

You are very important to God

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Date: 13 July 2016

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn immediately to the scriptures, and our reading today comes from Luke chapter 19, which you will find in page 878 of the Pew Bible.

Familiar verses, a familiar story, familiar probably to most of us, if not all of us here. Luke chapter 19, reading from verses 1 to 10.

Let us hear then the word of God. He, that is Jesus, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus.

He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. But on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature.

So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore fig tree there to see him. For Jesus was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.

[1 : 0 7] So Zacchaeus hurried and came down, and he received Jesus joyfully. And when they, that is the crowd, when they saw it, they all grumbled. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, behold, Lord, look. Half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

And Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house. Since he also is a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

Just a short prayer. Make the book live to us, O Lord. Show us thyself within thy word. Show us ourselves and show us our saviour.

And make the book live to us for Jesus' sake. Amen. I was recently watching a program about the first moon landings. All about Neil Armstrong.

[2 : 1 2] And you'll remember those famous words that Neil Armstrong uttered. As he stepped out of the aircraft and onto the moon for the first time. One small step for a man. But one giant leap for mankind.

As he stepped out and onto the moon. But I've always wondered, why? Why would you do that? Why would you put three men in a rocket? At great expense and great risk.

And fire them a quarter of a million miles to land on an uninhibited planet. I could name you three men I would love to do that with right now. Why would you do that?

Now I've always thought it was done in the name of space adventure. Or the advancement of science. You know, learning more about the universe in which we live. But in watching the program that was on recently.

I found out that the main reason. The main reason the Americans did this. Was in order to beat the Russians. They did this to put a man on the moon before the Russians could do it.

[3 : 1 2] You see, since the Russians put the first satellite in outer space in 1957. A satellite called Sputnik. The space race had begun. And this space race intensified in 1961.

When the Russians were the first to put a man by the name of Yuri Gagarin in space. And remember, this was at the time of the Cold War. And so really, it wasn't really all about putting somebody in space.

It was really a battle between two ideologies. Between two ways to live. Democracy. The American way of life. And communism. The Russian way of life. Life.

So you see, what I thought the moon landings were all about. Were in actual fact. Not what they were about at all. And in much the same way. What people think Jesus Christ coming to the earth for was about.

Was in actual fact. Not what it was about at all. Some people think that Jesus came to be a good teacher. Now it's true. Jesus is the greatest teacher this world has ever seen.

[4 : 11] But that's not the main reason he came. Still others think that Jesus came to be a great example. To show us how to live human life. Again, it's true. Jesus is the greatest.

In fact, the only example. Of how the human life should be lived. But again, that's not the main reason he came. And so who better than Jesus Christ himself. To tell us why he came.

And it's therefore as in verse 10 of our passage. For the son of man. Came to seek. And to save the lost. Jesus came to seek. And to save. You could say that Jesus was on a search and rescue mission.

Jesus Christ came to rescue. In order to be our saviour. And that's what the angels announced to the shepherds. The night that Jesus was born. You may remember. From your Christmas cards.

In Luke chapter 2 and verse 10. For unto you is born this day. In the city of David. A saviour. Who is Christ the Lord. So Jesus has come to be a saviour.

[5 : 09] Before we go any further. Let's be absolutely clear about that. Jesus has come to be a saviour. But who has Jesus come to save? Well again verse 10. He has come to seek.

And to save. The lost. And you might be sitting here this afternoon. Saying well. I'm not lost. I know where I am. I'm sitting in the Tron Church. In Bath Street.

In the middle of the city centre. And I know where I'm going after this. I'm going home. And I know the way there. So I can't be lost. But friends. The lost here that Jesus speaks about.

Is a relationship. That has been lost. A relationship with God. Has been lost. And that's every one of us. We've all rejected God. We've all replaced him.

With our own values. Rules and ideas. All of our lives have been lived. As the title of the song says. My way. But Jesus Christ has come.

