

Zacchaeus

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[0 : 00] Psalm 119, and we will sing the section that begins at verse 145 through to the end of that section. We'll sing to the tune, Woodlands.

I call with all my heart, Lord, answer me, and then all your decrees I will obey. I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life, and I will keep your statutes every day.

Let's stand to sing these verses. I call with all my heart, Lord, answer me, and then all your decrees I will obey.

I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life, and I will keep your statutes every day.

I cry aloud to you, Lord, let alone and cry for help. For I have set my hope upon your word.

[1 : 29] I stay away throughout the hours of night, reflecting on your promises, Lord.

I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life. I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life. I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life. I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life.

I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life. I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life. For those who dance, make that your holy love.

How gross this king's offering, that best last night.

Yet you are near to those who seek you, Lord. All your gold lands are true and never sure.

[2 : 45] Yes, from your statutes, love on your island. That you have made them always to endure.

Thank you. Zacchaeus was a very little man.

A very little man was he. He climbed into a sycamore tree for the Savior he wanted to see. I have sometimes wondered about having a series of sermon entitled Sunday School Specials.

All the classic Sunday School stories. Now, it's never gone beyond an idle thought. But what with Joseph this morning, Zacchaeus this evening, and next Sunday morning in our study of Daniel, we come to Daniel in the lion's den.

It might appear that I've, or we, have embarked on that particular series. But there is no rhyme or reason to the particular order of these, as it happens over these two Sundays.

[4 : 02] Sunday School classics, I suppose. And what can we say about Zacchaeus that has not already been said a thousand times?

I think I would describe the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus as a love story. A true love story that in a very personal way illustrates the love of Jesus, very particularly for men and women on the margins.

For those starved of and yet searching for love and acceptance and belonging. And in that sense, of course, it is and always has been and always will be a very contemporary story.

For there will always be those who are on the margins and those who long for love and acceptance and belonging.

Indeed, it is such a trait of our human condition that we long for these things. And the story of Zacchaeus presents us one who knew such longings, but very especially one who found fulfillment of these longings in the person of Jesus.

[5 : 21] So, a love story. The love of Jesus for Zacchaeus. The love of Jesus for those who are on the margins. Those who are seeking and struggling to find love and belonging.

What kind of love finds expression in this memorable little account of a memorable little man called Zacchaeus?

As we go through the account, I want to simply identify some features of the love of Jesus and comment on them as we make our way through the account.

Really, in the manner in which it's presented to us in the order in which the events unfold in this passage. If I have counted correctly, I think there are seven features of the love of Jesus that I want us to quickly notice and consider.

The first thing that I want you to notice about this love, this love very particularly of Jesus for Zacchaeus, but a love that remains the same today is that it was a love that holds true whatever the circumstances.

[6 : 38] And I say that in connection with the occasion in which this encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus takes place. Notice in verse 1 of chapter 19 a detail that we are given that we could easily pass over without noting its significance.

But we read there in verse 1, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. Jesus was passing through and it rather begs the question rather obviously well passing through to where?

And we can discover the answer to that question in the previous chapter in chapter 18 and at verse 31 we read, Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, We are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be turned over to the Gentiles, they will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again. So there we have the answer to the question, well where was he passing through to?

He was passing through to Jerusalem. He had been in Jerusalem on different occasions, but this was the final journey to Jerusalem. This was the journey that would end in his death.

[7 : 59] These are the circumstances in which Jesus finds himself with the opportunity to have this meeting, this encounter with Zacchaeus. And we could say, if ever Jesus would have had just cause to politely and reasonably decline any involvement with Zacchaeus, this was the time.

If ever Jesus could have said, well, yes, I have spent my life, my public ministry very particularly attending to people like Zacchaeus. To having time for them. To reaching out to them.

To loving them. To rescuing them. Yes, that's what I've been about. But not now. Not today. I'm passing through. I'm going to Jerusalem. I fixed my eyes on what is my primary purpose of being here at all.

