

Luke 18:37

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to that passage that we read in Luke's Gospel and to two verses in particular. First of all, a verse in chapter 18, verse 37, where we read, They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

Then chapter 19, verse 1, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

Jesus was passing through. This was, in fact, the last time that Jesus passed through Jericho. The last opportunity that Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus had to meet Jesus and to respond to him. You see, Jesus' ministry was quickly drawing to a close. Jesus had set his face to go up to Jerusalem. He was preparing his disciples for what was to happen there.

[1 : 10] We read about it in verse 31 and what follows of chapter 18. Jesus knew that at Jerusalem he was going to be arrested.

He was going to be falsely tried. Falsely accused. Jesus was going to be mocked and beaten and spat upon. And he finally was going to be crucified.

Jesus was passing through Jericho for the last time. His ministry in this world was drawing quickly to a close. Now I am acutely conscious of the fact of the passing of time at the present moment. I am acutely aware that my ministry in Aberdeen is drawing quickly to a close. Almost every day now I am doing something for the last time.

I am acutely conscious of the last time. I have already written the last from the manse in the newsletter. Next week we will have the last communion here with me as your minister.

[2 : 25] There will be the last prayer meeting. There will be the last sermon. There will be the last visit. Home visit. Last hospital visit.

All of these things. The last opportunity in various ways. And this is very true of life in general. Not just at this particular time. But we are being presented all the time with last opportunities. And as life draws on.

And all times draw on to a conclusion. Then we will have last opportunities of very significant proportions.

I want to look with you at these two men that we see here. Who had this great last opportunity. To meet with Jesus. The first thing I want to notice about them.

[3 : 23] Was their lost condition. In verse 10 Jesus drew attention to the fact. Verse 10 of chapter 19. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

See he saw someone like Zacchaeus. And someone like Bartimaeus. And he saw them as people who were lost. Needed to be found. I wonder is that the way you feel about yourself this morning. You know something perhaps of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But you yourself don't feel that you have been found by him. You are still lost.

Consider Bartimaeus. There he was. In one sense he was very lost wasn't he? He was a poor blind beggar. There was this great crowd.

Milling around him. Passing by. Perhaps jostling him. Pushing him out of the way. They didn't seem to have very much sympathy with him at any rate. He must have felt lost and confused.

[4 : 34] In his blindness. And in his darkness. Bartimaeus. There that day. He wanted to know what was going on. He asked what was happening. You know there are many people in the world today.

Who must feel like Bartimaeus. Perhaps you this morning you feel a bit like Bartimaeus. You live in a world that is very confusing.

And you can't understand what's going on. You can't make sense of life. You can't make sense of what's going on around you. And you ask what's happening. What's happening in the world.

It may be because perhaps of the things you see happening in the world around you. The things you see on television. Perhaps at a much more personal level. The things that you see happening in your own experience.

What is happening to me? The world seems to be going mad. Perhaps you can identify very much with the way Bartimaeus felt that day. Lost in the crowd.

[5 : 37] Blind. Confused. What about Zacchaeus? He too was lost. But in a different way. He wasn't blind.

He wasn't a beggar. Far from it. He was a wealthy man. But Zacchaeus also had lost his way. He had lost his way in life. He was wealthy.

He had everything money could buy. Because he wasn't just a tax collector. He was a chief tax collector. And in those days. Tax collectors were very wealthy. We perhaps complain about taxes today.

But the tax system of the ancient world was often very corrupt. And these tax collectors, they each raked off a share for themselves before they passed off the proper taxes to the people above them. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. He would probably be in charge of the whole district of Jericho for the collecting of taxes. And he would have other people under him. And so he would be raking in a great deal from all these sources.

[6 : 49] He was wealthy. But he was guilty. He was guilty of grinding the faces of the poor. He was guilty of sheer exploitation of others and of corruption.

And it looks as if he perhaps was bothered by a guilty conscience because of that. Because we see, as we will see later, when he came to meet Jesus, one of the first things he wanted to do was to put right what he had done wrong.

Are you bothered by a guilty conscience today? You may have everything going for you in life in many ways. You may be young and fit. You may have a good job.

You may have great prospects in front of you. Yet you're bothered by a guilty conscience. You're bothered by the fact that you know you have done things and you continue to do things that are breaking God's law.

And no matter what you do and what you get and what you achieve, that guilty conscience will not be silenced. That's perhaps a bit like what Zacchaeus was.

