

Luke 19.¹⁻¹⁰

to seek and to save the lost

2. 'The Christmas tree!'

Background

The Greek word for 'salvation' was closely associated with the idea of 'healing': it's little wonder, therefore, that with Luke's background as a doctor one of the themes which runs through his gospel record is that of the saving grace of God in Jesus.

Luke's lengthy narrative of the birth of Jesus, to which at Christmas attention is customarily turned, sounds this note repeatedly. Mary's song begins with the expression of her delight in the God who is 'my Saviour' (Lk.1.47): when Zechariah finally speaks after 9 months' reflecting on what the Lord is doing, his immediate testimony is that God has raised up 'a horn of *salvation*' for us' (Lk.1.69): and when the angels burst in on the shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem with their news, it's the announcement of 'a Saviour' who has been born to them (Lk.2.10).

The rest of his gospel record as Luke narrates the ministry of Jesus is in many ways an exposition of what that 'salvation' comprises: how it's to be understood, what it effects in experience, and what it involved for Jesus Himself. Hence it's no surprise to find that he records this illuminating story of what happened in Jericho, with the climactic statement of Jesus, "*The Son of Man came to seek and the save the lost*" (Lk.19.10) – a fitting sequel to last week's study on the 'lost' sons.

That's His take on Christmas! Luke meant his readers to draw these lines of connection and to relate his extended narrative of the birth of Jesus to the record of His ministry which follows. What we now describe as 'Christmas' is not to be seen as some separate event, disconnected with what followed, but rather the first great act in the unfolding drama of God's saving grace in and through His Son.

Luke was for significant spells a travelling companion of Paul and the theology which underpins his narratives mirrors closely that of the apostle. Paul's wrote to the church at Corinth about the 'grace' of the Lord Jesus declaring that, "*though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich*" ([2 Cor.8.9](#)). Luke's account of the ministry of Jesus is the record of (a) what it meant for Him to 'become poor' and (b) what it means for us to 'become rich'.

It's important, therefore, to recognise that this episode in Jericho is as Jesus is en route to Jerusalem and to the final and complete 'impoverishment' which His death on the cross will involve. It is through Jesus' being 'impoverished' (see [Phil.2.5-11](#)) that this 'wealthy' man who was actually desperately 'poor' became rich beyond measure: and Luke's narrative points carefully to what that involved for Jesus and how that transforms ourselves.

I've included the immediately prior narrative insofar as both have to do with the capacity to 'see' – a note which the closing chapter of the Bible picks up on: "*they will see His face*" ([Rev.22.4](#)).

Start with '**days**' (3), (5) and (7). There are additional questions for Community Group study under each of these 'days'.

1) Monday 12th December – opportunity

Read [Luke 18.35-39](#)

“.. have mercy on me! ..” (Lk.18.38)

“Make the most of every opportunity,” wrote Paul ([Col.4.5](#)): Bartimaeus, the blind beggar ([Mk.10.46](#)) certainly did! It wasn’t every day that Jesus would be passing this way. “Now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation” ([2 Cor.6.2](#)).

How earnest and urgent are you in your prayer requests?

Are there things in the service of God which you’ve been tempted to keep putting off until another day?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, that by Your grace we may now approach the throne of God with confidence, receive mercy there and find grace to help in time of need.

2) Tuesday 13th December – service

Read [Luke 18.40-43](#)

“.. What do you want me to do for you? ..” (Lk.18.41)

Like a mother with her infant child, amid the noise of a crowded street Jesus hears the cries of the least, the lost, the last, and places Himself at the blind man’s service. He’s at *your* service, too: what do *you* want Him to do for you? Tell Him now!

How specific are you in your prayers?

Read [Rom.15.30-32](#): Paul asked the believers to pray for 4 specifics – what 4 things would you ask others to pray for you today?

Prayer: As You have been to me, my Lord, help me to be towards others today. May the way I serve the needs of others see their eyes being opened to Yourself.