The cross. And so surely today of all days I could reasonably say, Zacchaeus, not today. No time for you today. No time for you today. But Jesus loved Zacchaeus.

He loved Zacchaeus. And so whatever his own personal circumstances, he has time to show that love and to express that love. To demonstrate that love in a very practical way.

[9 : 19] Notice also as we consider the circumstances that Jesus finds himself in, we can also notice that he finds himself very much alone. It may seem a strange thing to say.

He's surrounded by his disciples. But notice what we're told there in verse 34 of chapter 18.

Immediately on Jesus explaining to the disciples what awaits him in Jerusalem, we then read, the disciples did not understand any of this.

Yes, they were there. They were surrounding him. And of course they had a very real affection for him. In that sense he wasn't alone. But in as much as what awaited him in Jerusalem is concerned, he was very much alone.

They didn't understand any of this. He explains it to them very explicitly. You might say very graphically. With great detail. And yet they don't get it.

They don't understand any of this. So here he is, heading to Jerusalem to his death, surrounded by friends, but friends who don't understand what he's going through.

[10 : 26] And yet, even in such circumstances, Jesus had time for Zacchaeus. And he had time for Zacchaeus because he loved Zacchaeus.

And of course this remains true of Jesus today in the manner in which he relates to us. He's never too busy. Never too stressed.

Never has more important stuff to attend to. His response to our cry for help, to our need of his company, is never, well I'll get back to you on that.

Or even worse, don't phone me, I'll phone you. No, whatever the circumstances, the love that he has for his own is a love that holds true and firm and secure.

That's one feature that we find of the love of Jesus for Zacchaeus, as that illustrates his love for us also. Another thing that we can notice as we go through the account is that this love is a love that takes the initiative.

[11 : 38] Now, if we read the passage, as we have done so, we might ask, well is that the case? Is it on this occasion Jesus who takes the initiative or is it not rather Zacchaeus?

Zacchaeus is the one who we are first told of and we're told of in connection with his intention of approaching Jesus.

But of course, as we just notice a little more carefully what it is that's happening as we're told, we discover that it's not as it might appear.

Just to take a wee step back to say something that we are sure so familiar with. Zacchaeus was not a popular man. He was a tax collector, possibly never a very popular profession, but his unpopularity was many times greater, not only because of his profession, but because of the fact that he exercised that profession in the service of the Roman oppressors.

And so he was hated with a passion by his countrymen. Hence, we speak of him as being so marginalized and so starved of love and affection, largely because of the life that he lived and the work that he did.

[12:59] But this Zacchaeus, so despised, had heard something about Jesus. We don't know what he had heard, but clearly he had heard something about Jesus.

Hence, we read in verse 3, he wanted to see who Jesus was. There must be something behind that. There must be something that would explain why it is that this man would have been interested in making the acquaintance of Jesus, or in fairness, limiting ourselves to what we are actually told, that he would want to see who Jesus was.

Maybe. We don't know. Maybe he had heard how Jesus was described as a friend of tax collectors and sinners. And he would have been greatly intrigued by this very strange, you might say even bizarre description of anyone.

You know, to describe somebody in that way. Well, what can we say about Jesus? Well, he's a friend of tax collectors and sinners. What a strange way of describing anybody. And maybe Zacchaeus has heard this. And he thought, well, I'm a tax collector.

I didn't know that we had friends. And yet here, there is this Jesus who is described in this way. And so, at the very least, he is intrigued.

[14:14] That thirst that was within him begins to wonder if perhaps it could be satisfied by this Jesus.

So, he wanted to see who Jesus was. But I think it is also important to recognize that in as much as we can discern from what we're told, that's all he wanted to do.

He wanted to see who Jesus was. It wasn't his intention to have an encounter with Jesus. It certainly wasn't his intention or aspiration that he would have Jesus in his home, as indeed was what eventually happened.

This was not on his, not in his agenda at all for that particular day. He wanted to see Jesus, to see who Jesus was. And so, that there would be an encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus was by no means of Zacchaeus' initiative.