[6 : 03] To repair that broken relationship. To save us from our lostness. And to lead us safely home. Now why would he do this? Well the very simple answer is this.

Because God loves us. Despite our rebellion. Despite our rejection of him. Despite our waywardness. We are still very important to God.

Maybe you've never heard that. Maybe you don't know that. Or you've never realised that. That you are very important to God. Well if you leave here today. Remember and nothing else. I want you to remember that.

That you are very important to God. So much so that he sent his son. To search for you. And to save you. In our passage this afternoon. Luke records for us.

The story of Zacchaeus. And the day that Zacchaeus found out. That he was very important to God. I'd like to take the passage under three headings. In verses 1 to 4. A dodgy character.

[6 : 58] Wanting to see Jesus. In verse 5. A divine call. Being seen by Jesus. And then verses 6 to 10. A definite conversion.

Seeing what Jesus wants you to do. Well firstly then. Verses 1 to 4. A dodgy character. Wanting to see Jesus. Luke introduces us here. In these verses.

To Zacchaeus. Whose name incidentally. Means pure. But as Luke goes on. We're going to find out. That Zacchaeus isn't pure. He is a chief tax collector.

And he was rich. Now if we've been reading along. In Luke's gospel. When Luke mentions that word rich. Our antennae would go up. Because just back a page.

We were introduced to another rich man. This man was called the rich young ruler. And this man was quite impressive. And he came to Jesus. And he said. Good teacher.

[7 : 51] What must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus says to him. Jesus begins to name a few commands to him. You know. Do this. Do this. Do this. And the fellow says. All of these.

I have kept since my youth. How easy men think it is. To keep the commandments of God. But Jesus didn't scold him. Jesus went on. You still lack one thing.

Sell all your goods. And give all the money that you have to the poor. And the man became. Terribly sad. Because he was very rich. And when faced with.

His. Temporal riches. His earthly riches. And eternal riches. He chose his temporary ones. Instead of eternal life. He chose his money.

And he walked away. Very sad. And friends. That's always the case. When men walk away from Jesus. And what he offers them. There's no joy. In that road. Nothing but sadness.

[8 : 49] And there. And Jesus said. As he looked at the fellow. He said. How difficult it is. For the rich. To enter the kingdom of God. It's easier for a camel.

To go through the eyes of a needle. Than for the rich. To enter the kingdom of God. And the disciples. Who were standing there. Who had heard all this. And seen all this. They had a question. Who then can be saved?

Because they attributed. Great wealth. With God's great blessing. And so. They assumed. That this man. Must be a great godly man. And a candidate. For being another apostle. Who then can be saved?

And Jesus said. With man. This is impossible. But with God. All things are possible. Now what Jesus was doing. With this fellow. Was. It's not a sin to be rich.

It's not a sin to be rich. Plenty of rich people. Do great good. With their money. But what Jesus was doing. Here with this fellow. Was he was putting. His finger on the thing. That the fellow. Was actually worshipping.

[9 : 47] He was putting. His finger on the thing. That was actually. The fellow's god. He was making him choose. Between his money. His god. And his real god. You see.

So that's what's going on. And so. As we're reading along. You see. The guy in Luke 18. He's very impressive. A moral man. Got a. A very respected man. He's obviously got a heart. For God's commandment.

Commandments. And then in Luke 19. We get this other rich character. A tax collector. And you remember. At the time. Israel was an occupied nation. Under the rule of the Roman Empire.

And to finance. Their great world empire. The Romans levied heavy taxes. And all the nations. Under their control. The Jews opposed these taxes. Because they supported. A secular government.

And its pagan gods. But they were still forced to pay. And so the tax collectors. Were among. The most unpopular people. In Israel. Jews by birth. That they chose.

[10 : 42] To work for the enemy. And they were considered. Traitors. Turn coats. And to top it all off. It was well known. That they were cheats. Taking more tax. From the people. Than they were authorized.