[8 : 01] And we know that he had in his heart a longing for something better. Because when he heard that Jesus was coming through Jerusalem, he wanted to see who Jesus was.

He had heard a great deal about Jesus and he wanted to see him. Now perhaps he didn't understand himself why he wanted that. But perhaps it was a little bit of, well, here was somebody who was very different from himself.

Yet he had heard that Jesus was somebody who was interested even in somebody like Zacchaeus. After all, Jesus had a tax collector amongst his own disciples. Matthew, the tax collector.

So Zacchaeus had in his heart a longing for something better than what he had at the present time. And perhaps he felt that somehow Jesus would be able to meet that need.

So here was a man, too, who was lost. He didn't have the kind of lostness that poor Bartimaeus had. It was a different kind, but he was lost nonetheless.

[9 : 13] He had lost his way in life. He wasn't living as a human being, really ought to live. A human being created in the image of God. He was depending upon his corrupt way of life for the wealth and the possessions and the enjoyment and so on that he had.

And he was bothered by a guilty conscience. And he had a longing in his heart that wasn't really satisfied by anything that he had. Is that the way you feel this morning?

It's the way that many thousands and millions of people feel around you. Yet many of them, perhaps most of them this morning, do not have the opportunity that you have today.

They don't have the opportunity that you have at this present moment. The opportunity to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ. The opportunity to meet with someone who can do something about that lost condition.

To meet with the only person who can ever do anything about it. Because Jesus, the Son of Man, came to seek and to save what was lost.

[10 : 28] I want to look with you next at the last opportunity. We've looked at the lost condition of these men. And our own lost condition.

What about the last opportunity they had? The last opportunity to meet Jesus. Jesus, as I said, was on his way up to Jerusalem.

Who was this Jesus? And why was it so important that these men should meet him? Well, Jesus was able and willing to transform people.

To bring a radical transformation into the life of individual men and women. And Jesus was known, as I've indicated already, as a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

You see, as soon as Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by, he started to shout out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. Why did he do that?

[11 : 36] Because he knew something about who Jesus was. Now, I don't know. Maybe there's someone here this morning who doesn't know the first thing about Jesus.

It's quite possible, because so many people in our society today hardly know anything about Jesus. They perhaps only know the name Jesus Christ as a swear word. But I'm sure many of you know a great deal about Jesus, who he is, what he came into this world to do.

Jesus is able and willing to transform people. The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

These men, in differing degrees, had heard about Jesus. Bartimaeus cried out as soon as he heard it was Jesus. Zacchaeus, he went and he climbed to a tree to see Jesus.

He had heard about him. I don't know how much or how little you know about Jesus. But what you need to know is this. That Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is sent into this world to deal with our lostness.

[12 : 50] He came to seek and to save what was lost. He didn't come just to be one other good teacher, one other prophet, one other philosopher.

He didn't come to be any of these things. He came to seek and to save the lost. He came to do the very thing that we need done. You see, there are so many people offering us things in the world that we don't really need.

A great deal of what goes on in advertising and so on is presenting us with things we don't really need. It's trying to encourage us to want things that we don't really need.

And so much of what goes on in life is like that. So much of what goes on in terms of religion and philosophy is exactly the same. Trying to get us to want the things that these people or these religions have that we don't really need.

Because these things can't do anything for us. We don't need to have someone come and give us teaching. We've got the very best teaching that we can have in God's own word concerning what is the way of life, the ten commandments and so on.

[14 : 04] The problem is we can't keep it. We don't need someone to come and give us a good example of how to be a good human being. We have the very best example that could possibly be given in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The problem is we can't follow that example. What we need is someone to come and to transform us. Just as Bartimaeus didn't need all the things that might be on offer in his world.

He needed someone who could make him see. And Zacchaeus didn't need all the things that were on offer in his world. He didn't need all these riches that he had because they couldn't cure his lostness.

He needed someone who had come to seek and to save the lost. And you today, my friend, you need exactly that. You need the Lord Jesus Christ because you're lost.

You're astray from God. You're wandering in this world. You've lost your way in life. You don't know where you're going. You're confused. You're confused. And yet God has sent his Son into the world to be the Savior of sinners.

[15 : 20] He has come to seek and to save the lost. He has come to reestablish a relationship between God and man. To put you at peace with God.

To put you into a right relationship with God. One that isn't going to just exist for a little time, for a week, a year. Or just for the rest of your life in this world. It's going to exist forever.

That's what Jesus comes to give us. So that's why this last opportunity we're considering here is so crucially important. Because of who the person is whom they had this last opportunity to meet.

