**A Great Sinner Meets The Greater God**

**INTRODUCTION**

I want to ask you a question, and it is the most important question anyone can ever ask you. What do you think of when you think of God? What do you think of when you think of God? Do you perceive God to be a being that is not concerned with how you live and what you do with your life? Do you think of God as this machine in heaven that just makes everything function and “run” everything? Or maybe you think of God as a God who is spiteful and angry, looking for every opportunity to punish you?

How are we to know who God really is? The answer might **not** surprise you. The Bible. The Bible is God’s revealing of himself. The Bible is a collection of historical events, poems, and stories that teach us who God is.

Tonight, it is my earnest desire to show you from Luke chapter 19 that our God is a God who goes out of his way to save sinners. He passionately pursues them because God delights in saving people from the punishment for their sin. God teaches us in every book of the Bible that the consequence of our sin is eternal punishment in hell. Our sin deeply offends God because sin is against the very character of God. God is a God of love, and he delights in love, his nature is love by giving and caring. Therefore, God hates selfishness and God despises acts that cause others pain and heartbreak. God is a God who delights in truth. He is truth. He is the creator of reality, and it is because God is truth that lying is a gross and vicious offense against the character of God. God’s standard is so high because his character is so perfect and righteous and holy, holy, holy. Holy meaning utterly and completely different and perfect.

For the rest of the time, we have left we are going to look at Luke chapter 19, verses 1 to 10 and we are going to see **A Great Sinner Meet The Greater God**.

In Luke chapter 18 Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, to complete the final acts of his earthly ministry and then be crucified. As he is busy making his journey to Jerusalem he needs to go through the town of Jericho. The rumor starts to spread the Jesus of Nazareth is on his way to the Jericho and a crowd starts to build as more and more people come to see the famous Jesus who is the son of David. Just before entering Jericho a blind man calls out to Jesus to have mercy on him and Jesus stops his journey in order to give the blind man sight. Both physically, and spiritually.

Now you can imagine how big the crowd grows as the story spreads of Jesus who healed the blind man outside of Jericho. The crowd is growing larger, but Jesus continues on his way and enters Jericho.

Luke chapter 19 starts with Jesus entering Jericho, but then something unusual happens, or I should rather say, someone unusual comes into the story. Let’s read **Luke 19:1-4**.

**BODY**

Here we meet Zacchaeus **The Searching Sinner**.

These four verses actually tell us a lot about who Zacchaeus was. Verse 2 starts with the word, “behold”, it is the writers way of telling us, “Hey! Pay attention! This person is important to the story of God”. Verse two ends by telling us that Zacchaeus was a tax collector and that he was rich. In time of the New Testament taxes worked differently than they do now. The Roman Empire privatized the collection of taxes. In other words, Caesar would appoint tax collectors to certain regions and he would expect from them a certain amount of taxes. How much the tax collector collects is of no concern to the emperor of the Roman Empire, as long as Caesar gets the amount of taxes asked. So, if Caesar expected R10 in toll tax from everyone who moves from Jericho to Jerusalem the tax collector could demand R100 from everyone, as long as Caesar got his expected cut, the tax-collectors could do what they want. It is easy to see how this system was abused right? This is why tax collectors were hated in the time of the New Testament. Even worse than a normal tax collector was a Jew who became a tax collector because the Jews were being occupied by the Roman Empire, and a Jew who became a tax collector was seen as the worst traitor, because he is not only participating in the suppression of his own people, but also getting rich at the expense of his fellow Jews.

Now you see, Zacchaeus was one of these tax collectors, but the text actually says that he was a “chief tax collector”. Meaning he was either the worst of all the tax collectors or he was in charge of a whole group of tax collectors. He’s not just bad, he’s the worst. But it gets even worse. How does verse 2 end? “and he was rich”. Zacchaeus had a lucrative lifestyle, he wasn’t just well-off, he was rich. Think like Lazarus and the rich man “rich”. Now you can see by this whole description of Zacchaeus that he was not a liked man. He was hated and despised, and rightly so because he was a man who was corrupt and funded lavish lifestyle at the expense of others as can be seen in verse 7 and verse 8.

But even the rich and corrupt are curious. Zacchaeus had also heard the rumor of Jesus, the son of David had come to their city and he was curious to see him. Zacchaeus most probably having heard the rumors and stories of Jesus miracles and teachings greatly desired to see Jesus, but did not expect to have any interaction with Jesus, after all, Jesus the holy son of David would most certainly not want to have any dealings with corrupt and despised Jewish traitors. Nevertheless, Zacchaeus at least had to see Jesus. **Verse 3-4.**

Zacchaeus, because of his small stature, he wasn’t so tall he could not compete with the crowd and decided to go and climb a tree like a child in order to see Jesus. Zacchaeus was willing to do an embarrassing act and climb a tree rather than miss the chance to see the famed and holy Jesus of Nazareth, prophet of prophets and king of kings.

The tree Zacchaeus climbed is called in my translation a sycamore tree, in other translations it is called a mulberry tree. This is not to be confused with the great American sycamore tree. The Greek word translated here is “sukomorean” and it refers to a tree that is deceptive, because it looks like a berry tree, but the fruit grown on that tree is not berries that you can eat. You’ll get extremely sick, that’s why some translations translate this tree as a mulberry tree, it is fake berries.

So here we have Zacchaeus the traitor, the corrupt, and the deceiver who robs others of their hard-earned money sitting in a deceptive tree when Jesus walks by. **Verse 5-6**

Here we see the **Searching Savior**, as Jesus the righteous and holy one, calls Zacchaeus, whose name means ‘innocent’ by the way, here we see Jesus calling Zacchaeus to climb out of the tree of deception and be with him.