To do so. And Luke chapter 3. When John the Baptist. Is preaching. Some tax collectors. Came to be baptized. And they said to him. Teacher. What shall we do?

And John said to them. Teach no more. Than you're authorized. To do. So here's Zacchaeus. And he's a chief tax collector. He's at the top. Of the tax collecting pyramid.

And he's rich. Stinking. Thilfy. Rich. For the mercy. For the misery. He's heaped upon his own people. Can you imagine. The feeling. The people had towards him.

This traitor. This turncourt. He was probably. The most hated man in town. And we can't really identify. With. How hated he was. Because we all just think.

[11 : 35] We're tax collectors. Oh. We all hate tax collectors. Maybe he likes to pay tax. But to come somewhere close. To how this whole nation. Felt about this guy. To use a modern day equivalent.

Of. How badly. Society thought about this guy. Modern day equivalent. Would probably be a pedophile. That would be the modern day equivalent. This guy was seen as the scum of the earth.

Everybody hated him. Everybody reviled him. And yet. Verse three. This dodgy character. Was seeking to see who Jesus was. Now why was he seeking to see who Jesus was.

Maybe it was out of curiosity. Or maybe it was out of conscious need. Maybe in his selfish pursuit of money. And getting to the top. He found out that it wasn't all that worth it. It wasn't worth the loneliness.

It wasn't worth the hate. And the rejection. That he suffered from his own countrymen. Sure he had position. And sure he had plenty of money. But he probably found out. That money can't buy you love.

[12 : 33] And maybe he was looking for a way out. A way out of the life that he was leading. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was. Well he had heard who Jesus was. The whole country had heard about Jesus.

How he healed the sick. How he cast out demons. How he changed people's lives. Maybe Zacchaeus had heard how Jesus had changed the life of another tax collector. A man from Capernaum. A man called Levi.

You'll remember the story. Jesus walked by Levi. As he was sitting at his tax collector's booth. And said come. Follow me. And Levi got up. Followed Jesus.

And left the tax collecting business behind. And this was no flash in the pan. Because three years later. Levi was still following Jesus. Maybe Zacchaeus was thinking. Jesus had been the way out for Levi.

Maybe Jesus can be the way out for me. And isn't that the story of so many lives? People who have made an absolute mess of their lives. And they're looking for a way out of the lives that they're living. The economist will tell us.

[13 : 33] That money is the way out. The professors will tell us. That education is the way out. Soldiers will tell us. You have to fight your way out. Politicians will say. No, no, no.

You need to legislate your way out. But Jesus Christ has broken into our world to tell us. I am the way out. I am the way out. And not just the way out of the life that you're living.

But also the way back to your life with God. So there was not just a curiosity to see Jesus. But there was also a determination to see him. But on account of the crowd he could not.

Because he was small of stature. And you can just picture the scene. There's Jesus coming down Jericho Main Street. The camera crew and all the reporters are there. And all the people are crowding in.

And there's we Zacchaeus. You know, trying to get to see Jesus. But because he's high, he couldn't. And when people were turning around and seeing it was him, they were cutting him off and bumping him out of the way. But Zacchaeus wasn't to be undone.

[14 : 30] And we get a picture of here of Zacchaeus acting like a wee boy. Running ahead and climbing up into the sycamore fig tree. There was a determination to see Jesus also.

Dodgy character wanting to see Jesus. And so the story flows. Bringing me secondly to verse 5. A divine call being seen by Jesus.

Although Zacchaeus had a curiosity to see Jesus. And a determination also to see him. There is absolutely nothing in the text that Zacchaeus was going to speak to Jesus.

It seems that he wanted to look at Jesus. He wanted to see Jesus on his own terms. Viewing Jesus. Beholding Jesus. At a distance. A safe distance he thought. For curious and determined though he may have been.

It seems that he did not really want to become personally involved with Jesus. And again. Is that not the story of so many lives? People are drawn to Jesus.

