

Jesus Meets Jericho's Most Hated

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[0 : 00] I'm pleased to have a seat and a very warm welcome to everyone. Thank you to everyone who's participated so far in the service. Is it not just wonderful to hear how God is at work in the lives of the members of this church family?

Thank you so much, Kirsty, for sharing that. I love how you openly admitted, and you don't really get this from students. You guys have time in your hands. Thank you so much for doing that. But grab a Bible, please, if you have one, and turn to Luke chapter 19 and verses 1 to 10.

This is where we're going to be this morning. And just before we get in, why don't we just still our hearts as we come to God's Word, and let's pray together. So, Father, help us this morning to see something more of the greatness of your Son, Jesus.

Lord, what we have not, we ask that you would give us. And what we are not, gracious Father, you would make us.

And this is our prayer made in Jesus' name. Amen. So, someone came up to me not so long ago and told me that they'd got a new job. And I asked them what the job was, and the line that came back to me was that their job meant that they were going to be catching bad guys.

[1 : 30] And it turned out that they'd actually just got a job with the anti-fraud investigation team at one of our city's banks. Now, I wonder if you identify with those sentiments, catching bad guys.

It's not true that in our society, when we hear of somebody who's got rich because they've cheated the system, we are outraged. I was thinking of some of the things we've seen over recent years in our news.

We're thinking of bankers who have been accused of fixing markets. We've had politicians found to be making dodgy expense claims. We have big companies like Apple and Google and Starbucks somehow managing to avoid paying millions upon millions upon millions of dollars in tax.

There's one friend advised me you should go to Caffè Nero for your coffees, because at least Nero gives to Caesar what is Caesar's. But we are not the first generation to feel that towards our money cheats, because this morning we're journeying to first century Israel, and we're back in this little town of Jericho.

Now, if you remember, we entered Jericho at the end of chapter 18 last week. We saw Jesus enter this little town. This well-to-do little town that sits, you'll see it, on the major highway to Jerusalem.

[2 : 49] And Jericho, like Edinburgh, it despises its money cheats. So let's read in chapter 19, the first 10 verses, about Jesus' encounter with Jericho's most hated money cheat.

From verse 1 of chapter 19. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus.

He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, He is going to be the guest of a sinner.

[4 : 01] 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.

Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

Amen. And we pray and trust that God will bless the reading of his words this morning. So here's Zacchaeus. His name means clean or innocent.

As we'll see as we read this little encounter here in these opening verses, the irony of that is clear for all to see. Do you see, Luke wants us to know two things about Zacchaeus.

Firstly, what Zacchaeus does? He's a tax collector. In fact, he's a chief tax collector. Now tax collectors in this state and in this region are considered traitors, because they are Jews who work for the Romans.

[5 : 12] And what they do is that they take taxes from their own people, and not only do they give it to the Roman enemy, but actually they end up taking a little cut for it themselves. Now some of you may have played Articulate, one of my favorite board games, Christmas favorite.

The game is essentially that you have a word on the card, and you have to get your team to guess the word on the card by using associated words, except they're not to be that word. Which when you put it like that seems quite difficult, but it's really easy.

Articulate. Imagine this week you get tax collector on your card. You're trying to get your team to guess tax collector. What are the words that are in your head? Despised. Hated.

Dishonest. Traitor. Oh, I know! Tax collector. This is what Zacchaeus does. He's a tax collector. And because of what he does, do you notice that he's rich?

And secondly, do you see Luke tell us what Zacchaeus is? What is he? He's short. Now, as we're introduced to Zacchaeus in these first few verses, we're not optimistic of anything good happening to him, and if we're really honest with ourselves, if anything, we're kind of crossing our fingers, hoping that something bad is going to happen to him.

[6 : 25] Zacchaeus is a man with not an awful lot going for him. Let me ask you this morning, are you here, and you feel like you've not got a lot going for you?

If that's you, then can I encourage you to make Zacchaeus' story your story? Why would God care about me? I'm nothing special.

Let Zacchaeus' story about how he encountered Jesus be for you this morning. Here is Jericho's most hated, and he's heard that Jesus is passing through his town.

