

Luke 19

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[0:00] Jesus said. And turn, if you will, to Luke chapter 19, which, if you've got a church Bible, it's page 878. So, it's August, lots of people are away, people are coming and going.

! I thought for the next two Sundays, on Sunday morning, we'd look at why Jesus came. Why Jesus came. And so, children, I want to say, I'm sorry, there's no gold diggers. I've not done gold diggers, the younger ones.

And they should be fat finders for you. I should also say, there are three points which are in my head, but I've just discovered aren't in my notes. So, let me give you the three points.

I'm not sure where we'll transition to them, but the three points are our need, God's provision, and our response. And you can guess where we'll make the transitions. All right. In October 1967, which was a considerable time before I was born, a book was published.

It was written by the former curator of London Zoo, and by a man named Desmond Morris. And the book was called *The Naked Ape*. It's quite a famous book. It claimed that human beings are nothing more than highly developed monkeys.

[1:10] And no one is denying, are they, that apes and human beings are genetically pretty similar. You, like I, will have been called a cheeky monkey.

But the question is, is there more to it than that? Is the only difference between us and monkeys that we've got bigger brains, that we're naked and they're covered in hair?

Are we just naked apes? I don't know what monkeys think about all day. I've got no idea what goes through the mind of the average monkey on a Monday morning.

But what I find with myself and with other people, as human beings, is we ask the big questions. Questions like, why am I here?

Not why am I here right now, not playing golf or something like that. But why am I here on the planet? Why do I exist? What is the purpose of life?

[2:10] Do you remember when you were little and you were a child, you went on the merry-go-round at the fairground? There's a few of them around in the parks at the moment. And as you went on the merry-go-round at a playground, with every revolution, you'd catch sight of a familiar face in the crowd.

And you'd go round and you'd see that one person as you kind of went round. You'd catch their eye or you'd catch their face. And it's a little bit like that with life, isn't it? Once a year, people catch a glimpse of Jesus.

Normally it's Christmas time. They kind of think of him. That one time of the year. Why is he there? Once a year. We celebrate his coming, don't we, at Christmas time.

But why? Why did he come? Could it be that his purpose and our purpose are actually connected? Could it be that this morning, as we find out why he came, we actually find out why we are here?

Well, the best person to ask is Jesus himself, isn't it? On a number of occasions, we're going to look at two of them. Jesus states clearly in black and in white why he came. And this is one of those occasions.

[3:28] So if you look at verse 10 of Luke chapter 19, can you see it? He tells you why he came. He says, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

And that's why Jesus came. So in his mission, what do we see first? We see our condition. And we actually see our deepest longings.

And this statement comes at the end of an incident with this little guy, Zacchaeus. This little guy, he is short. He climbs a tree. Verse 2 tells us he was the chief tax collector and he was rich.

He was rich. So here is somebody who's done well for himself. He's worked in finance. He had risen to a senior management position and he is rich.

He's done really well over the years. He's made a load of money. Here's somebody who lives in a big gated house. He wears designer clothes. He's made it.

[4 : 36] He's got a six liter convertible sports cattle. And as he rides it, all the little boys turn their heads. Here's a man who's made it.

Here's a man who had it all. He's a success story. He's a boy done good. He's a winner. But according to Jesus, he's not a winner at all. Jesus sees a loser.

Jesus sees somebody who is lost. And Jesus says that I came to seek and to save the lost. And Zacchaeus is just one such example.

And so despite all his wealth, Jesus says he's lost. Materially, he's on top of the pile, but spiritually, he's lost. A few chapters before in chapter 15, Luke has told three stories about human beings, about you and me.

And they're all about things being lost. You may know them. There's the lost coin. There's the lost sheep. And there's the lost son. And Jesus says that's what we're all like by nature, you and me.

[5 : 43] We are lost, estranged from God. And we're alienated from him. We're lost in the universe. We are far from God and far from home.

And we're without ultimate purpose in life and without hope in death. We're lost, the Bible says. We're lost souls wandering through life without direction from our true home.

And I don't know if you can relate to that. Have you ever got lost? Got lost in the woods? Got lost in London?

Got lost in the car? I think if you're a man, it's very, very difficult to ever admit you're lost when you're driving. And there's something, isn't there, about maps and cars and men, which is just not a good combination.

And we can never admit that we're getting lost. And my nephew got married in Somerset. I don't know if you've ever been to Somerset. It's the end of the earth, really.

