

Luke 19:1-10

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[0 : 0 0] Where is flight MH370? That's the big question that is being pondered on and considered and investigated with such energy, even as we gather here this morning. Could it have landed some clandestine location in Kazakhstan, or is it languishing in the depths of the Indian Ocean, which sadly seems a more likely answer to the mystery? Of course, the bottom line, as far as we know, unless there's been any developments in these past hour or two, the bottom line is that so far nobody knows. As an observer of the search, and I'm sure we all, in some measure, are among those who are observers of the search and rescue operation,

I'm struck by two contrasting realities. I'm sure there's lots of other things that might strike different people depending on where they're coming at things from, but two things have struck me in any case as I've observed what is going on. In the first case, one is struck by the massive resources, technological and financial and human, that are invested in the search and rescue operation.

The pooled resources of several nations working very commendably with only one goal in mind, to find the plane. But at the same time, I'm also struck by a poignant sense of man's limitations for all the technology, for all the resources, for all the commendable cooperation and goodwill.

Nothing. Certainly as yet, nothing in terms of definitive answers. I guess the best-case scenario is finding the wreckage and discovering what happened. The search part of search and rescue may prove possible, but rescue, that does seem a very, very long shot. This morning, with the backdrop of the drama surrounding flight MH370, I want us to consider another search and rescue operation, one that is global in its reach and yet intimately personal in its nature. This is a search and rescue operation that you can participate in, not only as a concerned observer, but as an actor in the drama.

We all love Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a very little man, and a very little man was he. He climbed up into a sycamore tree for the Savior he wanted to see. But the account of Zacchaeus in Luke's gospel ends with these following words of Jesus that I want us to consider this morning. In Luke chapter 19 and verse 10, we read, For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. Jesus, in explaining what had just happened to Zacchaeus, speaks of a search and rescue operation. And I want us to think about this search and rescue operation considering what Jesus, in a few choice words, says concerning the three essential components of any search and rescue operation. What are the three essential components? Well, there are the victims to be rescued. Who are they? The victims to be rescued. But then a search and rescue operation necessarily involves and requires a rescue party. The ones given the task of rescuing. And we want to think about what Jesus says concerning the rescue party. But then thirdly, there is the rescue operation itself. What does that look like?

[4 : 20] What does that consist of? So, these three elements, I think all three are touched on in these very few words with which the account concerning Zacchaeus concludes, For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. Let's think of these three elements. First of all, the victims, the victims to be rescued. One of the very tragic aspects of the search for flight MH370 is the likely reality that the victims are beyond rescue. At best, the plane or remnants of it might be found. But Jesus, in what He says here in our text, has in mind victims that are rescuable. I doubt very much if that's a word, but we'll coin it for the purposes of this morning. Victims that can be rescued. And who are they? Who are these victims that can be rescued that Jesus speaks of? Well, we don't have much information. We're simply told that He came to seek and to save what was lost. What was lost. Now, to clarify something that possibly doesn't need clarification, but we'll do so anyway, given that Jesus is speaking in the context of seeking and saving Zacchaeus, we can very reasonably conclude that Jesus has in mind people. When He's speaking of that which was lost, He's speaking about people. He's speaking about men and women and boys and girls.

But who are these lost people? Who are these victims that need to be rescued? What I want you to do, and what I want us to do together at this point, is to take a step back from the story of Zacchaeus, from the text before us, and to just think a little bit about what that language would mean in ordinary usage. If we were speaking about somebody who was lost, what would we mean by that? What would that involve? What does it mean to be lost? Let me suggest that to be lost involves a couple of core components. As I was thinking about this, I came up with a few others, but I want to limit myself to what I think are two essential components of being lost. And they're basically this. To be lost is to be where you're not meant to be, but also to be unable to get to where you're meant to be. I think these two things are essential to being lost. If somebody is lost, they're where they're not meant to be. You know, if you can think of just a journey you're making, and your intention is to get to a certain location, and you're not there. You want to be there, but you're not there because you don't know how to get there. You're lost. You're not where you're meant to be, and you're unable to get there. You don't have the resources at your disposal to get to where you're meant to be.

