

Louise White. Sunday 27th April 2008. Luke 19:1-10.

Zacchaeus

21st MAY 1983

A very special day.

A very memorable, very important and very pivotal moment in History. Any ideas why?

It is the final of the FA Cup Brighton and Hove Albion verses Manchester United. A David verses Goliath moment!

WEMBLEY - 100,000 spectators and an estimated 600 million people watching it on television worldwide

Brighton had just been relegated from Division 1 after 4 years of being up there. This was their chance to shine. Could this be their miracle?

The Seagull's were playing well, difficult to break down, well organised as well as threatening MUFC from their set-pieces.

14 minutes Smith for BHA scored, 55 minutes Stapleton MUFC scored, 72 minutes Wilkins MUFC scored then at 87 minutes Stevens scored for BHA.

They then go into extra time 2 - 2 - could this be BHA day?

29 minutes of the extra time played, it had been played tightly and mostly uneventful. I was at home watching the match literally biting my nails off. One minute to go then all of a sudden Smith BHA lines up his shot from 12 yards, the commentator excitedly shouted: 'And Smith must score ...'. There was just him an open goal and the MU goalkeeper Gary Bailey. This was going to be it - the pivotal moment - we were going to win...

BUT Smith hesitated I guess you knew that might be coming, giving the goal keeper enough time to get back in goal and save the goal.

A replay was later played the following Thursday at Wembley. I was there. The first 20 minutes Brighton played very well. But 4 Man Utd goals later the dream was over.

The pivotal moment of BHA who have never been able to repeat this amazing success and who have had a 'interesting' time going many down and up the various divisions. Most BHA fans think what if Smith had scored the goal? What if we had won the cup? It was a pivotal point that didn't quite go the right way.

That was until I recently lifted the very same FA Cup on behalf of BHA, in my house - but that's another story.

Today, we are going to be looking at a pivotal point in someone life when their life is not looking that good but then God intervenes!

We are looking at the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 v 1 - 10, as part of the 'Meeting Jesus Series' that Martin has recently started.

So far, Martin has looked at

- Jesus and the leper (individual message)
- Jesus at the feast (If anyone is thirsty - invite for everyone)

Today, we look at the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus which shows the heart of Jesus, as the Shepherd, seeking the lost.

Luke 19 v 1 - 10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a `sinner'". But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house,

because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

This is a story that I learnt about at Sunday School when I was about 7 and I remember singing the Zaccheaus song. Callum, my 7 year old son too learnt the story when he was a little younger and brought back a Zaccheaus in the tree action figure.

It's one of those "familiar" Bible stories. Sometimes it's easy to think that I 'know' the story well and as a result skirt over it, skim read it or flip through it.

But studying this passage a fresh has helped me gain a new and fresh understanding, I've seen the story in context and I've learnt about more about God's Grace, unconditional love and his heart as a shepherd, committed to searching for his lost sheep. I hope that I can share this amazing truth to you this morning adequately enough.

Zacchaeus Story can be broken down into 3 stages -

1. God's Intervention - makes the encounter possible
2. God's Grace - Makes the encounter memorable
3. God's Forgiveness - Makes the encounter credible

GOD'S INTERVENTION- makes the encounter possible

Background - context of passage (Rich young ruler - Poor Person - Zach - Jerusalem - The Cross)

Luke 18: 9-14 - the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (tax collector). The sinner who humbly looks for God's mercy will find it!

Luke 18: 18-30 - The Rich Young Ruler who refused to rise to Jesus' challenge. He goes away sad. One challenge too far! He could not bring himself to change.

Luke 18: 26 disciples ask "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus - On his way to Jerusalem, he has to first go through Jericho. Why? Because he has 2 jobs to do first heal the blind man and second give salvation to Zaccheaus, the Tax Collector.

This answers the disciple's question, "Who then can be saved?" Answer = the lost - the desperately poor and distressed as well as the very rich and the apparently successful.

Jericho - Where is it? Jericho is on the border and important trade-route out of Jerusalem to the East. It was a wealthy town and it was famous for its balsam groves!

Now let's focus on Zacchaeus. His story is shown in Luke 19: 1-10. This is the only time we ever hear about him and his amazing encounter with Jesus.

~ Zacchaeus is Jewish and has a Hebrew name that means pure/righteous. It is probably the last thing he felt like - pure and holy.

~ Now Zacchaeus is a tax collector and generally even today we don't like tax collectors. We don't like giving up our hard earned cash to the government. Even this week we can see how Gordon Brown had to do a u-turn about compensating the people who lost out when they removed the 10p lower tax rate.