[6 : 45] And he was getting married in the street in Somerset. And we were late for the wedding. And we were going down the M4. And I said to my wife, we'll cut across country and we'll go that way. So we put it into my phone and we had the GPS going.

Google Maps. And it was all fine. But we were right on these single track country lanes with high, high hedges. And Somerset is so in the middle of nowhere that we lost signal on the phone.

And so there we are driving along these single tracks at high speed with no signal and hedges on either side. And it was very, very infuriating.

It would have been scary, particularly if it was at night. It's not a pleasant experience. It wasn't pleasant in that car, I can tell you. Being lost. And being spiritually lost isn't a pleasant experience. We might not like to admit the symptoms of being lost, but you can probably recognize them. An emptiness. A lack of satisfaction. An isolation.

[7 : 54] A loneliness. A sense of being lost and far from home. A sense of drifting towards the void. And so when somebody like Zacchaeus, who's made it in life and is really materially successful and wealthy, it's easy to be fooled, isn't it, into thinking, all is well.

But Jesus says to you, it's not all well. It's possible to have a really full diary. And have a full box of toys and be spiritually empty. Because we're lost souls and we're far from home.

But how have we ended up being lost in the first place? I don't know about you, if you drive and you're like me, I've ended up getting lost. It's normally because I've gone the wrong way.

I've gone the wrong way, but often I'm just too proud to admit it. And so Claire is there telling me very helpfully that I've gone the wrong way. But I'm adamant. I know what I'm doing.

I know what I'm doing. Trust me. It might not be the case for you, but it's definitely the case when it comes to you spiritually. The Bible says the reason the world is like it is and the reason why you are like you are, it's our own fault.

[9 : 15] And we're to blame. Just look at verse 7 with me. Look at verse 7. The people, they grumble. They all grumble. They murmur.

They mumble and they grumble because Jesus has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. And so this guy is a keyist.

He may well have been successful and wealthy, but he's a pretty shady character. His wealth is dishonest wealth. He's got a reputation. Tax collectors in those days, they worked for the Roman forces and this man had made his money not only by being a collaborator, but by cheating and creaming off, by being dishonest with his fellow countrymen.

There's one second century writer who refers to tax collectors in the same breath. He says, adulterers, pimps, tax collectors and informers. And so bankers have quite a bad reputation, don't they?

But they're nowhere near this. These guys were worse than that. Ambulance chasers. You know the people that ring up and say, we know that you've been in an accident over the last week and a half.

[10 : 34] Those kind of people. They've got a bad reputation, but not even they are kind of in the same bracket as these people. They're regarded as kind of modern day drug dealers.

And Zacchaeus was lost. He'd gone astray. He was a sinner. But the Bible says this.

The Bible says that we're all sinners. In different ways. So some people might be really moral and religious. And other people might be totally immoral and totally irreligious.

But all of us, the Bible says, we are all like sheep and have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way. And we're not lost because we've made a wrong turn just by accident.

We're lost because we've deliberately, willfully gone our own way instead of God's way. And we've said, I'm in charge, God. And I will live the way that I want. And that is why the coming of Jesus is such great, great news.

[11 : 43] Because do you remember what Jesus says? The reason he came. Verse 10. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. And so in Jesus, God has come on a search and a rescue mission.

For people like ourselves. For people like your colleagues. For people like your neighbors. For people like your family. To bring us home to himself. So it's a really interesting question to ask, I think, when you come to this passage.

It's who is seeking? Who is doing the seeking? So look at verse 3. It says, isn't it, verse 3, Zacchaeus was seeking. He wanted to see who Jesus was.

But by the end of the story, can you see who's doing the seeking? Verse 9. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. And so Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus.

But wonderfully and more importantly, Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus. Can you see that it's Jesus who takes the initiative? It is Jesus, isn't it, who stops at the tree. Zacchaeus, this little man, has kind of shinned up a tree.

[12 : 47] He's sitting there. And Jesus stops at that tree. And it is Jesus who tells him, come on down. It is Jesus who invites himself to dinner at this guy's house.

And in the Old Testament, hundreds of years before this incident, God has said, I will seek the lost. And the great news of Christianity is that in Jesus, the search party has come to earth.

And so I don't know, are you somebody who is seeking God? Have you ever thought to yourself, actually God is seeking me?

Have you ever thought that in Jesus, God has come to find you and to bring you home to himself? It's not unusual, is it?

