

**He Came**  
To Save the Lost  
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## **To Save the Lost** **Luke 19**

I want to read you a story. It's a short story, but it is a powerful story that I believe helps us understand the meaning of Christmas. The story goes like this (from Luke 19): *"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way"* (Luke 19:1-4)

If you grew up in church, there is a song that is reverberating in the back of your mind right now. We're not going to sing it together.

*When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' But Zacchaeus 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.' Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost'* (Luke 19:1-10).

All throughout the month of December, here at Brook Hills, we have looked at different texts of Scripture that talk about why Jesus came. Different verses in the Bible that say Jesus came to do this. He came to destroy the devil. He came to free the captives. He came to serve the helpless. He came to bring us life. And Luke 19:10 says, "[He] came to seek and to save what was lost." That is the meaning of Christmas. That's what this story is all about.

You know, it's interesting. In this story, Jesus is surrounded by two types of people. On one hand you've got people in this story who are known for breaking the rules. They have earned a reputation as sinners. Like Zacchaeus, a tax collector, he worked for the Roman Empire, which meant that he collected taxes from the Jews, but not just collected the taxes – took their money – but tax collectors were notorious for taking extra in order to pocket for themselves. And clearly somewhere along the way Zacchaeus had made a pretty good profit at his job. He, and those like him, were known for breaking the rules – indulging themselves, even though it might cost others; advancing themselves to get ahead and enjoy what they wanted to enjoy.

But then there's another group in this story, and it's people who love to follow the rules. There's religious teachers and leaders who were following Jesus at this point. The kind of people that do everything right to a "T." The kind of people that look down upon those sinners who break the rules, and look up to themselves for how well they keep the rules. And you know, it's interesting, and when we think about it, every single one of us in this

room always tends towards one of these two groups. There are some of us in this room who love to break the rules. We love to indulge ourselves in the ways of this world, even if it might hurt others, or cost others. We want pleasure, and we want to enjoy what all the world has to offer. And we look down on people who keep the rules. They are totally missing out on all that life has to offer.

Or, we have a tendency to be in this group over here, where we do our best to keep the rules. And we follow the law, even religiously as best as we can. We do everything we can to live good, nice, descent, even religious lives, and we look down on those people over there – they're the problem with society. "If everybody was like this, we'd be all right."

You know what the point of this story is? The point of this story is that both groups are lost; the people who follow the rules, and the people who break the rules. People who live according to their own rules or the people who try to live up to the rules that are put before them, both are lost.

Now we don't like to think of ourselves as lost. There's something in us that instinctively denies lost-ness. I was in New York City this last weekend with my precious wife celebrating our tenth anniversary. She had always wanted to go there, so I took some SkyMiles and we went to New York. And last Sunday we wanted to go to worship at Brooklyn Tabernacle – church – known for its music and prayer. And so we hopped on the subway to go over to Brooklyn, we got off in Brooklyn, and we start walking around the streets of Brooklyn.

And I'm confident; I know where the Brooklyn Tabernacle is. In my mind I've studied the maps, I know where it is. And so we find ourselves walking up and down the streets, criss-crossing back and forth across streets. And on not one occasion Heather looks at me and says, "Why don't we just ask somebody where it is?" But of course I reply, "I know where we're going. I'm sure it's right over there. Just follow me." And so we continue walking, and it's ridiculous. You don't wander aimlessly through Brooklyn, New York. That's not a wise thing to do. But there's something in us, isn't there, that instinctively denies lost-ness.

Now maybe you're not that stubborn when it comes to directions, but the reality is we are all that spiritually stubborn. We want to find our way—our own way. This is the story of every major world religion: Follow the rules, and you will find the way. Or, everybody who rebels against world religions, make up your own rules and you'll find the way. And the picture is, that in trying to find our own way, we are just displaying the fact that we are lost, and we need help.