3) Wednesday 14th December – sight

Read [Luke 19.1-3](#)

“.. he wanted to see who Jesus was ..” (Lk.19.3)

Jesus has an enduring appeal. Who He is, what He does, how He cares .. The longing on the part of Bartimaeus – ‘Lord, I want to see,’ (18.41) – is the burden in the heart of Zacchaeus: and, deep down, the ultimate yearning in the hearts of us all.

The juxtaposition of these two narratives – a poor beggar (18.35-43) and a rich tax collector – highlights the fact that, rich or poor, our basic need is the same: what struggles do ‘the rich’ and ‘the poor’ have in becoming part of the church?

How comfortable would wealthy business men and women feel if they were to drop in on a Wednesday 'Re-launch'? And how comfortable are those who have lost their way in life coming in to our Sunday worship services?

His lack of height kept Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus: what are some of the factors which keep people you know from seeing Jesus?

Peer group pressure ('the crowd') makes it hard to fix your eyes on Jesus: in what ways does the pressure of 'the crowd' impact your desire to serve Him?

Prayer: *'Open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus.' Whatever I have, I want Him more. Help me to see Jesus more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly.*

4) Thursday 15th December – initiative

Read [Luke 19.4](#)

".. so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see Him .." (Lk.19.4)

Zacchaeus had long since learned to use his initiative: a man who'd known what he wanted in life (or thought he did) and had figured out ways to get it. He used his initiative, even if it meant going 'out on a limb', to make sure he'd get to see Jesus.

How desperate are you to know Jesus more closely?

Zacchaeus wasn't troubled by what other people would think of him: do you hold back from getting close to Jesus because of what others might think?

Prayer: *You are not ashamed to call us Your brothers and sisters, Lord Jesus: forgive me for times when I have been embarrassed to have owned You as my Lord.*

5) Friday 16th December – more

Read [Luke 19.5-6](#)

".. So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly .." (Lk.19.6)

Zacchaeus may have used his initiative, but the real initiative lies with Jesus. He stops, speaks, summons. The wee man wanted only to see Jesus: Jesus is intent on giving the man so much more! Not just into his line of vision, but into his home and heart.

Zacchaeus must have been startled by the fact that Jesus knew him by name: how good are you at remembering people's names? And how might you improve your capacity to call people by name?

In a sizeable fellowship how can we best ensure that everyone is 'noticed' and knows that he/she matters?

What has been your experience of Jesus giving you so much more than you had anticipated?

Is your response to Jesus' word as quick, as complete and as glad as that of Zacchaeus?

Prayer: *How full of grace You have been towards me, my God, in welcoming me into Your family. Help me in turn to welcome you into my every circumstance today.*

6) Saturday 17th December – Immanuel

Read [Luke 19.7](#)

".. He has gone to be the guest of a sinner .." (Lk.19.7)

The purpose of God will culminate one day with this great affirmation – 'The dwelling of God is with man' ([Rev.21.3](#)): or, in a word, 'Immanuel', God with us. Here you have a 'trailer' for the big event, a statement of that glorious gospel truth. Welcome Jesus!

How can a holy God, without compromising His righteousness, choose to be the guest of such a patently sinful man?

Are you as ready to go to the homes of sinners as you are to have them come to your place of worship?

Prayer: *Keep me from a muttering tongue and a critical spirit today, O Lord. Help me so to rejoice in Your grace to me, a sinner, that I can't but show it to others.*

7) Sunday 18th December – salvation

Read [Luke 19.8-10](#)

".. today salvation has come to this house .." (Lk.19.9)

'A Saviour has been born to you' ([Lk.2.11](#)). This is what salvation looks like! A 'little' man, put on his feet, speaking to Jesus, his heart and his home opened wide to the Lord, his attitudes and actions totally transformed. What cause you have to worship!

In what ways could Zacchaeus have been described as 'lost'?

What does it mean for a church, as the body of Christ, to be 'seeking and saving the lost'?

What lessons might we learn as a fellowship in that regard from this narrative?

How would people know that 'salvation has come to *your* house'?

Does your generosity (with your time and your tongue, with your gifts and your giving) reflect the generous grace of God in the gospel?

Prayer: *Lord, You are Love beyond all telling, Saviour and King I worship You. Emmanuel, within me dwelling, make me and keep me pure and true. [[F Houghton](#)]*