And Luke wants us to know what was going on in Zacchaeus' mind. What does he want? He wants to see Jesus. And I find that so interesting.

Now, put yourself in Zacchaeus' shoes. He's a wealthy guy, probably Armani shoes, he's probably got barber boots, something like that. Put yourself in Zacchaeus' shoes. If I were him, thinking about leaving the house, I think I would probably step back.

[7 : 34] Think about it. The whole town is out to see Jesus. If I were Zacchaeus, the last thing I would want to do is to show my face in public. Why risk being insulted by the whole town if they're out, the crowds?

Why risk maybe being exposed by this good man Jesus? Why do it? Because Zacchaeus needs to see Jesus. So out he goes, he gets to the road, and what does he see?

He sees that the crowd have taken the best spots for the sightseeing. Now, is at this point Zacchaeus going to call it a day because he's given it a really good shot? No, because Zacchaeus needs to see Jesus.

So he runs on ahead, and he climbs up a sycamore tree. Luke's way of telling us that it's a real tree. It really was a sycamore tree. You can go and see it in Jericho. It was a sycamore tree.

He runs and he climbs the tree. Undignified behavior for a man like this. Maybe even more reason for the watching crowd to mock him. Why does he go to these lengths? Because he needs to see Jesus.

[8 : 39] Now, see this in the context of what we've just seen over the past couple of weeks. Like the persistent widow, if you remember her. Like the blind man last week of chapter 18, if you remember him.

There's an admirable determination to this man Zacchaeus. He needs to see Jesus. In fact, it's something about this man Jesus that is almost irresistibly drawing Zacchaeus to him like paperclips to a magnet.

Now, C.S. Lewis, many of you have heard of him in his book, Surprised by Joy, which is really just his spiritual autobiography, if you want to put it like that. He talks about how he became a Christian. How he met Jesus. And he writes this. And here are these words. Fascinating observation. He said, I say that I chose Jesus.

Yet it did not really seem possible for me to do the opposite. So Lewis is saying there that he found himself drawn to Jesus. You're here this morning and you find yourself, as we encounter Jesus in

the words, you find yourself drawn to him.

[9 : 52] Zacchaeus, he needs to see Jesus. And there he is. He's up the tree at the end of verse 4. If you see it there. Now, picture the scene at the top of the tree. Zacchaeus, he hears the commotion up ahead. Just imagine his inner dialogue.

I see him. There he is. This Jesus who I've heard so much about. He's coming my way. But he's stopped. He's looking for someone.

Maybe he's looking for something. Who's he looking for? He's looking at me. He's looking at me. Do you see it? Verse 5. Luke tells us that Jesus went eyeball to eyeball with Zacchaeus.

He sees him. And he calls to him. Not, hey, you up there. Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus. He knows his name. I think we're meant to understand that Jesus, God in the flesh, he knows more than just his name.

He knows it all. He knows everything about this man. And if that's the case, what are the next words out of his mouth going to be?

[10 : 58] Is Jesus going to publicly shame him in front of the watching crowd? Is Jesus going to out him for being a cheat? If he did either of those things, I'm sure that would have made him even more of a celebrity in the eyes of the crowd.

But see what Jesus does. He doesn't exchange a passing greeting. He doesn't say, Zacchaeus, do you want to join me? Let's walk and talk as I journey to Jerusalem. Jesus is interested in what?

Coming to his house. He doesn't say, may I? He doesn't say, can I? He simply announces that he's coming. And I guess it's at this point in the story that we're reminded that Jesus isn't British.

I don't know if anyone has ever invited themselves to yours for tea. Maybe they have and you've greeted them with that Scottish phrase, what do we say? You'll have had your tea.

As if to say, you may be in my house, but don't think for a minute that you're getting any food. Here is Jesus. You'll have had your tea. Doesn't happen often in the Shanks household, I'll be honest.

[12 : 06] We like to know when people are coming. We like to tidy the flat for them coming. We don't want them to see the crumbs on the floor. We don't want them to see the unwashed dishes. We definitely don't want them to smell the dirty nappies that we haven't taken out yet.

We want to get the lighting right. We want to get the background music on. We want to get the scented candles on. Probably true for all of us, is it not? We want people to see us at our best.