[15 : 28] Yet fear keeps them at a distance. They long for Jesus. But they hesitate to become involved. And the moment that involvement becomes likely. Up go the barriers.

And friends. That's not just people in the world. That's also people in churches. People who week by week. Sit under the sound gospel teaching.

Hearing the invitation of the gospel. Week by week. To come to Jesus. So there's a question to ask ourselves as we sit here this afternoon. Have I become personally involved with Jesus?

Usually the barriers go up. But on this occasion. Jesus breaches all the barriers and comes through to him. Verse 5. Just before we come to verse 5. I want us just to notice.

That verse 5 is all initiated by Jesus. Yes. Zacchaeus was seeking to see who Jesus was. But remember verse 10. Jesus has come to seek.

[16 : 28] And to save the lost. I wonder if there's people in your life. As there is in mine. Who talk about their search for God. I've been searching for God. As if God was elusive. As if God was hiding.

But that's not the story. Or the picture that the Bible gives us. The Bible always speaks about God's search for man. And it's been that way since the very beginning. Since Genesis 3.

When the first man was lost. You remember the story. God comes walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And he calls out to Adam. Where are you? And Adam said.

I'm hiding. The first man that was lost. Has been hiding for God. And men and women and boys and girls. Have been hiding ever since. It's God who comes to seek.

It's God who comes to save. First thing I want us to see from verse 5. There is a divine call. Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name. As though he were well acquainted with the tax collector.

[17 : 23] Indeed he was. For Zacchaeus' name was written in the Lamb's book of life. From all eternity. He was one of those whom the Father had given to the Son. From all eternity.

As the Apostle writes. Those whom he predestined. He also called. Secondly there is a divine command. Hurry and come down. Great words for Zacchaeus to hear.

As he was up that tree in Jericho. But certainly not words that you want to hear. When you're up here preaching. In the pulpit of the Tron church. Hurry up and come down. But there is a divine command.

Hurry. Hurry and come down. There is an urgency in the command. There is an urgency in the Saviour's voice. Because verse 1 tells us. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

Jesus wouldn't be back that way again. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. And to the cross. Divine call. Divine command. And thirdly. Divine choice.

[18 : 21] For I must stay at your house today. Here the man that the whole town turned out to see. Chooses to stay with the man that the whole town hates.

And that teaches us the most glorious of lessons. Of the unconditional nature of God's salvation. It exalts free grace.

And extols God's unconditional offer of mercy. Jesus didn't say to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus. If you're prepared to mend your ways. Then I'm prepared to have dealings with you.

Zacchaeus. Turn over a new leaf. Give it six months and prove yourself. And then you can be part of the gang. No. He says Zacchaeus. Hurry. Come down. For I must stay at your house today.

And I'm certain that three thoughts jumped into the mind of Zacchaeus. As Jesus spoke to him in verse five. He sees me. Jesus looked up into the tree. He knows me.

[19 : 18] He called Zacchaeus by name. And he wants me. Jesus asked to go to his house. He sees me. He knows me. And he wants me.

Oh the acceptance of Jesus Christ. In the face of rejection from the world. Zacchaeus found out that day. That he was very important to God. Did you know that you're very important to God?

That same Jesus sees you. He does. He sees you. And he knows you. He knows all about you. He knows where you've been. He knows what you've done. And yet. That same Jesus.

Wants you. He accepts you. He accepts you as you are. And for me. For me personally. That's the biggest thing in the gospel for me. That the holy God of heaven would see me.

See me. And yet. He would still accept. Even me. Well how did Zacchaeus respond to this. Amazing glorious call. Well that brings me thirdly to verses 6 to 10.

[20 : 19] A definite conversion. Seeing what Jesus wants you to do. And what a great picture. Verse 6. Of gives of Zacchaeus. Conversion of Zacchaeus becoming a Christian.

