



Luke 19:1-10

We are looking at the way Jesus does mission

- John 17 and 20
- Jesus is our model for mission

What we see Jesus doing in this text is **restoring** in a person the marred image of God as a generous giver

The mission of Jesus surprises humanity:

- Who He **calls** and how He calls them
- The **barriers** He breaks to reach broken people
- How He **touches** people that others avoid
- The **kindness** He shows to 'really bad' people

Jesus fascinates us with these things.

The focus of much of our study has been on Christ's concern for **the poor, the oppressed and the powerless... the marginalized**

- Those that we have come to call '**the least of these**' (Cf. Matt 25:40)

Jesus and the Gospel accounts are always thrusting them before us because we do not care enough about them

But here, Jesus surprises us again!

Because Zaccheus was none of these!!!

- Zaccheus was a **chief tax-gatherer** and **he was rich** (verse 2)
 - He had the **power** of Rome behind him—he was anything but powerless
 - He was one of the **oppressors**—not oppressed
 - He was **rich**—not poor
 - **Powerful, rich and oppressive**

It is true that tax-gatherers were **marginalized** by the Jewish religious society

- **Tax-gatherers** and **sinners** are lumped together as being bad in the gospels¹
 - Both terms basically referred to those in Jewish society who lived outside the laws of the Old Testament
 - **They were the unreligious in a very religious society**

¹ See for example Mark 2:16

- But not everyone in 1st century Israel was religious and they would not have been considered on the margins in broader culture
- **Tax-gatherers** were still **rich, powerful** and partnered with the **oppressors**
 - And Zaccheus was a **chief tax-gatherer** (v. 2)

What we discover is that God is concerned about both ends of injustice and suffering

- The victims **and** the perpetrators
 - Both stand under the judgment of God—both are **in need of mercy**
 - In different ways (socially perhaps), but equally in need
- And Christ loves them both and is equally concerned
 - **And pursues both in mission**

In fact in the minutes just before this interaction Jesus was called upon to heal a blind man (Luke 18:35-43)

- But **he** called upon Jesus (18:38)
- Here, Jesus calls on Zaccheus! (19:5)

Jesus' actions illustrate the desire of God to have sinners reconciled to Himself (Cf. 2 Cor 5:19)
-Even tyrants and extortionists

We live in a culture (and church culture) that is becoming increasingly aware of **the least of these**

- Popular in **Christian circles** right now (Justice mission and ministry) and **broader culture**
 - There are over 1 million non-profits in America²
 - And in 2008 Americans gave over 307 Billion to charity (estimated)³ (2007 = 1st time over 3 bill.)
- We want **mercy** for the oppressed and **relief** for the poor (**good!**)
- But we seem to simply expect **divine justice** and **harsh judgment** for the powerful and rich that create and perpetuate the systems that oppress (**bad!**)
 - **Are they beyond the grace of God?**

God cares even about **the unjust wealthy** (who take advantage of others) (Cf. Eph 6:12)

Our worthiness is not the issue. God **comes to us** and **gives to us** and is **nice to us** precisely because we are bad!

Mark 2:15-17 (NLT)

15 Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many **tax collectors and other disreputable sinners**. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.)

16 But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "**Why does he eat with such scum?**"

17 When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—**sick people do**. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

² <http://nccs.urban.org/statistics/quickfacts.cfm>

³ http://givinginstitute.org/press_releases/gusa.cfm

To be sure, Jesus called such people to **repentance** (and sanctification) in order that they might be ultimately reconciled to God and transformed from sinners to saints...

But as the visible manifestation of **God's outreaching and pursuing love**; Jesus does not make people **change** before He demonstrates love to them (Cf. Romans 5:8)

The staggering nature of God's gracious character is that **He sits down to eat with his enemies!**⁴

For Jesus acceptance and belonging proceeded repentance!

Jesus **ignored the religious crowds** and went straight to the one who represented all that they hated (a despised collaborator) and **invited Himself** to his house!

In that culture to stay in someone's house and dine with them was a sign of **intended friendship** and **fellowship** (acceptance and belonging)

- Especially inviting yourself! It wasn't okay in that culture either⁵

"Jesus' friendship with sinners gave people a tangible sign of the welcoming grace of God"⁶

In his book *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Kenneth Bailey explains what the religious crowd would have liked to hear Jesus say to Zaccheus:

"Zaccheus you are a collaborator! You are an oppressor of these good people. You have drained the economic lifeblood of your people and given it to the imperialists. You have betrayed your country and your God. This community's hatred for you is fully justified. You must quit your job, repent, journey to Jerusalem for ceremonial purification, return to Jericho and apply yourself to keeping the law. If you are willing to do these things, on my next trip to Jericho I will enter your newly purified house and offer my congratulations."