Here we see Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem to complete his earthly ministry, surrounded by a crowd who adores him and if it was anything like when he entered Jerusalem, they most probably sang his praises as he walked into the city. People from all walks of life trying to get the attention of Jesus, but to whom does Jesus give his attention to? The corrupt, traitor, who defrauds people for a living. The chief of all the sinners in Jericho. Jesus approaches this deceptive little man sitting in the tree of deception and invites himself to Zacchaeus’ house.

Verse 6 makes it clear that Zacchaeus was so excited about Jesus the son of David wanting to be with him in his house that he hurried down the tree. Can you image this comedic scene of an olderish short little man doing his best to climb down a tall tree without falling to his death. It must have been quite a sight to behold by those who despised him.

The response of the crowd after hearing that Jesus wants to visit Zacchaeus in his house is seen in **verse 7**. They were not happy. Of all the people in the city, the important ones and the good ones, Jesus wants to sit at the table of the biggest sinner and traitor of them all! How could Jesus the rightful king of Israel, the son of David want to be the guest of a man who betrayed Israel, who betrayed his own people and then make money by defrauding them. This just didn’t make sense to the crowd.

Now we don’t know how long Jesus was at Zacchaeus’ house or what conversations they had but is must have been quite some time, since in those days it would take hours to prepare for guests and it would take even longer if you had uninvited guests, especially guests of honor.

We see in this that Jesus is a **searching savior**. He takes a day at least to spending time with the worst of sinners in order to see salvation come to this worst of sinners. This is what the crowd did not understand. They followed Jesus for his miracles, but Jesus was concerned of the individual sinner who left to himself would be damned to hell because of his sin.

When you think of God, think of this great God who passionately pursues sinners, think of great sinners who are sought out by an even greater God. This is where we see the **Certain Salvation**.

We see in this passage that there is more grace in God than the capacity for sin in us! **Verse 8-10.**

What we do know for certain is that Jesus did preach the gospel to Zacchaeus like Jesus did everywhere he went. And in these verses we see the results of Zacchaeus salvation. He gives away half his possessions to the poor.

Please note this important point of clarification: ***Zacchaeus was not saved because he gave his possessions to the poor. Zacchaeus was not saved because he gave his possessions to the poor***. The *reason* Zacchaeus gave his possessions away was because he was saved! Him giving away his possessions is evidence of the work of God in his life! The reason we can say this for certain is because of what Jesus said in the previous chapter, **Luke 18:24-27**. And here we see most probably one of the wealthiest men if not the wealthiest man in Jericho come to salvation. A task which is impossible with men, and only possible with God.

Not only does Zacchaeus give away half his possessions, he vows that he will repay everyone he has every defrauded four times as much as he took from them, and Zacchaeus being a tax collector and chief among the tax collector, that means that all the wealth he has ever acquired as a tax collector was received through, defrauding or cheating, by making people pay more taxes than Caesar required so that he can pocket the difference.

Here is also something very interesting. The word he uses here for defrauding in verse 8, is the same root word from where we get the word used for the sycamore tree. The sycamore tree, that is the tree of deception, in which Zacchaeus was found when he met Jesus and was called out of by Jesus is almost a sort of symbol. Just as Jesus called Zacchaeus out of the deceptive tree that produces false berries, deceiving people who eat from it, so Jesus also called Zacchaeus out of a life of deception and defrauding. Zacchaeus having build his tremendous wealth off of the backs of other people is now, after having met Jesus and after having been forgiven from his sins, vowing that he will return four times as much. That means that he will have worked for the rest of his life to repay others and he most probably died without having paid everyone back fourfold. He spent his whole life testifying of the work of Jesus in his life! Zacchaeus experienced the **certain salvation**, he experienced the **sweet salvation** and because of that he knew, what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul! A person who has a large bank account and a full belly will still one day die and stand before God. Zacchaeus, after meeting Jesus looked forward to that day, because it means he would be reunited with his Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

My dear friends, to story of Zacchaeus is one that reminds us of Jesus passionate pursuit of sinners. Not only does Jesus command you tonight to repent and turn to him, but he also ***desires*** that you do so! My dear brothers and sisters, not only does Jesus command you tonight to strengthen what remains and continue to fight the good fight and guard your hearts against lukewarmness, but he ***desires*** that you do so!

Jesus in no way needs you to repent. If you do not trust in Christ, you will be held responsible for your own sin and you will have to bear the punishment for your own sins. But Jesus does desire that you call upon his name, seek forgiveness for all your sins, for every evil act, for every selfish deed. Only he can grant you peace of heart and mind, because only he can forgive your sins.

Just like Jesus passed through Jericho to save one sinner, so tonight might be the last time Jesus passes you. Like Zacchaeus, desire to see Jesus, because Jesus will see you! That day when Jesus left Jericho, the people never saw him again. Tonight might be the last time Jesus gives you the command to repent.

My Lord Jesus is a gracious Lord. He cares for those who are his servants, he loves them and treats them like his brothers and sisters. You will find no better master anywhere. Trust in Jesus.

But dear friends, I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact that salvation is completely free, but it will cost you. Jesus freely saved Zacchaeus, and it cost Zacchaeus all his riches and a lifetime of servitude, but Zacchaeus not only did it joyfully, he desired to do so, because he received the most valuable treasure of them all, Jesus Christ. The one who created the sun and the moon and the stars, the one who thought of flowers and butterflies, who created the mighty mountains and brings gentle rain on the fields. Zacchaeus understood that compared the Jesus, everything else is a loss. Just like Paul said in Philippians.

We are all great sinners, but we have a greater God. A God who has more grace than we have sin, and a God that loves us just as we are, but loves us too much to keep us as we are. When Jesus stepped into the house of Zacchaeus he said in Luke 19:9, ***Today salvation has come to this house!***

***AMEN!***