He hurried. And came down. I'm surprised he never fell out the tree. But he hurried. And came down. And he received Jesus. Joyfully. Total opposite the other guy.

Who walks away with great sadness. At his rejection of Jesus. Zacchaeus responds to Jesus. And is filled with great joy. Oh what joy Jesus brings. When you respond to his call.

And receive him. And Zacchaeus didn't just receive Jesus. Into his house. He received Jesus. Into his heart. Since Jesus came into my heart. Since Jesus came into my heart.

Floods of joy. O'er my soul. Like the sea billows roll. Since Jesus. Came into my heart. We have a definite conversion. But look at the response of the crowd. Verse 7.

[21 : 18] He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. Didn't they know that that's why Jesus had come? He had come to save sinners. And didn't they too realize that they were sinners. In the need of saving.

It was the same. After Jesus called Levi to follow him. The people grumbled and complained. Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus replied. Those who are well.

Have no need of a doctor. But those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous. As if there was such a thing. But I have come. To call sinners. To repentance.

And what Jesus was saying was this. You wouldn't give a doctor a hard time for visiting the sick. So don't give me a hard time for welcoming sinners. Because that's my business.

How wonderful that Jesus Christ comes to call sinners. And to be their guest. But the folks in Zacchaeus' day would never have appreciated this amazing, wonderful truth and grace of God.

[22 : 13] Until they realized that they were sinners in need of a savior. And friends, it's the same for us too. We will never respond to this amazing invitation. Until we realize our great need too.

Well, if there's a definite conversion in a life. There must also be a definite change in that life. I remember hearing the story of a man from Airdrie. Quite a formidable man. His name was Duncan Donaldson.

And they used to call him Drunken Duncan. For obvious reasons. And Duncan used to sometimes get himself absolutely blottle drunk. And he caused trouble.

And sometimes it would take six, eight, ten policemen to restrain this man. And he would end up spending a night in the cells. But on the nights that he didn't spend in the cells. He used to go home.

And he used to just kick his door in. I mean, he had a key. But he never used it. He just used to kick the door in. And after he'd kicked the door in. He had this wee dog. And the dog would come to him. And he just boot the dog as well.

[23 : 14] But this night he wandered into a Christian meeting. And he got converted. And he went home that night. And he opened the door. Not as was his custom. Be using the key. Be kicking it in.

He opened the door. Be using the key. You see. And when he went in. The dog bit him. There was such a change in his life. That even the dog knew he was changed.

There's a definite conversion. And verse 8 gives us the concrete evidence of a changed life. Zacchaeus making restitution. Just a word about verse 8. What Zacchaeus does here in these verses.

Does not save him. It does not make him right with God. Zacchaeus becoming a Christian. Being converted. Being accepted by God. Already happened back in verse 5 or verse 6.

When he was up that tree. When Jesus called to him. And he responded. But what we have here in verse 8. Is the evidence of Zacchaeus being saved. The evidence of him being saved.

[24 : 13] John Calvin said. We are saved by faith alone. Trusting and responding to Jesus alone. But that faith never comes alone.

That faith is always followed by works. A demonstration. That we have been saved. So here in verse 8. Here are Zacchaeus. He has been saved.

He has been saved. The demonstration that he has been saved. Giving half his goods to the poor. Which I am sure was only done after he had paid back those he had defrauded. And he paid back double what the law said.

And look what he says. You know. If I have defrauded anybody. He knew. He knew fine well. He was a total cheat. But he did not say. You know. I am going to wait for people to sue me. I do it now. I do it gladly.

I do it now. Now. Before his conversion. He thought it was okay to cheat. But now it grieves his heart. There is a definite change. Zacchaeus demonstrates inward change by outward action.

[25 : 09] Faith without works is dead. We must show our faith with changed behavior. And isn't it amazing. That the thing that had a hold of Zacchaeus. Namely his money. No longer has the same hold.