Zacchaeus, he's not going to have a chance to tidy himself up. Jesus is going to see the real him, warts and all. Jesus is going to see it all. But Jesus already knows the real him.

He knows who he is. He knows what he's done. He knows the thoughts in his mind. He knows the skeletons in his closet. You see, this isn't about Zacchaeus cleaning himself up for Jesus.

Jesus meets him as he is. Jesus meets Zacchaeus despite of who he is. Why? Because Jesus doesn't want to leave Zacchaeus as he is.

[13 : 19] Friends, Jesus knows every area of our lives. That's why we were singing those songs at the beginning to help us understand that. He sees the depths of our hearts. And he moves towards us, not away from us.

Jesus meets Zacchaeus with love and grace, just like Kirsty was saying, not with accusation.

Because Jesus hasn't gone to Zacchaeus' house to learn about his problems.

Jesus hasn't gone to Zacchaeus' house to advise him about his problems. Jesus has gone to Zacchaeus' house to deal with Zacchaeus' biggest problem. And his biggest problem is that he is a sinner.

He is not right with God. And because of his sin, he is alienated from God. And he, Jesus, needs to make that right. And in the context of Luke, that is exactly what Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem and to the cross to do.

And notice the word must there. It isn't a chance meet, this one. They don't, they haven't just happened to bump into one another. This is a divine appointment.

[14 : 27] And you see how Zacchaeus responds to Jesus' invitation. He doesn't say, no way. He doesn't get his smartphone calendar out and say, how about next Tuesday in February? He welcomes him gladly.

He welcomes him joyfully to his home. Now we've seen that theme joy all the way through this gospel. That this is what happens when people encounter Jesus.

As Jesus forgives, as Jesus gives life, the reaction is joy. Here is Zacchaeus welcoming Jesus joyfully to his home.

But, not everyone shares that joy. The camera, verse 7, pans from looking at Zacchaeus and Jesus, this very happy scene, to looking at the muttering crowd.

He's going where? He's going to visit who? He's going to eat with who? See, for Jesus to go to Zacchaeus' house, for Jesus to presumably share a meal with this man, is for him to associate with Zacchaeus.

[15 : 36] Because as far as the crowd are concerned, Jesus should be getting a selfie with the local mayor. He should be getting, he should be meeting the upstanding members of Jericho, but instead, he's gone to this house of this man a sinner.

See, the crowd are disgusted at Jesus. Why? Because he associates with the wrong kind of people. In fact, I reckon you can make a good case for saying that Jesus is killed, as we see it in Luke's Gospel, precisely because he hangs out with the wrong kind of people.

That's why Jesus gets the nickname, the friend of sinners. Jesus, friend of sinners. Let me challenge us in passing.

When was the last time we puzzled people by the individuals that we hang out with? That person at work that nobody wants to go near, nobody wants to get on with.

That friend who's a total drain in your time, and people look at you and say, why do you bother? I'm able to say to them, I bother because Jesus bothered with me.

[16 : 51] You see, this crowd may not be interested in extending any kind of grace to Zacchaeus, but Jesus is. Often the case, is it not, in the Christian life that God brings to the surface and exposes the hardness of our hearts when he extends his goodness to somebody else.

That's the heart of this crowd in Luke 19. And in a way that illustrates so beautifully what Jesus is about to do as he journeys to the cross, do you see how the shame and the insults at the beginning of this episode that were directed towards Zacchaeus, Jesus now takes upon himself.

And this encounter with Jesus so radically transforms Zacchaeus' life. As you read verse 8, it's almost as if he knows instinctively that as if he is to follow Jesus, then he needs to put his sinful past behind him.

Look at it, Zacchaeus pledges himself to be generous with his money, half of his money. Where's it going to go? To the poor, half of his money. And he commits to restoring fourfold those whom he has defrauded.

Now what we need to see here is this is not Zacchaeus deciding in his own mind to turn over a new leaf. Because let's be quite honest, that would not have lasted long.

[18 : 16] What this is, is evidence that God by his grace has given Zacchaeus a new heart. Now there's a famous story told of Harland and Wolfe, the great shipbuilding company based in Belfast.