Now, with this in mind, with this understanding or this definition of what it involves being lost, what can we say of the victims that Jesus is speaking about that are the object of this search and rescue operation that He alludes to? Well, Jesus is not talking about being physically or geographically lost. Zacchaeus, and we'll be referring to Zacchaeus quite a lot in what we say this morning, he is the real-life example we're given of this search and rescue operation. And in the case of Zacchaeus, he evidently was not lost in that sense. He knew perfectly well where he was.

He was in Jericho. He knew Jericho. He lived in Jericho, and he knew perfectly well where he was. Clearly, he wasn't lost in that sense. So, Jesus here is speaking of what we might say is being spiritually lost. Now, I even hesitate to use the word spiritually at this point in the sermon because I'm very aware and conscious that perhaps for some people, the moment you use that word, it kind of introduces onto the stage something that seems very otherworldly and just quite unreal, spiritually lost. Well, what's that all about? But nothing could be further from the truth. If that is what you think when you hear that language, and you say, well, that's got nothing to do with the real world, let me suggest that you are quite mistaken. Jesus here, when he speaks of victims, when he speaks of those who are lost, he's speaking about real people living in the real world who are really lost. Let that be very clear. But what does that look like? What does it look like to be, to use the language I've used, what does it look like to be spiritually lost? Well, let's remember the definition that we gave just a moment ago, or the two components of being lost, being where you're not meant to be and unable to get to where you're meant to be.

So, where are you meant to be? Where are we as men and women meant to be? Well, the big message of the Bible is that as men and women created by God, we have been created for friendship. We have been created for friendship with God. This is where you are meant to be, with God, friends with God, in a relationship of loving service to God. That is what we find at the very beginning. When we go back to the very beginning, when we go back to the garden, when we go back to Eden, what do we find? We find Adam and Eve in a relationship of loving service to God, in a relationship of friendship with God. That is God's intention for us. That is where we are meant to be.

[10 : 42] And so, if you're even pondering the question, well, am I lost? The question you need to answer is, is that where you are? Are you in that place of loving service to God? Do you experience, and do you know what it is to be in a relationship of friendship with God? That is where you're meant to be. If that is not where you are, then you're lost, and you are of those that Jesus is speaking of here, that He has come to seek and to save. But the second element of that definition that we gave concerning what it means to be lost is not only to not be where you're meant to be, but to be unable to get there. And that, of course, is the sorry plight of men and women who are spiritually lost.

We can't get to where we're meant to be. Now, some might protest and say, well, why is that so? Can't somebody who realizes that they are lost simply reset their spiritual GPS and get back on track? Is that not something we can do? If we identify the problem, if we recognize, well, this isn't what I'm meant to be, and I need to be there, well, I'll just, you know, get up and go there. Is that not something we can do? Can't we just look back on our lives and see where we took a wrong turning and say, ah, that's what it all went wrong. What I need to do is just turn that around and get back to where I'm meant to be. The difficulty is that it's not that simple. Why is it not that simple? Well, how did man get lost in the first place? How did we end up far from God and indeed at enmity with God? How did that happen? It wasn't just a matter of a wrong turning. It wasn't just that we sinned. Important and critical and crucial, though that is, too, the big story. It involved also the deliberate action of God to banish man from His presence. In the garden, where we can see what

God's intention for men and women was, Adam and Eve enjoyed friendship with God, but as a result of their disobedience, they were banished from His near presence. The very language of being banished is the language that we find in that account. Let's just remind ourselves of what it says in Genesis chapter 3 and verses 23 and 24. We read there, so the Lord God banished him, that is, Adam, banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

After he drove the man out, this is something that God is doing, he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. You see, given what God has done, certainly in response to man's sin, we can't just walk back into God's favor and friendship because we decide that we want to. The cause of our banishment needs to be dealt with first. And we're going to come back to that need in a moment.