But this person, this Jesus, this Son of Man, Son of God, was passing through. Bartimaeus heard, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.

Bartimaeus in all his confusion and bewilderment was asking, What is going on? And they said, Jesus is passing by. The beginning of chapter 19, we read, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

[16:33] It's something that perhaps strikes you occasionally as you read the Gospels. That Jesus was always on the moon. Yes, there were times when he stopped in a particular town or a particular place and taught people.

But he didn't stay long. He was always on the moon. And I believe that was stressing to people that time was passing. That things were urgent.

That he would not always be there. And they had to respond while he was there. And Jesus today is passing through. Jesus today is passing by.

Jesus today is near to us. Just as he was near physically there to Bartimaeus and to Zacchaeus, so he is near spiritually to us today.

How do I know that? Because here his word is being proclaimed. It's not just an ancient book. It's not just my opinions.

[17:37] It's Jesus' own words. Jesus himself comes alive to you. As we read these things and as we think about them together. Because Jesus himself is communicating to you now by the power of his spirit.

That he is alive. And that he conquered death. And he is able today to help your particular needs. And to meet with you. But Jesus is still passing by.

Jesus is still passing through. You see, sometimes we get the kind of impression that, well, things are always going to continue the same.

And we're always going to have these opportunities. We're always going to have these privileges.

Perhaps you come to church every week of your life. For I don't know how many decades.

And you perhaps go on the assumption that you're always going to be able to do that. Well, of course, when you reflect about it just for a moment, you recognize the utter foolishness of it.

[18:45] It is not so. It is not so. The time will come when you will hear your last sermon. The time will come when you will have the opportunity to come to the last communion.

You see, our life is full of last opportunities. All times are drawing on to a conclusion. Your time.

As well as the time of the history of the world in general. Here we're not going to live forever. We have a time in this world. And then it's appointed unto men once to die.

And after that, the judgment. So Jesus today is coming near to you. He's passing through this very place. There's that marvelous vision, isn't there, in the book of Revelation that John received from Jesus.

And it was the vision of Jesus walking amongst the candlesticks. The candlesticks represented these lampstands. The lampstands, they represented the churches of Christ.

[19:55] And it's as if Jesus today is walking around the church here. And he's coming near to you. Just there as he passed by Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus.

So, today, we have an opportunity. I cannot say that this is your last opportunity. But it may very well be.

You see, Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus, they didn't know it was going to be their last opportunity. As far as they were concerned, it was their first opportunity, as far as I know.

Perhaps this was the first time Bartimaeus had that opportunity to be so near Jesus that he could shout to him and he would hear him. Perhaps that was the first time Zacchaeus was able to be free and to be there and to go and to climb up a tree and to see Jesus.

I don't know. They might have had another opportunity. But I do know this. That that opportunity was the last. Jesus did not pass that way again.

[21:01] Ever. Now, today, Jesus is drawing near to us. And this may be our last opportunity to respond to him and to his loving approach to us.

There is an urgency involved here. See what he says to Zacchaeus in verse 5. Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.

He didn't say, Well, Zacchaeus, if you're interested in meeting me sometime, make an appointment. Next week, next month, that'll do. No, he said, come down immediately.

I must come to your house today. We have business, urgent business to do today. And that's the way the gospel comes to us today. It doesn't say to you, You can think about this next week.

It doesn't say to you, even that you can go away home and you can think about it later on today. It says to you now, today, at this moment, come immediately.

[22 : 07] And so often, you see, we put off decisions. We see it in ordinary life. We put off making decisions about just ordinary things. And we never get the thing done. Now, we do the same spiritually.

We put off this greatest of all decisions, and we never get it done. Do it now. Do it today. While Jesus is drawing near to you.

He's reaching out to you. He's passing by you. Do exactly what these men did. Let's look then at what these men actually did.

They had this last opportunity, and then we see the least response that was required. And that may seem perhaps a strange thing to say.

The least response. But I want to stress this. Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus, they didn't need to do something marvelous or wonderful to get Jesus to be interested in them.

[23 : 15] Think about Bartimaeus. What did Bartimaeus have to do? He heard Jesus was passing by. All he had to do was to cry out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy, on me.

You see, he didn't need in some way or another to impress Jesus with his achievements, with his good life, with his wealth, or with his influence, or any of these things.

He didn't really have any of these things. He wasn't concerned about these things. He was concerned about one thing only, that here was someone who could help him. Here was the one person in the world who could give him his sight.