Lots of people think of God as like a kind of cosmic game of hide and seek. That God is hiding somewhere out there.

[13 : 48] And as human beings, we are earnestly searching for God. But the Bible's message from start to finish is actually it's the other way around. That we are the ones who are hiding and God has come seeking and looking.

And so how committed is God, the God who is love, in looking for his lost children? He sends his son.

Jesus has come to seek us and to find us. And so this morning I can tell you on the authority of God's word that no one is too bad and no one is too far off. It doesn't matter what you've done, it doesn't matter where you're from.

But will you let him find you? Will you come out of hiding? Francis Thompson wrote a poem in the 19th century called The Hound of Heaven.

If you go onto YouTube, Richard Burton, a great Welsh actor, read it in the 19th century. I spent about an hour listening to it on repeat yesterday. Its voice is, it's a great watch, well listen.

[14 : 57] But the poem is called The Hound of Heaven. And Francis Thompson in the 19th century tells us how he tried to flee away from God throughout his life. It begins like this. I fled him down the nights and down the days.

I fled him down the arches of the years. I fled him down the labyrinth ways of my own mind and in the midst of tears. On it goes.

Basically his story is that as a young man, he'd studied medicine. He'd hoped that in his studies of medicine he'd find some purpose. But it didn't work. Francis Thompson grew really discouraged. He got involved in drugs. He faced such despair that he contemplated suicide. He latched on to various philosophies that denied God. He tried to distract himself with sensual pleasure. But all of it turned sour. And in the end he heard God say to him, All things fly thee. For thou flyest me. It's old language.

[16:02] He's basically saying everything is flying away from you. You can't get all these things. Because I'm running away from you. And in the poem he expresses that God sought after him like a bloodhound.

Hence the name of the poem, The Hound of Heaven. And you get this line which keeps coming up again and again in the poem. Where it's still with unhurrying chase. Unperturbed pace.

Deliberate speed. Majestic instancy. More instant than the feet. And in the end Francis Thompson gave up. And allowed God to find him.

He talks about how he wearily fell into God's arm. And that's been the experience of so many people down through the ages. It's been the experience of some of you here this morning.

You know what it's like, isn't it? Someone is chasing you in a game. And you've got a bit of a head start. But you know they're faster than you. And you keep going. And you keep going.

[17:08] And you hold out. But in the end, what do you do? You stop running. You give up. You let them catch you. John Stott was a minister in central London in 2005.

He was, according to Time Magazine, one of the most hundred influential people on the planet. And he wrote about his experience. Listen to what he says. Why I am a Christian is due ultimately neither to the influence of my parents and teachers.

Nor to my own personal decision for Christ. But to the hound of heaven. Referencing the poem.

That is, it is due to Jesus Christ himself who pursued me relentlessly.

Even when I was running away from him. In order to go my own way. And if it were not for the gracious pursuit of the hound of heaven. I would today be on the scrap heap of wasted and discarded lives.

Or take Malcolm Muggeridge. He was a journalist. A media personality. He wrote that I had a notion that somehow, besides questing, I was being pursued. Footsteps padding behind me.

[18:10] A following shadow. A hound of heaven. So near that I could feel the warm breath on my neck. And then he turns to address God. And he says, yes, you were there. I know however far and fast I'd run.

Still over my shoulder. I'd catch a glimpse of you on the horizon. And then I'd run faster and farther than ever. Thinking triumphantly, now I've escaped. But know there you were coming after me.

Do you ever get the feeling that you're being followed? In Jesus, God has come looking for you.

And maybe even this morning, you're aware that he's on your case.

And he's on your tail. And if that is the case, well, why not stop running? Because the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. And Jesus didn't just come to seek Zacchaeus.

He came to save him. He went to his home. Look at verse 9. It says, isn't it? Today, salvation has come to this house. And so on that very day, this little fellow, Zacchaeus, was found by God.

[19:22] He'd come home to God. He'd found his true home. He'd been saved from being spiritually lost. For eternity, he'd been saved.

From the judgment that was coming and was hanging over him. And he's coming our way, too. And he was saved ultimately through the sacrifice that Jesus was about to make in Jerusalem.

So look at verse 1. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. Why was he passing through?

Because he was on his way to Jerusalem, where he would be crucified. He knew that there he would be killed and tortured and die on the cross for us.