No, it is Jesus who takes the initiative to secure the encounter and indeed to offer his friendship to Zacchaeus. Jesus takes the initiative.

[15:23] The love of Jesus is a love that takes the initiative. This initiative that we speak of, does it begin here as Jesus enters into Jericho, passing through Jericho, and discovers that there is this man who wants to see him?

Is this the beginning of the story as regards love's initiative? Well, of course, we know that that is not the case. We know that God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has taken that loving initiative in eternity itself.

And that loving initiative that was expressed and conceived in eternity found expression in history, and indeed in our own personal histories.

We think of some of the passages of Scripture, some of the verses that speak of that divine, loving initiative. The words that we read even this morning from Ephesians chapter 1.

For he, God, chose us in him, in Christ, before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight. Or we think of the same Paul as he wrote to the Christians in Rome.

[16:40] And in chapter 5 writes, But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We think of the words that we find in the first letter of John.

And in chapter 4, And in chapter 4, this is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

When we think of these familiar truths, and maybe if we think of them in a slightly different way, introducing the name of Zacchaeus. For God chose Zacchaeus in Christ, before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight.

This is love. Not that Zacchaeus loved God, but that God loved Zacchaeus, and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for Zacchaeus' sins.

This love is a love that takes the initiative. And of course, that remains true today. Perhaps it may be true of you, that you are intrigued by Jesus.

[17 : 53] To use the language of the passage, you would want to see Jesus. Who is this Jesus, of whom others speak, of whom others share with me their experience of?

Who is this Jesus? Who is this Jesus, who thousands of years after his walking this earth, remains the subject of such fascination for so many?

Who is this Jesus? I'd like to see him. I'd like to know more about him. Well, that may be your desire. But Jesus' desire goes beyond simply seeing.

Jesus' love that Jesus wants to meet with. Jesus wants to have that encounter with you, to offer you his friendship. This love, then, is a love that takes the initiative.

But we notice also, as we continue through the account, that this love of Jesus for Zacchaeus can be described also in this way, that it's a love that knows your name. If you imagine the scene as it unfolds here on this morning in Jericho.

[19 : 02] Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. He knows that he's passing through. He's familiar with Jericho and the streets that make up the city.

He is able to establish the route that Jesus is likely to take as he makes his way through the city. And so, he goes forward and advances to a point where he would be able to climb up the famous sycamore tree.

And from there, have a good view of Jesus as he approaches. That's all he wants to do. He wants to see him. To discover something more about him. And so, he has his strategic position secured in the tree.

And then, Jesus begins to approach. And as he approaches, he begins to slow down. And Zacchaeus is wondering, well, why is he slowing down? And he doesn't just slow down.

He stops. And he stops at the foot of the tree. And you can just imagine how Zacchaeus' heart begins to pound. And it pounds in a strange cocktail of excitement and also fear.

[20 : 08] What is happening? Why has he stopped here below me at the foot of this tree? And then, there is this wonderful moment.

When Jesus looks up and he pronounces his name. Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus, come down.

Immediately, I must stay at your house today. But, I wonder if all that Jesus said was a bit of a haze following that first word that he pronounces.

The very name of the one in the tree. Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus. And Zacchaeus wonders, how does he know my name? How does he call me by name?

Zacchaeus. For Zacchaeus, the moment was certainly at that point, whether he looked back and analyzed it with greater criteria.

[21 : 05] But, at that moment, it was incomprehensibly random. Why me? Why does he address me? Why does he stop and speak to me? But, though it was a random moment from the perspective of Zacchaeus.

For Jesus, it was a moment that he had looked forward to from, yes, even before the beginning of Genesis 1. You see, from all eternity, God had appointed this moment of encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus.

And Jesus had looked forward to this moment. And now this moment came. Love that knows your name. This was, of course, not the first time that Zacchaeus has heard his name pronounced.

No doubt, as he walked through the streets of Jericho, he would hear his name pronounced, murmured. Murmured in angry and hateful tones by those who would see him passing by and would murmur, there's Zacchaeus the traitor.

