or, 'if it's not too much trouble, and it's convenient enough,' or, 'ideally I'd stop and spend time at your place, Zacchaeus, but otherwise I could always go somewhere else, or just keep going...'

No, here is what the Son of God has on His agenda: 'What needs to happen now is for you to welcome me home. Just now. Let's go.' That is what I believe the Spirit of God has on His agenda for some of you listening to this right now. You're beyond curiosity now. You didn't expect to be, this crossroads moment has snuck up on you as unexpectedly as it did Zacchaeus.

But right now, God says to you, 'I absolutely welcome you. Now welcome me home with you. Let's make it today. I'd *love* to be seen with you, and you with me. Will you let me in?' When you go home from church today, will Jesus actually come with you - into your home, all access pass, from this day on?

Pause to pray? (Inviting Jesus in)

I know - most of us have done this already. To you guys, I say this - we tend to have our own agendas. 'This *needs* to happen. That *must* be next. This person *needs* to let Jesus in.' What I've found in recent months is that the people on my agenda and prayer list are not the ones that Jesus has stopped and locked eyes with. I've had to learn to watch to see who the people are to whom *Jesus* is saying, 'I need to come to your house now.'

What would 'inviting Jesus home' look like in your home?

The muttering crowd in v.7 can't believe that the Jesus they came to see went off to dine with the leech of the community. Maybe Jesus is just like everyone else. Maybe He likes to buddy up with the rich and powerful and get in with the people who pull the strings. Except for two things:

- 1) He's spent most of Luke's gospel doing the opposite - courageously challenging the rich and powerful, and giving dignity and friendship to the poor, forgotten and marginalised and...
- 2) It turns out after this encounter that it's not Zacchaeus and his wealth that influence Jesus, but Jesus who influences Zacchaeus and his wealth. Radically so, in fact.

In v.8, we read that Zacchaeus gives up *half* of his possessions to the poor, *and* commits to repaying those he has cheated *fourfold*. Forget PPI reclaims or tax refunds, this kind of repayment is on a whole other scale. After inviting Jesus in, *this* jaw-dropping, crowd-silencing, lifestyle-transforming change is the result in Zacchaeus' life. A change so big that the people who know us notice it is what follows from faith in Jesus.

The first thing about the change in Zacchaeus' life is that he *leaves behind what he must to enter new life*. This is in contrast to the other rich guy we read about just in the last chapter. Before Christmas, we read in Luke 18:18-30 about a rich man who came to Jesus asking how to have eternal life, and learning that it involves *leaving, following, entering and receiving*.

Before following Jesus, entering the Kingdom of God and receiving eternal life, that rich man was challenged to leave behind the thing in his life that was bigger to him than God was. And the man couldn't do it. He walked away. From Jesus, and from life beyond death. Jesus commented afterwards, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God.'

Not impossible though, it seems. Because here in the next chapter is a rich man who, when he met Jesus and let Him in, *chose* to give up half his wealth without being asked, and committed to repaying those he'd cheated. He was leaving behind wealth as his life's aim, and all the cheating ways that had got him there.

It's a reminder to us that when we become Christians, that involves leaving behind things of the old life that have no place in the new. I asked you when we looked at Luke 18 what you left behind when you started following Jesus. Do you remember what your answer was? Is there something you're not leaving behind that God's been prompting you about?

The change in Zacchaeus' life is a radical one. What he commits to changing after meeting Jesus means changing not only his values, but his lifestyle. He won't be living the same kind of life now that he's given up half his wealth and paid back those he'd wronged fourfold. He'll be living in reduced circumstances. Will he keep his job and start to change the corrupt culture in it? Will he have to change job? How will the community react to this really obvious change in his life?

The challenge for us as Christians is really this - what is there about your life that is so *different* - either from those around you, or from what you used to be - that people can see and comment on that difference? What is there about your lifestyle change that gets people talking and points people to the God who has saved you and changed you?

What's obviously different about your life as a Christian?

Now, here's five other things about the change in Zacchaeus' life brought to you in 2 minutes (honest - I've timed it!). We're going to look at these things more fully in Life Groups next week...

Zacchaeus changes *willingly*. He's not making changes out of obligation, but from a heart full of thanks to Jesus for the welcome and salvation he's received. Willing change starts with inviting Jesus in and being bowled over by Him as we take time in His presence.

Zacchaeus changes *immediately*. It's not so much 'I will' as 'I do.' 'Here and now' he says, 'I give half my wealth to the poor.' Present tense, happening now. He is not putting off change for another day, it's happening today.

Zacchaeus changes *publicly*. He 'stood up' and said to the Lord, 'here's the change I'm making.' It wasn't kept to himself. He let others know the change he was committing to, and that both helped him to make the change and pointed other people to the Lord he was changing for.

Linked to that, Zacchaeus changes *accountably*. Because he's shared the change he is committing to, people can ask him, 'How's that going?' or pick him up on anything he doesn't stick to.

And finally, Zacchaeus changes *measurably*. He's specific about the changes he's making. He doesn't say, 'I'm going to give more money to the poor,' he says, 'I'm going to put a number on it - half my wealth.' He pays

back *four times* what he's cheated people out of. He'll change in specific and measurable ways, to God's glory.

We're going to finish by looking at what Jesus says as the last word about all this in vv.9-10. In v.9, He does what we saw Him doing last week with the blind man that nobody welcomed. He says out loud to everyone, 'this person is saved. He's part of God's family now.' Whoever you are, however lost you were, Jesus doesn't just publicly welcome you into His presence, He publicly declares your status as one of God's own when you invite Him in to save and transform you.

And in v.10, Jesus tells us the whole reason that He came to this world at all. Back in Luke 4, we read Jesus' mission statement - to set people free from everything that robs them of life - sin and death and everything else that blights us. That's the goal, the outcome for all those whose trust is in Him.

If that's the 'what' of His mission, here in 19:10 is Jesus' heart for the 'who.' He came to seek and save the lost. Those who have written themselves off from God, or been written off by others. The ones who chose the wrong road. The ones who walked away from the God they grew up with. The ones hiding guilty, empty feelings in the quiet of their own homes. The ones who get honest enough to *know* they are 'lost.'

We've seen it before in Luke. Jesus told the famous stories in Luke 15. The lost sheep. The lost coin. The lost son. God's heart is for those who know they are far from where they need to be. To another tax collector in Luke 5, Levi, Jesus offered the call, 'Follow me.' They ate and drank in his house that day, too. Jesus got the snide remarks then as well. And that time, He said, 'It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'

You've got to *know* that you are lost before it's good news that in Jesus you've been found. That you're sick before it's good news that in Jesus you're made whole. So those of you who think you're fine will let Jesus walk by. You might see the passion amongst us here and even feel something inside that says 'there's something in this' - but you'll do nothing in response.

But those of you who have now, perhaps suddenly and to your surprise, come to the view that you are sin-sick and far from God and you need His help - know that to be welcomed into *your* home, and to welcome *you* to His home in the end, is *exactly* why Jesus came. So make a move, because Jesus says to you, 'I must stay at your house today.'