But back to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was lost. He was not what he needed to be. He very clearly was not enjoying a life of joyful service to God. He did not know anything of friendship with God. He was not what he was meant to be. And Zacchaeus had no way of getting there. And so, he was, in the estimation of Jesus, lost. He was lost. That's the first crucial element in a search and rescue operation.

[14 : 50] There need to be victims. There need to be those who need to be rescued. And who are they? Well, they are those who are lost. But the second element is the rescue party. The one are the ones who are going to do the rescuing. And we've already given some thought or made some reference to what is dominating the headlines and the search for flight MH370. The rescue party, the search party, is massive.

Ships and airplanes and satellites in space and experts in every field that relates in some way or other to the task at hand. And yet, despite this massive search and rescue party, nothing. What about the search and rescue operation that Jesus is speaking about here?

Who makes up the rescue party? Well, it would seem, on the basis of the one verse that we're focusing our attention on, it would seem to be made up of just one man. We read, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. But who is this man who makes up the rescue party? Who is the Son of Man? Now, we know, on the basis of the gospel accounts and comparing them and just giving them some thought, that this title, this designation, was Jesus' favorite self-designation.

It is Jesus who describes Himself in these terms or employs or adopts this self-designation as the Son of Man. Jesus is speaking about Himself. He is the Son of Man. But the question that we need to ask as we probe a little bit further, as we consider the rescue party and who makes up the rescue party, is why does Jesus use this self-designation, and what does the designation tell us about His credentials to take on a global search and rescue operation for a lost humanity?

The Son of Man language must be understood and interpreted in the light of the passage that we read in Daniel chapter 7. Now, for reasons of time, we limited ourselves to reading two verses that make very explicit reference to this character, the Son of Man or one like a Son of Man.

[17 : 18] And just very briefly, for the purposes of feeding into our concern this morning, concerning this need for one who can rescue that which was lost, let's just notice some of what is said there concerning this character. There in Daniel chapter 7, verse 13, we're told that He was, or Daniel's saw, one like a Son of Man. And it's rather cryptic, it's rather mysterious. What does that mean, one like a Son of Man? And certainly some of what we say will be with the help of what we subsequently discover. And so, in that sense, we stand in a privileged position compared to Daniel when he first saw the vision. But in the light of further revelation, we can say that this language of this character as one like a Son of Man is that He is human, but somehow more than human. He's one like a Son of Man. Then we're also told that He was one who was coming with the clouds of heaven, coming with the clouds of heaven. And then subsequently, we're told that He is worshiped by the nations. And this language of one coming with the clouds of heaven, and very clearly the language of being worshiped speaks of Him, identifies Him as divine. So, He is human, and yet more than human, but He's also divine. The clouds of heaven is language that the Bible almost invariably associates with the presence of God, one coming with the clouds of heaven. Now, when we try and make that link with Jesus, as we see how events unfold in due course, we can identify that as language that very closely relates to what we're told concerning Jesus' second coming, when He will come with the clouds of heaven. But in noticing that, it's important to be aware that when in the prophetic writings, as in Daniel and elsewhere, there is prophetic reference to the coming of Messiah, almost invariably, it speaks of His coming as one event. We, in the light of what we know in the New

Testament, divide it between the first and the second coming. We are perfectly entitled to do that. That's the way it has transpired. But from the prophetic perspective in the Old Testament, it's presented as one great redemptive act on the part of the coming Messiah. But our interest here this morning is simply to identify this character that Jesus recognizes as Himself, as being one who is like a Son of Man, human, but somehow more than human, worshiped, coming with the clouds of heaven, divine, and one who we're also told there in Daniel is given authority.

He's given authority, indeed given all authority. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All peoples, nations, and men of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

The Son of Man is well equipped to seek and to save. He is, as one who is both human and divine, uniquely placed to bridge the chasm between God and a lost humanity. And He has at His disposal all the authority and power to seek and to save. So, if you are lost, if you are not where you're meant to be, if you find yourself incapable of getting to where you're meant to be, a life of joyful service to God, in friendship with God, you don't need to despair if you acknowledge that that is where you are, because the one entrusted with the search and rescue operation is able. He is the Son of Man, and He can and will find and rescue all those He has come to seek and save. Notice also that Jesus speaks of how He has come, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. And again, in the light of the fuller revelation of the Bible, we know that He came from His Father. He was sent by His Father. So, the rescue party that we're identifying also counts with God the Father as the one who sends His Son to seek and to save. And as we'll see in a moment, the rescue party also counts with the participation of the Holy Spirit of God as the one who draws the lost to the Savior.