Zacchaeus could have wrote the words of the song. That I am sure we all know. Words taken from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. All I once held dear. Built my life upon.

All I once thought gain. I have counted loss. Spent and worthless now. Compared to this. Knowing you Jesus. Knowing you. There is no greater thing.

As a case would have ended the day financially poor. But oh the treasures he now knew in Jesus Christ. And in verse 9 and 10. There is a divine confirmation. That in Zacchaeus we have a definite conversion.

Verse 9. Today salvation has come to this house. Jesus Christ has done the impossible. A camel has gone through the eye of a needle. All because of the wonderful grace.

[26 : 11] And the wonderful power of God. Since he also is a son of Abraham. Not meaning that Zacchaeus was a Jew. Although he was. But now saying. That this man now walks.

In the steps. And the works. And the faith. Of Abraham. His father. In the faith. For the son of man. Came to seek. And to save the lost.

But friends. We are left with a question. How is it that Jesus. Is able to. Seek. And to save the lost. And what did he do with this dodgy character's sin?

Did he just forget about it? Did he just sweep it under the carpet? Well fourthly. Finally. And quickly. A dying Christ. A dying Christ.

Seeing. How Jesus saves the lost. We have already seen that Jesus is on a mission. To seek and to save the lost. Verse 10. And in Luke's gospel. Luke tells us that. Jesus is on a journey to Jerusalem.

[27 : 09] Jerusalem. Chapter 9. Verse 51. Luke records. And Jesus set his face. Resolutely. Towards Jerusalem. And in chapter 19. Verse 41.

Jesus finally arrives in Jerusalem. And in the 10 chapters. That have. Went in between that. Jesus has told his disciples. On more than one occasion. What will happen.

In Jerusalem. And the last time there is. In chapter 18. Verse 31. At the top of your page. And taking the 12. Jesus said to them. See. We are going up to Jerusalem.

And everything that is written about the Son of Man. By the prophets. Will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles. He will be mocked.

And shamefully treated. And spat upon. And after flogging him. They will kill him. And on the third day. He will rise. But they understood none of these things.

[28 : 05] The same was hidden from them. And they did not grasp. What was said. Jesus is going to the cross. To pay the price for our sin. And rebellion.

To be our saviour. If you are here today. And you want to get right with God. I have got good news for you. You can. But you need to go via King's Cross. And not the railway station in London.

But the cross of Calvary. That the King of Glory died on. At the cross of Jesus. Even though. Even though I be. The chief of all the sinners. There is hope for me.

Judged. Condemned. And guilty. Like Zacchaeus. I am lost indeed. But the cross of Jesus. Meets. My deepest need. And you will remember.

That Luke records. That there were two thieves. Crucified with Jesus. One on either side. And one of them. Asked Jesus. Jesus. Will you remember me. When you come into your kingdom.

[29 : 03] And Jesus replies. Truly I say to you. Today. You will be with me. In paradise. Nice. Jesus saves us. Through the cross. But even on the cross.

Jesus was seeking. And saving the lost. And he is still. In the same business today. In closing friends. Are you saved? Are you a Christian?

Well if you are. Him who came to seek you. And called your name. And saved you. He will keep you. It was grace. That taught your heart to fear. And grace your fears relieved.

It's grace that's kept you safe thus far. And it's grace that will lead you home. As we sit here this afternoon. Are you lost? Do you not yet know.

Personally. The Lord Jesus Christ. Well he knows you. He does. He sees you. He knows you. He knows all about you. He knows where you have been. He knows what you have done.

[30 : 01] And he wants you. You are very important to him. You are. He calls you. He bids you come. Will you respond? And will you receive him?

With great gladness. Amen. Let us pray together. Have you heard the voice of Jesus.

Softly pleading with your heart. Have you felt his presence glorious. As he calls your soul apart. Harken to his invitation. To the music of God's grace.

Let the peace of God's salvation. Fill your soul. And love embrace. Amen.