And he did the only thing he could do, which was just to cry out to Jesus for help. Have mercy on me. Take pity on me.

And you see, that's all we have to do to become Christians. That's all we have to do to know this salvation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. We just, we can say the same words.

[24 : 29] Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. We can say, like the tax collector who went up to the temple to pray, we can say, God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

That's all that's required, because all that is required is the least particle of faith on our part, that Jesus is able and willing to help us and to heal us and to transform us and we simply appeal to his love and to his mercy.

And no person who has come to Jesus Christ in that simple way has ever been turned away. That's why I've called it the least response. You don't need to climb mountains of self-achievement or self-importance.

All you have to do is to ask for his help. Similarly with Zacchaeus. Isn't it interesting that Jesus said to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, come down.

Now of course we know the reason why Zacchaeus had climbed up his tree. He had climbed up the trees so that he could see Jesus. But I think that too is kind of indicative of the attitude we may sometimes have with regard to coming to faith or becoming Christian.

[25 : 48] We want to climb up. We want to get up onto some kind of pedestal so that Jesus will notice us. Jesus didn't need that.

Jesus didn't even need Zacchaeus to climb up the tree that day. Once, a poor woman who had suffered from bleeding for most of her life simply brushed against Jesus.

And yet Jesus knew immediately that here was someone who needed his help. You see, he said to Zacchaeus, come down. Come down from your pedestal that you climbed up on.

Come down. And he says to us, similarly today, we've got to come down from our pedestals.

Sometimes, our ridiculous pedestal. As I'm sure, Zacchaeus looked ridiculous up the tree.

You see, we can climb onto all sorts of pedestals that we put ourselves on, thinking that we can impress God or impress the Lord Jesus Christ with our achievements.

[26 : 51] We can't do it. We've got to come down. We've got to come down to Jesus himself. We've got to fall at his feet. We've got to come to know him.

But the important thing is this. You have to respond. I've called it the least response. In one way, it's a little thing.

Coming to the Lord Jesus in faith. It's not some great big achievement that you work up. So simple, a child can do it.

But it has to be done. You have to respond. You see, Jesus said to Bartimaeus, Receive your sight.

Your faith has healed you. It was just simple faith on the part of Bartimaeus. He trusted the Lord Jesus. He called to him.

[27 : 50] He knew that he would help him. That's all that was required. But he did it. Jesus was passing by there. Jesus was passing by Bartimaeus.

He was passing through Jericho. Bartimaeus could have said, Well, isn't that wonderful? Jesus was passing by. He would perhaps tell his children in later years, Jesus, pass by me actually one day I was there begging in Jericho.

And perhaps Zacchaeus could have said, I saw Jesus one day. I climbed up a tree and I actually saw him passing by. And you may think, you see, it's wonderful to be here today even and to hear the gospel being preached.

And maybe you'll go away and you'll talk about these things and you'll say, Well, wasn't that marvelous what we heard today? But you see, that's no use because you haven't responded. it would have done Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus not one whit of good if they had just let Jesus pass by. It was only when they seized the opportunity, they responded.

[29 : 07] Bartimaeus cried out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Zacchaeus actually came down from the tree and invited Jesus into his house. You have to respond.

It's the least response, but it is a response. And then finally, there's just this, the list of benefits that flow from all of this.

We've looked at the lost condition, the last opportunity, the least response, but the list of benefits that come from it.

The list of benefits to themselves, verse 43. Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. What a tremendous transformation in the life of Bartimaeus.

He was blind, he was confused, he was lost, but Jesus with one word gave him his sight. receive your sight.

[30 : 14] Take it as a gift. And Bartimaeus was suddenly transformed. And not only that, but he followed Jesus and he was praising God.

He now entered into a new relationship with Jesus Christ, and he was able to truly worship God and praise God for all that God had done for him in Jesus Christ.

A personal transformation. He had new life. He had vision where before there was blindness. We are confused today. We live in a confused and bewildering world.

We don't know, we don't understand, we can't see what's happening. when we come in simple faith to Jesus Christ, we suddenly have a whole new world view.

And things that were totally confusing before we begin to see a way through these things. We begin to see a way through life. We begin to see that life makes sense as we follow Jesus.

[31 : 17] We are not going to understand it all. We are not brilliant. We are not a great intellectual giant that can understand everything if there are such people. but we can begin to see the way as we follow Jesus.