There's Zacchaeus, the one who cheats us and who makes himself wealthy at our expense. But this time he heard his name pronounced in an altogether different way.

[22 : 24] And Jesus remains the one who knows our name. He knows your name. He knows you by name. He knows you as you are.

He knows your pain. He knows your doubts. He knows your guilt, your fear, your hopes, your dreams, your aspirations. All of these things he knows. He knows what opinion you hold concerning himself.

He knows if you trust in him or choose not to trust in him. He knows if you believe in him or you don't believe in him. He knows if you are being faithful to him or if you are not being faithful to him. All of these things he knows. He knows your name. He knows you as you really are. This love that finds expression in this encounter.

Love that knows your name. But we can notice another aspect of this love. And we can describe it in this way. It's a love that takes up residence. Notice what Jesus goes on to say.

[23 : 25] He doesn't just address him by name, but he goes on to say a little more. Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.

Love, if we want to put it this way, that takes up residence. Two words that I just want to highlight, particularly in these words that Jesus addresses to Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today. This revealing must. I must stay at your house. You can almost sense the divine authority behind this manner of expression.

I must stay at your house. It's not the language you would ordinarily use if you're meeting somebody for the first time and you're maybe, for whatever reason, interested in being able to visit them.

You don't speak of having to do so. But here Jesus uses this language, I must stay at your house today. There's a divine necessity that this take place.

[24 : 35] Indeed, Jesus is entirely persuaded that this will take place. Zacchaeus, there's no dubiety about it. He will stay with Zacchaeus that very day, for he has business with Zacchaeus.

Gracious, loving, friendly business to transact with this man. I must stay at your house. And I must do so today.

I must do so today. Now, of course, we've already considered the circumstances. There were very pressing reasons why it had to be today. Jesus was passing through. He was heading to Jerusalem. He was heading to Calvary.

If he didn't see him today, he wouldn't see him at all. That's one very obvious reason for why Jesus speaks of the need that this encounter be today, this very day.

But of course, there is also the sense in which an encounter with Jesus is not one that can be postponed. It is never a good idea to postpone this encounter.

[25 : 40] Never a good idea to say, well, maybe tomorrow, maybe next week, wait for a more convenient season to use the language of Scripture. This love is a love that will and must take up residence in our home, in our life.

I must, I must stay with you. And it must be today. Now is the day. And what is demanded, lovingly and graciously demanded, is that our very lives be opened up.

That Jesus would come in and take residence, take control, and guide us into the future. Love that takes up residence.

Then another feature we can notice of this love, we could describe in this way, that it is a love that demands response. Again, if we can imagine the scene.

Jesus has indicated his very clear intention to Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today. Imagine, foolish though it might appear.

[26 : 50] Imagine if Zacchaeus had heard those words and maybe just for a moment given them some thought and then responded, well, Jesus, that's very good of you, very kind of you to want to come to my home, but no thank you.

I'm fine what I am. My intentions today were to see you. Well, I've got a lot more than I bargained for. You've addressed me, you've spoken to me, but that's as far as I really want to take this.

It's such a foolish thought that Zacchaeus would respond in that way. Of course he doesn't respond in that way. He gets down that tree as fast as his little legs can carry him until he is able to go with Jesus to his home.

See, this love, this love that reflects the divine initiative, this love that would indicate this intention, this desire to reside with us and to be part of our home and our daily lives is a love that demands a response.

We must respond to this invitation, to this opportunity that we are presented with. How will we respond to it?

[28 : 11] A couple of final things I want to mention. Features of this love of Jesus for Zacchaeus and indeed for us. And the penultimate thing I want to notice is that this love is love that takes the flack.

What did it cost Jesus to love Zacchaeus? And in considering this we can contrast two verses. First of all the final verse of chapter 18 and then verse 7 of chapter 19.

The final verse of chapter 18 we read immediately, and here the reference is to this blind man who Jesus meets on the way. And we read there in verse 43, immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God.