For our rebellion and for our sin. So that people like Zacchaeus, people like you and me, could be saved, could be found. And Jesus goes to the cross to sacrifice himself so that we could be saved.

It's really simple. He takes our place. He stands in our place. So that we could be found. Because the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

[20:37] When I was in Northern Ireland on holiday the last 10 days, I saw this CCTV car. You don't see them so much, do you? Now. But they were around in London for a bit. They're little funny

cars with their kind of camera on top.

And I don't know what they do. Whether they follow you around. Whether these cars with CCTV, they kind of pop up and sneak up. They're going to catch you throwing litter or some traffic violation. And I think lots of people think that God is like that.

They think that God is trying to catch us out all the time. That God is there waiting, hoping that you trip up. But Jesus shows us that God isn't like that at all.

He didn't come to condemn us, but he came to seek and to save the lost. Imagine for a moment, you might not need to imagine, but you're a child. And your parents have lost sight of you in the crowd.

It's a frightening experience, isn't it? You feel all alone. And it seems like hours have gone by. And then you see your father or your mother.

[21 : 48] And they're calling your name. And they push through the crowd. They barge past people. And they grab hold of you and embrace you. And you were lost, but now you're found.

And it's a really, really joyful experience, isn't it? The joy of being found. You were lost, but now you're found. And so how much more joyful would it be to be found by God?

To be brought into his family. To have your conscience cleansed. How do we do that?

How can we be found this morning? Do we wait for him? Well, look at verse 3. It's really interesting, isn't it? Look at verse 3. Zacchaeus was seeking to see who Jesus was.

But on account of the crowd, he could not. Because he was small in stature. So he ran up ahead. Climbed into a sycamore tree to see him. He was about to pass that way.

[22 : 55] And so Zacchaeus is really curious. And he wants to see who Jesus is. And he wants to hear Jesus. So he gets himself into a place where he can get a better view of Jesus.

And so maybe you're here this morning and you're curious. And you are asking the big questions of life. Well, let me say this to you. Get yourself to a place where you can get a better view of Jesus.

And take a good look at him. The best way to do that is to come here more. To come and hear the Bible explains. To engage with the Bible. Somebody maybe you'd like to read the Bible with.

Take a book. We'd love to give you a book. There's loads of ways, aren't there, to get a better view of Jesus. And so Zacchaeus had obstacles.

There may be obstacles for you. He says his knee because of the crowd. And because he was small in stature. He was in the midst of a massive crowd. And he's vertically challenged.

[23 : 57] But he doesn't let that dissuade him. He perseveres. He runs ahead. He finds a tree. He climbs up it. And there may be obstacles for you. Standing in the way of you taking a closer look at Jesus.

All sorts of things. You might say, well, life is so busy. I just can't do it. Maybe your friends or your family just wouldn't approve. Maybe, quite possibly, you've had a bad experience of church or Christians in the past.

And in every single one of us, there's a natural inertia. There's a natural apathy that we think, I just can't be bothered. And we need to overcome that. To say, this is important.

I need to take a closer look at this. To take a bit of effort. To swallow my pride. But I'm going to climb that tree. And I'm going to see who Jesus is this morning.

But it may be, actually, that you need to come down and receive Jesus. Look at verse 5. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down.

[25 : 11] For I must stay at your house today. So Zacchaeus hurried. And he came down. And he received him joyfully. For I must stay at your house today.

And it may be that Jesus is saying to you this morning, hurry and come down. For I must stay at your house today. Lots of you know enough about Jesus.

You know why he came. But you've never received him personally. Why not do that? John Stott. The preacher I mentioned earlier. He was a 17 year old boy. He heard a preacher give a talk. A sermon like I've given to you this morning. And the preacher ended with a verse from Revelation. Where Jesus says, here I am standing at the door.

And I knock. And if anybody hears my voice and opens the door. I will come in and eat with him. John Stott says this.

[26 : 16] So that night by my bedside. I opened the door of my personality to Jesus Christ. I invited him to come in. And be my Lord and Savior.

And just as it was for Zacchaeus that day, a new life began. Look at verse 8. Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.
And if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I'll restore it fourfold. He was a changed man. He was a joyful man. He'd been freed from his love of money.
He'd been freed from his love of possessions. Because he was a lost man who had been found by Jesus. And Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.
And so here's my two applications. Number one, will you at least climb the tree? To see who Jesus is clearly. Or even better, will you come down and receive Jesus?
[27 : 27] Let's pray.