Think too of how the life of Zacchaeus was transformed in verse 6. So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. A life that before had a different kind of lostness and confusion from what Bartimaeus had, but a life where there was guilt and a life where there was a feeling of lostness, a life where there was a longing that wasn't fulfilled.

That life now was full of gladness. He received Jesus, welcomed him gladly into his house, into his home, into his very heart and into his life.

What a transformation. But you'll see also how that transformation worked with regard to others.

it wasn't just a transformation that stopped in their own life. We could make a whole list of benefits in their own life. But what about how it spread out to others? In verse 43, when all the people saw it, they also praised God.

[32 : 40] We live in a world that in spite of all its attempts at frivolity, is in many ways so miserable. Even its very humor is miserable and horrible.

wouldn't you want to transform this world? Wouldn't you want there to be something of that great celebratory spirit that is spoken of in the parable of the prodigal son?

When the father said, let's celebrate. My son was lost and now he's found. He was dead and he's alive again. And when the older brother came in, he heard the sound of music and dancing.

they were happy because here was someone who had been transformed. In the same way, people are really made happy when people's lives are transformed.

The children whose father is a drunkard, their lives are totally transformed when his life is transformed. And in every other way, people whose lives are transformed by Jesus Christ, it impinges upon others and is a liberating influence upon others.

[33 : 56] Think too especially of Zacchaeus, because he was an influential man. Bartimaeus, he was just a poor beggar and yet he brought joy to other people.

His transformation brought happiness to others. But Zacchaeus was a most important man. He was a VIP in Jericho. And his transformation really had a tremendous effect because he says to Jesus, verse 8, look Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor and if I've cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.

Just think for a moment of the staggering nature of that great generous offer on Zacchaeus' part. He had come to know a transformation in his own heart.

Not only did he now know forgiveness of sins and salvation, but he wanted to put right what he had done wrong. Now there's something for you. How many of us as Christians have sought to do that? No doubt there are some things that we can never put right that we put wrong. But there are some things that we ought to try to put right. if you become a Christian, yes, the whole of the past, your past is wiped out, held no more against you.

[35 : 20] All your sins wiped away, yet there's an obligation on you to try to put right, to try to restore, to try to do good to others perhaps to whom you've done harm in the past, to share with them the great gift that you have come to know.

So that's what Zacchaeus sought to do. A whole list of benefits flowing from these transformations. So there we have it.

The last opportunity these men had to respond to Jesus. Today you've got an opportunity. We don't know if it's your last. But we're reminded just now of opportunities disappearing.

You may very well live on to hear other ministers preaching from this pulpit. I certainly hope so. But you may not. We're reminded as things come to a conclusion in one way here, that in time all things will come to a conclusion.

So make sure that your last opportunity is not a lost opportunity. opportunity. You know there was a man that Jesus met just before this.

[36 : 39] Perhaps his last opportunity was a lost opportunity. The rich young ruler, he came to Jesus, he seemed so promising, he seemed so interested. He asked such a tremendous question, a question that ministers would really love people to be asking today.

Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? yet he goes away from Jesus so disappointed and so disappointing.

He went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. We don't know, was that his last opportunity to respond to Jesus? Pray God, it was not. But what if it was?

A last opportunity that was a lost opportunity. Today you have an opportunity. It's my prayer that it would not be your last opportunity, but it's especially my prayer that it would not be a lost opportunity.

Let us pray. Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we praise your name for your grace to us in Christ, that you have given to us such a Savior, and he is freely offered to us in the gospel.

[38 : 02] We thank you for all these privileges we've been considering today. And we pray that you would please help us to respond in a meaningful way to what we have heard.

Lord, we pray that we might not be overwhelmed by feelings of just powerlessness and weakness and just do nothing. We pray for that powerful ministry of your Holy Spirit to be active amongst us, drawing us to yourself, turning us to the light, being prepared to have our sins exposed and cleansed away.

We pray that your rich blessing would rest upon the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ, not only here, but wherever it is proclaimed in this city and throughout this country. as Christ is lifted up, may he indeed draw all men to himself, men and women, boys and girls, transformed by his love. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we close by singing in Psalm 119, verses 57 to 60, the tune is Belmont number 33.

Thou my sure portion art alone, which I did choose, O Lord. I have resolved and said that I would keep thy holy word.

[39 : 36] Verse 60, I did not stay nor linger long as those that slothful are, but hastily thy laws to keep, myself I did prepare.

verses 57 to 60, to God's prayer. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of you now and forever.
Amen.