The reason I know of them is because it's famous for being the place where the Titanic was built.

It's a famous story about Harland and Wolfe. At their height, they used to employ 35,000 men.

A lot of men. 35,000 men. And at the end of the day, you can imagine the easiest thing to do in the world was for these men as they left en masse just to pick something up, a little bit of lead, a little bit of copper, a little bit of pipe under the jacket and out they go.

Harland and Wolfe, the directors knew this was going on and thought, we can do nothing about it.

But during one of those periods of revival in Northern Ireland, many of those 35,000 men became Christians.

And what began to happen as the transforming grace of Jesus Christ worked in their hearts, as the Spirit of God began to prod and to poke about their sinful ways about how they needed to change, what began to happen is that many of those 35,000 men began to bring the bits that he'd stolen back to the warehouse.

[19 : 31] In fact, so great was the transforming work of God amongst these men that actually the directors of Harland and Wolfe had to write to the men publicly and say, would you stop bringing the pieces that you've stolen back to the warehouse because we simply do not have room to store all the things that you've stolen.

the transforming power of the grace of Jesus Christ. Now I wonder as you think about your own life this morning and as God and by His Spirit as He works in the midst of His people, what will that transformation look like in your life?

As the people in your circles view you, watch you in action every day. Friends, do they see the fruit of a transformed heart?

Now presumably, Zacchaeus, he kept being a tax collector but now, do you see, I love to imagine this, he's a transformed tax collector.

You can imagine him, can't you? Remember, we used to do this when I worked for a law firm. We used to have yearly getaways as a team to go and talk about what we'd done. Try to imagine Zacchaeus at one of those little retreats with his tax collector mates.

[20 : 49] They're sitting there boasting about the people that they've ripped off, boasting about the amount of money that they've made, laughing about how rich they've become and they turn to Zacchaeus.

Go on Zacchaeus, you're the chief, you must have a great story about what you've done this year. And Zacchaeus says, do you know what I've done with what I'd done with my money this year? Half of my money went to the poor and those who I previously defrauded, I gave back fourfold.

Can you imagine the look on the faces of his peers? This is what you did with your money? In the words of John Newton, the man who God saved from a life of being a slave trader, I am not the man I ought to be.

I am not the man I wish to be. I am not the man I hope to be, but by the grace of God, I am not the man I used to be. That is Zacchaeus' story.

The transforming power of the grace of Jesus Christ. And what does Jesus call him at verse 9? A son of Abraham. Zacchaeus is now included in God's family of faith, where society looked to him and labeled him a hopeless outsider.

[22 : 05] Do you see, through repentance and faith in Jesus, Jesus labels him a hope-filled insider? Here indeed, again in the context of chapter 18, here indeed is a rich man who has found his way through the eye of a needle.

Luke's message to us, his readers, that there is no one too bad beyond the grace of Jesus Christ. That the grace of Jesus is deep and it's wide and it's long.

And the invitation to receive him is for the religious and the non-religious, the rich and the poor, the bad and the good, the high and the low, it's for absolutely everybody. Why?

Well, see Jesus outline his mission at verse 10. And if you, we don't often do this, do we, memory verses? It's a dying art in Christian circles. But if you're going to memorize one from today, memorize this one.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. See, the beginning of the story is Zacchaeus thought he was the one looking for Jesus.

[23 : 12] Actually, the truth of it the whole time was that Jesus was the one looking for Zacchaeus. Now, what a glorious truth that should thrill our hearts if we are Jesus' this morning.

As we were singing earlier, that Jesus sought me when a stranger, when I was wandering far away from God, he to rescue me from danger, he shed for me his precious blood.

This is the gospel. The gospel that not only gets us into the kingdom, but the gospel that continues to transform us day after day after day more into the likeness of our Savior.

That God took the initiative to save us in the sending of his Son. Jesus came looking for us. And that is the business that he's employed in today just as much as it was in Zacchaeus' day.

Let me ask you as we read of him here, is he compelling you this morning to come to him? As you see him in action here, is he saying, come to me, receive me, receive the forgiveness that I purchased for you at the cross and let me transform you by my spirit.