And then particularly what we read in what follows, when all the people saw it, they also praised God. The point is that at this point, as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, Jesus is very popular. You know, this miraculous healing of the blind man has caused wonder among the people who have witnessed it. And we're told that they praised God.

[29 : 19] They praised God for what Jesus has done. Jesus is this wonderful rabbi who does these wonderful miracles and it's great to be with him, to be connected to him in some way. Well that's the end of chapter 18.

And then what do we read in verse 7 of chapter 19? These are the same people, all the people, all the people, all the people saw this and began to mutter, He has gone to be the guest of a sinner. These are the same people largely, I'm sure. The same people who had been waxing eloquent concerning who this Jesus was and the wonderful things that he could do. And indeed we're told they praised God on account of what Jesus had done for the blind man.

And yet now, just moments really later, when they saw this, they began to mutter, He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.

You see, his friendship with Zacchaeus, his desire to be in the home of Zacchaeus, his willingness to love Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus does nothing for his reputation.

[30 : 23] He has to take the murmuring and the flack of those who were highly critical of this very unwise decision as they saw it on the part of Jesus.

He loves Zacchaeus. He's willing to take the flack in order that he would meet him and have this encounter with him. And of course when we speak of love that takes the flack, it goes way beyond simply the murmurings of the crowd.

We know that what he was going to do at Calvary was, we could describe it in this way, to take the flack for us. To take the judgment and the punishment that we deserve for our sin.

Jesus willing to take the flack in that ultimate way on our behalf as he dies for our sins on Calvary's tree.

This is the kind of love that we find in this account of Jesus and Zacchaeus. Jesus doesn't care what others think about his friendship with Zacchaeus.

[31 : 33] I wonder if we, when we turn things around, to what extent are we concerned about what others think of our friendship with Jesus? Are we sometimes somewhat embarrassed by it?

And play it down because we are concerned what people will think about us if we're too vocal concerning this friend we have called Jesus. But finally, in this account of Jesus and Zacchaeus, we find a love that can be described in this way.

A love that transforms. The love of Jesus transforms Zacchaeus. Jesus, as we've noticed, had sought him out. Jesus had found him.

Jesus saved him. Jesus changed him. And through Zacchaeus reaches and serves others.

Zacchaeus, as we read there in verse 8, 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.

And 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.

[32 : 54] This man who was lost, marginalized, unloved, hungry, and thirsty for love and acceptance and belonging. And in Jesus he finds all of these things.

He's rescued from his life of selfishness, sinful selfishness. His genuine and heartfelt repentance finds expression, immediate expression, in what he commits to do concerning all that he owns and seeking to help others.

And Jericho itself becomes a better place because of the salvation of this man, because of the transformation of this man. Not only he blessed, not only his family, but the whole of the town.

A better place because of what Jesus had done to and for Zacchaeus. It's a love that transforms men and women like Zacchaeus.

Men and women like you and me. And as he did this for Zacchaeus, so he can do that for you. How will you respond? Of course you will respond one way or another to the divine initiative.

[34 : 05] You will accept or you will reject the offer of friendship that he makes. You'll stay up the tree or you'll come down as Zacchaeus did and welcome him gladly into your home and life.

How must we all respond? Because the example of Zacchaeus and his response to Jesus isn't only relevant for those who are not Christians and who perhaps for the first time are presented with the opportunity to respond to the friendship and the love of Jesus.

It certainly is applicable for such, but it's also applicable for all of us. For this need that is presented to repent and to believe is not a one-off need.

It's not a one-off exercise, but rather day by day we are given the opportunity and we have the responsibility to repent and to believe as Jesus comes to our encounter and awaits our response.

Well, may we be wise as Zacchaeus was in responding with that enthusiasm and with that excitement that we find described here.

[35 : 19] So, the love of Jesus, a love story, the love of Jesus for Zacchaeus, a love that holds true whatever the circumstances, a love that takes the initiative, a love that knows your name, yes, even your name, a love that would take up residence in your life, that demands a response, that takes the flack for you, and a love that transforms.

May we know increasingly that love in our own lives. Let's pray.