We'll comment on that just in a moment. So, first of all, then, we've seen who the victims are, those who are lost. We've identified the rescue party, the Son of Man, but we now need to move on and think a little bit about the rescue operation.

[22 : 26] And there are two intertwined and very connected aspects to the rescue operation. It involves seeking and saving, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. Now, let's think about these two aspects in the light of the real-life example of Zacchaeus as one who was both sought and saved. First of all, seeking. And we'll work backwards from the encounter when Zacchaeus was found. And consider what Jesus does and what Zacchaeus does. What does Jesus do that leads to that encounter where Zacchaeus is, we might say, found? What does Jesus do? Well, we've read the passage.

We have it before us. Jesus approaches and engages with Zacchaeus. I was mentioning to the children how he came to the very spot and looked up to Zacchaeus there in the sycamore tree. He approaches Zacchaeus.

He engages with Zacchaeus. He comes to the encounter of Zacchaeus. He finds Zacchaeus. But we discover more by noticing the manner in which he does so. These are the bare facts of what he does.

But let's think a little bit about the manner in which he does so. And I think three words help to describe the manner in which Jesus seeks Zacchaeus. I think the first word that helps me to describe that is that it is very deliberate. This is very much a deliberate act on the part of Jesus. In verse 5, we read, when Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus. This is no chance encounter.

This is very clearly an act that is one taken deliberately by Jesus in favor of Zacchaeus with the definite purpose of encountering, of finding Zacchaeus. It's a deliberate act, but it's also a very personal act. We've already commented again with the children how he addresses this man by name, Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus, come down immediately. He calls Zacchaeus by name. We can imagine the scene. The crowds are milling around. So many people, all with their eyes fixed on Jesus and what he's saying, what he's doing. But of all the many faces directed towards Jesus, at this moment there is only one who concerns the Son of Man, the one he has come to seek and to save. Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name, and he continues to call those whom he is seeking by name. The manner in which he seeks is intimately personal. It's deliberate. It's personal. But we might also say that it's driven. Again, the language that Jesus employs in addressing Zacchaeus in verse 5. Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. I must stay at your house today. The language is very revealing. It is the language of driven divine necessity. This is not some polite inquiry on the part of Jesus. He doesn't come to

[25 : 52] Zacchaeus and say, well, you know, how about meeting up? Let's do coffee. You know, do you think it would be interesting just to have a wee dialogue? No, this is not the language Jesus employs at all. I must stay at your house today. I must do so, and I will do so, and I will do so today. Jesus is driven in his search to find Zacchaeus. That's what Jesus does. What does Zacchaeus do? Now, in a search and rescue operation, the victim generally does very little. That's not always the case. There's perhaps something the victim can do, the one who is lost, to perhaps facilitate those who are seeking to rescue him. But generally speaking, what the victim can do is very little. What about Zacchaeus? Well, while the initiative is very clearly the initiative of Jesus, Zacchaeus is not altogether passive, and we ought not to consider him as being altogether passive. What does Zacchaeus do? Well, Zacchaeus also approaches Jesus.

He is, in some measure, conscious of his need. It's difficult for us to know just what Zacchaeus is thinking, because we can't see his heart. We don't know what's driving him in approaching Jesus. And in a sense, all we can do is speculate, but hopefully it's not entirely fanciful speculation. And I think we can conclude that in some measure, in some way, Zacchaeus is conscious of his need. He somehow knows that he is not where he is meant to be in his life. He is, in a way, perhaps he himself would not have been able to explain, drawn to Jesus. His approach at one level is very tentative. We're told in the passage that he wanted to see Jesus. There in verse 3, he wanted to see who Jesus was. He doesn't have any further ambitions or aspirations as to what will unfold on that day, just to see Jesus, to discover something more about him. He fully expects to end the day as he began the day, but at least having seen

Jesus and knowing something more about him. So, at one level, it's a very tentative approach, and yet, at another level, it's quite decided. The evidence of that is his lack of concern at what we could imagine would have been the pointing fingers and muffled sniggers as he clambers up the sycamore tree.