You know it's interesting, there were a couple of occasions, including that time in Brooklyn this last weekend, when we would be wandering around and I would be navigating us through the city, when someone would come up to us and say, "You don't know where you're going, do you?" You know it's bad when it's totally written across your face that you are clueless, like you're trying to act like you're a local in New York, and it's apparently not working. And so they would say, "Can we help you? Like, you look lost." It's good when someone takes the initiative to reach out to you in your lost-ness, and this is the beauty of Luke 19. When we were lost, Jesus came to seek us.

Now I remember when I first met Heather, some of you know that she is my first and only girlfriend, and that sounds really good, but the reality is I was just totally socially awkward in high school, and could not get up the nerve to talk to girls until God, by His grace, brought a beautiful woman into my life who, for some reason, was attracted to my social awkwardness. And she began to talk to me, and as soon as she did I began to seek her in every way I knew how. I wanted to seek her. One of the things she gave me on our

anniversary was a scrapbook that had some of the letters that I had written to her. And we looked through them that night together, and I'm going to risk my reputation here, because I was lame, to say the least. I want to read you just an excerpt. This is one of the three-pagers, and I am not about to read to you the whole thing, but I just want you to hear, like she had just moved off to college – she's a year older than me, and just moved off to college. So I wrote:

"Dear Heather, Dude, I am glad you called tonight." What kind of opening is that? Yeah, okay. So, "Dude, I'm glad you called tonight." We had just apparently talked. "I've wanted to call you Friday, Saturday, Sunday and today" – you don't say that – "but I just figured you were too busy. When I heard your voice it was so awesome that I can't explain how I felt. You sounded so awesome!" Is this not lame? I'm not even going to read the rest that I was going to read. It sounds so much worse when it's coming out in front of a group of people.

Anyway, the end of the letter, once again, "Dude, I'm not just wasting ink when I say this: My life isn't the same without you around, and I miss having you to talk to and spend time with. I miss you something fierce. Praying for you, Dude. In Christ, David."

Like is not great evidence of God's grace that I am married? I would write her. I would call her. I would want to be near her. I'd wait for her after class. Think of it, the God of the universe has sought after you. The God of the universe says, "I come to seek you; to be near you; to be with you." The same way that He stopped, fixed His attention on Zacchaeus, called his name. We have a God who says to His people, "I have called you by name and you are mine. I come to seek you, and not just to seek, I come to save you." Save you from what? Save you from your lost-ness. Save you from you trying to find your way.

You know, Mandy shared her testimony and she talked about darkness. I think it's a picture that we see in Scripture that coincides with this idea of lost-ness. And we all know that when we find ourselves amidst darkness, that it's difficult to find our way. I'm guessing we can all think of times when we found ourselves surrounded in darkness, and we didn't know which way to go. And maybe we tried to go a certain direction only to find out that that was not the right way. We are lost, in the dark, and God in His grace has brought us light.

And the meaning of Christmas is that when we were lost and in the dark, God did not choose to leave us alone there. In the darkness of our struggles... I know that over this last year there are many people in this faith family – in this room, who have walked through struggles – financial struggles, loosing jobs, looking for jobs, family struggles. And the reminder that we receive at Christmas is, that God has not left us alone in the dark, and the darkness of suffering.

I know that there are families all across this room who have experienced some unexpected diagnoses this last year – unexpected physical trials and pain. And the good news of Christmas is that God has not left us in the darkness of suffering alone. In the darkness of sorrow I know that there are families who have experienced loss over this last year. Isn't it good to know that God has not left us alone in the darkness of sorrow? And ultimately in the darkness of sin, that when you and I found ourselves in the depths of sin, God on high became a man, and came to be with us so that we would not have to find our way. He came as "the way," so that when we trust in Him, He will deliver us from sin, lost-ness and darkness so that we might be found in Him, now and for all of eternity.

There is simply no greater truth than this, and this is what we celebrate at Christmas.

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