Zacchaeus is a Chief Tax Collector. Now when Rome came to Jerusalem, they made an offer to the Jewish people. Fight us or submit to us. The Jewish nation chose submission. As is always the case, the conquered pay tribute taxes to the victor. Someone had to collect those taxes, be accountable for those taxes and turn the money over to Rome. Zacchaeus' job was similar to head of a local tax department. He would have had a group of tax collectors working under him. He would have been making an awful lot of money from the tax system. The Roman Authorities, the occupying power were happy as long as they were getting their agreed level of tribute tax. The tax collectors could charge whatever they wanted and with the authority and sanction of the Roman government, the Jewish people had no appeal. Like it or lump it, they had to pay what the tax collector demanded.

Zacchaeus is likely to have made LOTS and LOTS of money this way... and lots and lots of enemies.

However because of his position

- RELIGIOUSLY - The Synagogue would have disapproved of him and seen him as unclean
- SOCIALLY - People would have shunned him and not trusted him

~ So, Zacchaeus was not only a tax collector but he was wealthy too.

People did not like Zacchaeus RICH (with their money) AND DODGY!

But actually he was lost and needed to be found by his shepherd!

Generally people find it hard to sympathise with rich people

- If I had their money...
- They don't know how the other half live...

They become the focus of envy and dislike

A paper was published by the University of Columbia, New York, entitled the Psychological cost of material wealth.

It was found that children from rich families can feel isolation and neglect. It found that high material wealth can be associated with low psychological wellbeing. The more people strived for - the more numerous their problems became and their well being suffers.

People generally dislike the rich and like to see have them knocked off their pedestals.



A lot of people enjoyed seeing the infamous Paris Hilton being jailed for 45 days for traffic offences last year.

Even better was hearing how her incredibly rich hotel magnate Grandfather Barron Hilton has announced plans to donate almost all his fortune to charity, slashing at a stroke his granddaughter Paris Hilton's inheritance, not to mention her potential eligibility.

The elder Hilton, 80, said he would give 97% of his \$2.3bn (£1.15bn) estate to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, a charity founded by his father.

But you know what, the rich and poor are just as lost and both need Jesus.

- Just as Zacchaeus did.

~ So not only was Zacchaeus a tax collector and rich. He was also short!

And speaking as a 5ft 3 and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch tall person, I have some understanding of the limits this can bring!

Short men in particular can often be laughed at and mocked.

I once heard someone describe Zacchaeus' appearance as like Danny DeVito. The description fits.

Zacchaeus - Knew Isolation and alienation. He wasn't paranoid - people REALLY didn't like him. The passage shows this.

Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus - we don't know why.

- Curiosity?
- Had he heard about what Jesus had done and preached?
- Jesus' reputation
- Friend of sinners and tax collectors

Wealth maybe had not given him the acceptance he wanted.

He was LOST.

God intervened and makes the encounter possible. Jesus, the friend of sinners and tax collectors was coming to his town, his street, Jesus had just healed a blind beggar and now it was Zacchaeus' turn to meet with Jesus.

Zacchaeus is resourceful and without any concern for dignity runs ahead, pushing through the crowds (no one would have made space for him as he was disliked) and he climbs up into a sycamore tree.

I have 2 sycamore trees in my garden and there is no way that a man of small stature could have climbed one easily. In fact, my trees are European sycamores. The tree that Zacchaeus climbed is a Middle Eastern sycamore, related to a Mulberry Fig tree. It grows up to 12m tall, easy to climb and often planted by the roadside.



Picture of a flourishing tree in modern Jericho.

Running, squeezing through the crowds and climbing up a tree was culturally a no-no! Very undignified yet he is prepared to do it because he wants to be in a good position to see Jesus.

But actually it was *GOD'S INTERVENTION* - he makes the encounter possible

GOD'S GRACE AT WORK - Makes the encounter memorable

Jesus did not pass by - he stopped and called Zacchaeus down. Jesus sought Zacchaeus out - lost people are found by him. The Good Shepherd sought him out. Jesus had come to Jericho to find this very man at this very spot and at this very moment in time.

Jesus calls him Righteous (Zacchaeus) at that moment he realises that he had been discovered by Jesus. The very things he didn't feel, Jesus calls him - pure and righteous.

'I MUST STAY TODAY' Jesus calls. He *SEEKS - CALLS - VISITS*

Jesus wastes no time - now is the time for salvation.

Zacchaeus hurries down and receives Jesus with joy.

Jesus invites himself -> *Grace* comes into Zacchaeus' life. No one deserves this grace yet he gives it to Zacchaeus and to us.

In complete contrast to the grace and acceptance shown to Zacchaeus, by Jesus, the crowd disapproves. Everyone grumbles and complains - no grace shown. Here is a well-known prophet who wants to stay at the house of a tax collector. That was scandalous and highly peculiar.