[24 : 28] You see, Jesus isn't in the business like my friend. He's not in the business of catching bad guys. Actually, he's in the business of saving them and transforming them. You know, just as we close, one of the highlights for us as a church last year was the weekend when we celebrated 50 years of meeting together.

Real milestone. To be honest, I feel so privileged to have stepped into the church's life at this point. 50 years. Let me ask, was there anyone who was here in the first meeting of Brunsfield Evangelical Church?

Yes. Handful. Excellent. Because the birth of a church is a beautiful thing, is it not? It's an exciting thing, it's a scary thing, but there's something wonderful about a church starting.

I was trying to imagine this week, and let me get a glass of water because my feet go on, I'm trying to imagine this week the first meeting of Jericho Evangelical Church. Right, if I was in charge, if I was a media guy, that's what I'd go for, okay?

Jericho Evangelical Church. Now, if you think about it, we've met two of its members over the last few weeks. Blind man of chapter 18, for argument's sake, we'll call him Bartimaeus, and Zacchaeus here in chapter 19.

[25 : 44] Jericho Evangelical Church, two of its members. I'm trying to imagine this week their first meeting. Their first meeting, probably in somebody's house. Imagine it. Somebody's got the quiche.

Somebody's suggested one of those awkward icebreaker games, like if you were a fruit, what would you be? And everybody's thinking, I'm a lemon because on the outside I'm happy, but on the inside I'm bitter towards you for suggesting this game.

The first meeting of this church, eventually, the conversation comes around to how did you become a Christian. Tell me, how did you meet Jesus?

Bartimaeus, do you want to go first? Do you want to go first? Tell us how you met Jesus. I'd love to tell you how I met Jesus. My life before I met him, I had nothing. I had no possessions.

I was reliant on the pity of people. I had no help. Most of all, I had no sight. Really had no hope in this world. But I met Jesus. I heard he was coming to my town.

[26 : 44] I met him. We came along and I shouted. The crowd tried to get me to stop. I kept shouting and eventually he came to me and he said, what do you want me to do for you? Do you know, I said, let me see, Lord Jesus, let me see you.

And he gave me sight and he transformed my life. And I said, Jesus, I'm following you. I'm going to put it back. I'm following you. And he goes, well done, Bartimaeus, well done.

What about you, Zacchaeus? Do you want to have a shot? I'd love to tell you how I met Jesus.

Bartimaeus, listen, if you were the low, then I guess that makes me the high. I had everything going for me in life.

I loved money. I loved my money. I was rich. In fact, I would do anything, even if it involved defrauding people to get money. I loved my money.

And people hated me because of what I did and what I do. But I heard Jesus was coming to town as well. And I ran out, decided I wanted to see him.

[27 : 44] I ran out. I couldn't find a spot so I climbed a tree and I looked down and I saw him. And you'll never guess what. He walked right past and he called. He knew my name.

And would you believe the brass neck of the guy? He invited himself to mine for dinner. But I'm so glad that he did because he transformed my life. I too sit here as a follower of this man we call Jesus.

Now do you see what Luke is doing here in this section? He's showing us two very different people from two very different backgrounds probably doing two very different things with their lives.

But do you see how these two very different men are united? In fact, they're more than united. They can call each other brother because they've got one shared story.

The words from the old hymn, I was lost but Jesus found me found the sheep that went astray threw his loving arms around me drew me back into his way.

[28 : 51] Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me sing it with the saints in glory gathered by the crystal sea.

And as we sit here this morning, it's not our testimony, it's not our song that Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering far away from God he to save me from danger shed for me his precious blood.

What a saviour. What a saviour. Let's pray together. And maybe just in the silence before we move to pray and to close with our final song let's just take a minute together and be silent.

The Lord has been speaking to us this morning through his word and perhaps now is the time to offer you a little prayer to him. And so gracious God and loving heavenly Father we thank you for sending Jesus to save us.

And thank you for sending your spirit not only to open our eyes to that truth but to do your transforming work in our lives. Help us dear Father to have your compassion and love for the lost world.

[30 : 11] Be at work this week we ask for Jesus' glory in our lives. Amen. Amen. Amen.