So, tentative, and yet also an element of decision on his part. Why this interest of Zacchaeus, however we describe it, however we imagine it, however we try and measure it, and we're limited in being able to do so with, you know, with definitive knowledge, why this interest, however described?

Well, this is the work of the Spirit of God. God is the one who, by His Spirit, is drawing Zacchaeus to the Savior. Zacchaeus approaches Jesus, but Zacchaeus also responds to Jesus. When the command, the loving and gracious command, is directed to him, come down immediately, that is precisely what Zacchaeus does. He clambers down from the tree. He believes the words of Jesus. He trusts in Jesus, saving purposes, saving purposes and intentions for Him, even though his understanding of what those were may indeed have been very limited, but he believes and he trusts. He is persuaded that here is a man that he can believe in. Here is a man that he can trust. There is seeking involved in this search and rescue operation, and as that was true of Zacchaeus, so it is true today as Jesus continues to seek and to save what was lost. He seeks with a deliberate focus. His seeking out of sinners is intensely personal, and it is driven. There is a divine necessity in what the Savior does in seeking and saving sinners.

[30 : 13] And though as those who are lost, there is indeed very little we can do to resolve our condition and situation, we can with Zacchaeus, as we are graciously prodded by God through His Spirit, approach Jesus, be drawn to Jesus, seek to know more about Him, discover more just who He is and what He has done. And when we hear Him speaking to us and calling us through His Word, respond to the commands that He presents to us. So, Zacchaeus has been found, but there's a second intertwined aspect to seek and to save, and it's somewhat artificial to try and divide them as two completely separate aspects because they are so intertwined. But let's just, we're doing so anyway for the purposes of what we want to say. But let's move on to this second aspect then. Jesus came to seek and to save. Listen to what Jesus says concerning Zacchaeus there in verse 9.

Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham. What does that mean, this language that Jesus employs? Let me suggest some aspects or elements of the saving work of the Son of Man in the example of Zacchaeus. First of all, notice the reality of it, and by speaking of the reality of it, all I'm doing is referring to the statement of Jesus, today salvation has come to this house. He describes the reality of the situation. This has happened. It's a done deal. Today salvation has come.

To Zacchaeus and to the household of Zacchaeus. It's a reality. Before even thinking about what it involves or what it means, there's the reality of it. When Jesus comes, salvation comes. You know, he had said to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, come down. I must stay at your house today. I must come to your house.

And when he comes to his house, salvation also comes to the house of Zacchaeus. That's the reality of salvation, of the saving work of Jesus. But also we have in the account the evidence of salvation in the experience of Zacchaeus. And what is the evidence? Well, it is a life transformed.

In verse 8 we read, Without going into all the details of what Zacchaeus says, what clearly we have before us, is a life transformed. Zacchaeus, to go back to the language we were playing around with in terms of being lost, Zacchaeus is now where he is meant to be. He is finally, for the very first time in his life, where he is meant to be. What he was created for in the joyful service of God and doing that which pleases God for the very first time in his sorry life. His repentance, his good works, and his joyful witness, evidence, his salvation. They are evidence that salvation had come to Zacchaeus and to his house. Evidence that he is no longer lost. That the search and rescue operation has been successful. That he has been found. That he has been saved. The reality of salvation, the evidence, but what about the means? How was Zacchaeus saved? The language that Jesus uses describing Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham, I think helps us in answering that question. How did this happen? How was Zacchaeus saved? How did he come to be in this place? We read there, today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham. Now, that Jesus would use this language is no doubt partly accounted for by the fact that he is directing these words to those who are looking on, the scoffers, who would have been horrified to hear a despised tax collector so described as a son of Abraham.