Jesus mixing with tax collectors - why? Luke 5 and 15

I can understand how they were feeling - can't you?

Imagine if a very, very important visitor was coming to visit your work place. That person has a very expensive free gift to give to someone. You all gather together and wait in the staff room. It's crowded, some people have to sit on the floor because there are no more chairs, the rooms hot and there's a lot of excitement. You and your work colleagues have been working so hard over the past 5 months, completing a major project. You have all worked long hours and even come in at weekends to get the work done. Well that is apart from Danny, 'Danny the skiver' as he is well known. He comes in late every day and often leaves early. He has had a lot of time off sick. He just doesn't pull his weight. No one likes him and he knows it! He makes out he doesn't care. Anyway the very, very important visitor comes in thanks everyone for their hard work. He explains that he has a thank you gift but he only had one gift. It can't be shared. He looks around the room and turns and gives it to Danny. A loud gasp is heard. Danny opens the envelope and reads it out loud. He had a gift of a year's salary. He is SO happy, everyone else is furious! They complain and grumble. They are NOT happy!

Back to Jericho, you can see why the crowds were annoyed. There were probably good, honourable people there, people like you and me, sick people, needy people and religious people who followed God's rules - Yet Jesus picks Zacchaeus.

Why? Because he's lost, people can't see the lost man behind the wealthy man.

God's amazing grace as he reaches out to Zacchaeus. The Good Shepherd reached out and found the lost sheep.

The pivotal moment of Jesus meeting Zacchaeus shows God's grace at work, what a memorable encounter. That happened over 2000 years ago and we still read about it today.

GOD'S FORGIVENESS AT WORK - Makes the encounter credible

So far, we have seen God intervene and show his grace to Zacchaeus. Now we can look how God forgives him.

Jesus brings Zacchaeus freedom.

Zacchaeus responds to Jesus by immediately standing up and declaring that he would give away half his possessions to the poor. As a wealthy man, Zacchaeus

must have lots to give. The hold money had over Zacchaeus had gone. Then, there is a further progression in his heart. He offers to make amends to the people he had cheated in the past. He decides to return his ill gotten gains at 4 times the amount, 400%. This is way beyond what Jewish Law required of him. By the Law he was only expected to pay back an additional 20%.

Jesus then declares to Zacchaeus "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham".

Jesus honours Zacchaeus by visiting his house - restoring the family's 'izzat' - the family honour... and removing their shame.

What Jesus says about salvation coming to the house is difficult to explain, but imagine the effect this must have had on all of them - seeing God's goodness and grace changing the life of their husband, father, or brother

The people of Jericho had probably rejected Zacchaeus and his family and said things like "No true Jew would do what you're doing", "You're not a true Jew" But Jesus affirms his 'Jewishness' and his faith (as it says in Romans 4) by calling him a true son of Abraham

Zacchaeus gets from Jesus the unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness that he could never get from money or position in society

As we have seen Zacchaeus is changing and makes God's forgiveness credible. We too as Christians should continue to make changes in our lives that also make God's forgiveness credible.

I recently read a true story that happened in the 1920's at a shipyard in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The shipyard was called C Wolfe Shipyard. Many ships were built there including.... RMS TITANIC in 1912.

Anyway, in the 1920's many of the workers became Christians. What followed was the workers were convicted by God, like Zacchaeus and they started to return pieces of material back to the shipyard that they had stolen over time. The owners then had to build huge hangers to hold the returned materials.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

God's grace and forgiveness motivates us to change and to keep on changing just like Zacchaeus.

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Jesus ends by saying "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Zacchaeus represented the guy that others had given up on. He was lost. He was the sinner who everyone felt would never change.

Jesus stopped for a single person and changed his destiny, and we are still talking about that pivotal moment almost two thousand years later.

Jesus dared to break a taboo of spending time with a tax collector because Zacchaeus' soul was worth more than Jesus' reputation. The story touches us - it shows Jesus' heart and love for the lost then and today.

Today, we have looked at the amazing story of Zacchaeus as part of the Meeting Jesus series.

Right now Jesus is still seeking and saving lost people. If we had meet Zacchaeus before he had meet Jesus we would of probably thought that he was rich, very successful and had everything. However as we have seen this morning he was lost and searching. Jesus looks beyond what other people see in our lives. He sees our rejection, our hurt, our 'lostness', our isolation and loneliness. He calls out to us, meets us and restores us.

So,

If you are feeling lost come to Jesus the Shepherd today!

If you have stopped being close to Jesus; come back to him - he loves you and wants to be your shepherd again.

If you are close to Jesus then just enjoy again being with your loving shepherd.