- Bailey concludes: "Such a speech would have provoked long and enthusiastic applause."⁷

We begin to **see ourselves** in the religious crowd... because we want unjust systems and their perpetrators to be dealt with first—seldom do we want them to **first experience** love and grace, mercy and acceptance

- Jesus' actions here contradicted everything they knew about religion
- **For Jesus, acceptance and belonging proceeded (and then brought about) repentance**

We like to see repentance before we let people belong

- But God's salvation does not come in response to a changed life. A changed life comes in response to the salvation offered as a free gift⁸

Accordingly, the Gospel of Luke does not only thrust the **needy and marginalized** before us, but it also draws to our attention **the equally tragic problem of power and affluence**

⁴ Tim Chester and Steve Timmins, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2008), 71.

⁵ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008), 178.

⁶ John Dickson, *Promoting the Gospel: A practical guide to the biblical art of sharing your faith* (Sydney: Blue Bottle Books, 2005), 41.

⁷ Bailey, 180-181.

⁸ Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The empty promises of money, sex, and power and the only hope that matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), 63.

Luke presents wealth, power and status as the major impedances to true discipleship⁹

- In fact, Christ presents wealth as the primary **challenging god** to the actual God
- Luke 16:13

No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. **You cannot serve both God and money.**

Especially in our culture (and it didn't seem to different then) money is the most common counterfeit God there is

★ What our following after false god's does is **mar the image** of the true God in us

A basic understanding of the true God is that He is a **generous giver by nature**

-Explore this in Scripture... it is unavoidably astounding (Cf. James 1:16)

Our serving of false god's (especially money) cause us to become greedy takers and not generous givers

Money held wrongly: When it takes hold of your heart it **blinds you** to what is happening, it **controls you** through your anxieties and lusts, and it brings you to **put it ahead of** all other things¹⁰

The mission of Christ is to **restore** the image of God in us, through the new birth made possible by the cross

Remember last week we talked about what it means to **restore** from Galatians 6:1

- The fundamental meaning is to put a thing in its appropriate condition¹¹
 - = **The way God made us to be**

We see a profound picture of that **restoration** here (See Luke 19:8)

Because of Jesus' surprising pursuit of this man, a journey took place from self-centeredness to generosity

"He went from being an oppressor of the poor to a champion of justice. He went from accruing wealth at the expense of others around him to serving others at the expense of his wealth."¹²

He had been **restored!** (See Verse 9)

Look carefully at the details:

- This happened **after** Jesus had gone to be with Him ("He has gone" in vs. 7)

⁹ See 6:20, 24; 8:14; 12:15-34; 14:33; 16:13-14; 18:18-30

¹⁰ Keller, 58

¹¹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 842.

¹² Keller, 63.

Zaccheus was not doing this to impress or earn favor with Jesus—he had favor with Jesus! **(undeserved)**

- And that favor and kindness of God, modeled in Christ, changed Zaccheus in a way **religion** had failed to and all the **scorn** of the people never managed to do

We are not saved by our generosity but by God's generosity!

That is not to say that our sins do not separate us from God and that there is not a need to repent and be sanctified...

- We are merely saying that Jesus embodies **God's desire** to **restore** all people
- He desires **that none would perish but that all would come to repentance**¹³
 - **See Verse 10**
- Yes, Christ must be received... (Cf. **John 1:12**)
 - Cf. Just as Zaccheus received Jesus gladly (**v. 6**) (a picture)
 - But **His kindness leads us to repentance!** (Cf. Romans 2:4)

God's love does not suppose that God approves of man's sin indiscriminately—He does not

- Christ and the Cross demonstrate that God loves us in spite of our sin

The acceptance and love of Christ toward Zaccheus (in spite of Zaccheus) had caused him to experience a **restored identity and security** in God

- Those things **not being rooted in** money anymore caused him to be **restored to a right view** of money and become a generous giver in the image of God

So, our **calling and mission** is to not just display generosity toward the hungry and poor, but even generous kindness toward the **unjust wealthy and corrupt powerful**

- Because God **Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men** (Luke 6:35)
- We are the evidence of that!

¹³ 2 Peter 3:9
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