[34 : 40] This man too is a son of Abraham. You wouldn't consider him a son of Abraham. For you, he's out of the family. He's been banished from any connection with Abraham, but that's not what I think. I consider him to be a son of Abraham. So, in a sense, these words are with a view to what others will be hearing and what conclusions they'll be coming to. But these words also serve, and I would say much more significantly, they serve to point to Zacchaeus' faith. Abraham was saved by faith.

This is the central truth concerning the patriarch, that Abraham believed. Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness. And if Zacchaeus is described by Jesus as a son of Abraham, the big truth that Jesus is getting out there is that Zacchaeus believed, that Zacchaeus had faith in Jesus, that he trusted in Jesus, and in believing, salvation came to his home.

But in this matter of Jesus saving Zacchaeus, seeking and saving Zacchaeus, there's one final piece of the jigsaw, I suppose, that we need to notice, and that is the grounds on which Jesus saves the time of the time. And the first thing is Zacchaeus' faith in the world. And the first thing is Zacchaeus' sin dealt with. His faith and his good works do nothing in and of themselves to remove the guilt of his sin. They're not able to do that. So, how is the guilt of his sin removed? Well, there is a clue as to how this crucial matter is resolved in the very first verse of the account. Notice what it says at the very beginning there in verse 1 of chapter 19. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. You might say, well, that doesn't tell us very much. But the very crucial thing is to just investigate a little further and say, well, if he was passing through, where was he passing through to?

And we discover as we read on that he was passing through to Jerusalem. Passing through to Jerusalem. And what was he going to do in Jerusalem? Well, we can answer that question listening to Jesus on another occasion when he also uses the Son of Man language. In Mark chapter 10 and verse 45, listen to what Jesus says, for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. And that is what he was passing through Jericho to Jerusalem to do, to give his life as a ransom for many, to die for the sins of Zacchaeus, to die for the sins of the world, to pay the price of our sin and rebellion, to open up the way for a banished humanity to come back to Eden, to come back to the garden, to come back to friendship and fellowship with God and joyful service to God. He was passing through Jericho. Jericho was important because he had to meet, to seek, and to save Zacchaeus. But he was passing through to matters of even greater moment when he would give his life as a ransom for many.

A search and rescue operation. Having given some thought to this search and rescue operation, there remain some big questions for you to answer in the light of what we have discovered about the search and rescue operation that Jesus speaks of. Are you lost? Where are you? Are you where God intends you to be? Are you where you are meant to be? Or are you lost? Do you recognize that Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost? Are you drawn to him? And will you listen as he calls you by your name?

[38 : 44] Will you with Zacchaeus put your trust in Jesus as your Savior? But I think there's also a question and a challenge for those of us who, by grace and grace alone, have been found by Jesus. The city in which we live is a city full of lost men and women. They need to know about the search and rescue operation that Jesus speaks of in our text. And just think of this for a moment and consider maybe the poignancy of it. The search for flight MH370 has been going on for what, 13, 14 days?

Might it be that the good citizens of Aberdeen know more about that search and rescue operation than they do about the one who came to seek and to save what was lost? Do you think that is so?

And if it is so, ought it to be so? Or is there there a challenge laid upon us, those who have been found, those who have come to know and to be brought in to that friendship with God, a life of joyful service to God, the onus and the challenge that we would share with others, this good news concerning the Son of Man who came to seek and to save what was lost? Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come and we thank You that You are indeed a God who seeks and who saves. We thank You for Jesus. We thank You for Your Son. We thank You that You sent Him into this world, into this sin-sick world to seek and to save a lost lost humanity. We thank You for all that You have done in the person of Your Son, Jesus, to open a way back for us, that we might return to where You ever intended us to be in a life of fellowship and friendship with Yourself. And we pray that You would help us to increasingly know what it is to put our faith in Jesus, to trust in Him as our Lord and Savior, as the One who has come to seek and to save us.

And these things we pray in His name. Amen.