

Seeking the Lost

Connecting with Your Church—part 4

March 8, 2020

A church is not just a “club” for “us.” It is not just a ministry for “us.” We also exist for people some of us have never met! Some of them may be friends of mine you’ve never met, and some of them be friends of yours we haven’t met.

You may have a lost friend who seems to have absolutely no interest in Jesus or church. If you lined up every one you knew from most interested in Jesus to least interested in Jesus this friend would be at the end of your list. What does God think of the godless man? How should you think of the godless man?

DAY 1: Meet the godless lost man

Luke 19:1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zachaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

1. What is Zachaeus’ occupation?
2. How is Zachaeus described?
3. Do you think there was any connection between his occupation and his wealth?
4. Zachaeus was shunned by the Jewish community. He was hired by the Roman government to collect taxes. The Romans didn’t care how he collected taxes as long as he brought in his share of taxes. That set him up for massive corruption.
5. The oppressive taxes on each colony was a means of massive wealth transfer to Rome. The result was an impoverished colony, that is, all but those in government “service.” He was free to collect more than required and just pocket the difference. We call this extortion.
6. Zachaeus was “double-shunned.” He was an “architelones,” arch-tax collector, a chief tax-collector. In his time, there was a stigma attached to conspicuous consumption and reveling in wealth. That didn’t matter to him.
7. Do you know someone like Zachaeus? How do you think about him?
8. How do you think God thinks about him?

DAY 2: Grace is expressed through our initiative

Luke 19:3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd.

1. When Jesus came to Jericho it created a buzz! Jesus had just healed a blind man and word spread fast!
2. People all over Jericho stopped what they were doing so they could see Jesus. This, along with the news of Jesus and the interest of others caught Zachaeus' attention.
3. As a result, the streets were lined deeply with people just wanting to get a glimpse of Jesus. This posed a problem for a short man, like Zachaeus!

Luke 19:4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

4. In Middle Eastern culture honor and dignity were top values. Zachaeus climbing up a tree, particularly as a short man would be the equivalent of a CEO clamoring up a tree so he can see. This kind of behavior would invite enormous ridicule.
5. Why do you think Zachaeus climbed the tree? Just to *see* Jesus or do you think something else was motivating him?

Luke 19:5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zachaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

6. Think about the massive crowds lining the street, the cheering, the buss, and the noise. Suddenly Jesus stops and picks out this one man out of the crowd, and identifies him by name!
7. What do you think happened inside the heart of Zachaeus? Think of several possible answers.

DAY 3: Grace is expressed through our love and connections

Luke 19:5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zachaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

1. Zachaeus, once “hidden” because of his short height, is now spotted openly in the sycamore tree, called by name and is now addressed in a way that must have stunned the crowd.
2. Though we would never invite ourselves over for lunch, in that culture, it was an honor to host a meal for a respected rabbi (teacher). Anyone would have been honored.
3. This must have really perplexed the “good people” of Jericho! Jesus passed through a crowd of respectable, religious people, all of whom felt smug about themselves. Jesus spots the most “notorious sinner” in the crowd and speaks to him.
4. We wish we could have known what was going on inside the heart of Zachaeus!
5. I suspect that initially, Zachaeus was flattered that someone as important as Jesus wanted to have lunch with him!

Luke 19:6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

6. But as he climbs down the tree and welcomes Jesus “gladly,” there is another “buzz” passing *through* the crowd and *from* the crowd.

Luke 19:7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

7. When we mutter or murmur “under our breath,” it is usually not so quiet that those around us hear something of our words and particularly in our tone. How would you describe the disdain for:

a. Jesus?

b. Zachaeus?

8. Reaching out to people, taking the initiative is sometimes costly. Sometimes even good people question our motives and actions. What do you think Jesus’ response will be?

DAY 4: Grace can be felt by someone who has not experienced grace (the surprise of grace)

1. Have you ever spent time over a meal with someone who is *clearly* a more righteous person than you? Though you may be flattered that someone like this wants to eat with you, there is also something else happening in the soul.

2. Imagine you are eating with someone like Mother Teresa. Beside the privilege and honor of her company, what else might be going on inside you?

a. Any fear(s)?

b. Any sense of not measuring up?

c. Any sense of hiding?

d. Any sense of wanting to do better?

e. Something else?

3. There are details of this story that are not told. (When this happens in a biblical story, it seems to me that we are left to ponder what happened outwardly and inwardly).

4. We are not told anything about the lunch or anything Jesus said to Zachaeus.

5. The story jumps ahead to the *effect* of Jesus' life and love on Zachaeus.

Luke 19:8 But Zachaeus 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."

6. What do you think happened in the heart of Zachaeus?

7. What do you think would have happened in your heart if you had been living as Zachaeus had?

DAY 5: Grace brings salvation.

Luke 19:9 Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham."

1. It is incorrectly believed in our culture that our good deeds will ensure our salvation. The bible clearly teaches from beginning to end that that is impossible.
2. Notice how Jesus phrases the salvation of Zachaeus. What strikes you about Jesus' phrasing?
3. Zachaeus didn't gain salvation because he promised to leave his old life behind and try to live a new life. It wasn't because of some New Year's resolutions regarding his finances.
4. Rather, as grace was given to Zachaeus repentance and faith in Christ followed.
5. Zachaeus has become a "son of Abraham." Abraham was the poster child for salvation by faith (not religious deeds or good deeds) in the Old Testament!
6. It's also striking that before Zachaeus metaphorically invited Jesus into his heart, Jesus had invited Himself into His.
7. It's been said that we most experience grace when our ugliness is exposed in the presence of sheer goodness. That is one of the "invisible" parts of this story.
8. This story ends with a vital point for all of us to hear.
Luke 19:10 "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."
9. Though salvation occasionally happens without human involvement, it is our teaming up with God that the message of salvation and the experience of grace occurs.
10. It is incumbent on us, His people, to have the same heart for lost people, and to take the initiative with them.
11. How's your initiative with lost people? Is there a lunch or coffee you should set up?