

Rescue: His Business

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[0 : 0 0] I want to thank Neil for his welcome this morning. It's good to be here with you. I bring greetings from Christchurch in Edinburgh, Christchurch Edinburgh and thanks for your partnership in the Gospel with us. I'd like you to turn, if you have a Bible there, to Luke 19 and to that passage that was read for us a little earlier. Luke 19, a story about a man who met with Jesus. Many years ago when I was a minister in Glasgow, someone gave me ministers, people like sometimes to give you books and encourage you to read whatever book they give you. And somebody gave me a book, a biography of a man called Ben Parsonage. I don't know anyone here has ever heard of Ben Parsonage. I suspect not, unless you're from Glasgow and perhaps of a certain age or vintage. He was a very well-kent figure in the city of Glasgow for many, many years. He worked on the Clyde and on the waterways of the city and he worked for about somewhere around 50 years on the city's waterways and he started an organisation that was known and it's still going called the Glasgow Humane Society. And over those 50 years Ben Parsonage worked with little regard for his own safety, rescuing people, upwards of 300 people from drowning in the waters of Glasgow. And the title of the biography that I was given, it began with these words, rescue his business, rescue his business. And it's that title that comes to mind this morning as we turn to look at this famous story in Luke chapter 19 because the theme of rescue is very much at the forefront of this particular passage. It's an incident that actually takes us right to the heart of the mission and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we're being reminded that Christianity is a rescue religion, that Jesus Christ above all else is in the rescue business. And that's in fact what sets it apart from many other religions. Jesus understood himself to be a man on a rescue mission. According to the Bible, Jesus Christ is the one person of whom it can be supremely said, rescue is his business. In his own words spoken, you'll notice at the very end of this encounter, the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

But what does that mean when we talk about Christianity as being a rescue religion? What does it mean to say that Jesus is in the rescue business? Lots of people very uncomfortable with that kind of notion today. Any idea of people standing in need of a rescue really goes against the grain. We might be willing to admit we need a little help. We might be willing to admit that we need a little assistance but a rescue. Well, surely that's going a bit too far. And yet that is the clear implication of the verses before us this morning. Because in this memorable incident, we're told three key things about the rescue mission of Jesus. And I want to share them with you for a moment. I noticed there's a clock up there, but I probably never looked at it up there. So I'll put that there. And that's got a vague chance I might catch my eye at some point.

And the first point is this, that it's a rescue mission that's directed towards the lost. A rescue mission directed towards the lost. The Son of Man verse 10 came to seek and save what was lost.

But who are the lost? Who are the people that Jesus says he came to rescue? Well, like so much of Jesus' teaching, we find that the origin of his language and his terminology are to be found back in the Old Testament. That was Jesus' Bible. And the theme of being lost is found notably in the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And they were prophets at the time of the exile, when many of the Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon. And those prophets often referred to the people as lost sheep. My people have been lost sheep. And it speaks in Ezekiel 34 of God's searching for those lost sheep and bringing back the strays. And it's that kind of language, that kind of image that lies behind the ministry and mission of Jesus himself. Jesus understood that he was the good shepherd. And he was seeking out lost sheep. In fact, a few chapters earlier on in Luke's Gospel, Jesus describes and defends his ministry in just those terms, isn't he? That famous trilogy of parables, the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost sons. Now, when we say something is lost, in simple terms, we say something is lost when it isn't where it should be. We are lost when we're not where

we should be on the map. Our car keys are lost where we're not where they shouldn't be or they're not where we thought we'd left them. At time of the exile, the Jews were lost because they were not where they should have been in terms of their relationship with God in the famous parables of the lost sheep and coin. Well, they were lost because they were not where they should have been in the parable of the prodigal sons. Those two brothers were not where they should have been in relation to their father. And here in Luke 19, we're introduced to this man, Zacchaeus. He was a man who was lost. That's what we're being told. There was a man by the name of Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, and was wealthy. That tells us two important things about Zacchaeus. One is he was a chief tax collector. It was one of the most despised members of the community. He was the lowest of the low. He was a collaborator with the Roman occupiers. He was someone who got rich at the expense of his fellow countrymen. He was a crook. He was a traitor. He was cursed, spat upon in the streets. Someone who made money, a profit on the back of other people's misery. He's not the kind of person you wanted to associate with. In fact, when Jesus goes to his house in verse 7, we're told, all the people saw this and began to mutter, he's gone to be the guest of a sinner. So Zacchaeus really was a nobody, a despised and rejected outcast. So morally disgusting, so repugnant, really that no respectable person would really have had anything to do with him. And secondly, he was wealthy. He wasn't just nasty, he was rich and nasty. It wasn't just that his wealth had been accumulated on the backs of other people. It was, I think, was being indicated here. He was a man who was given over to the pursuit of wealth. He was a lover of money. And there is, I think, in the text, a very clear contrast being drawn between Zacchaeus in Luke 19 and in the previous chapter, the rich ruler. Remember what Jesus said to that rich ruler in Luke 18?

[8 : 06] How hard it is, or he said, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

And the people said, well, who can be saved? Jesus says what is impossible with men is possible with God. And there's a contrast here. You see, the rich ruler goes away, you remember sad and dejected, clinging onto his wealth and his money. And here we discover Zacchaeus transformed into a generous person, cheerfully, joyfully giving away his wealth. He said, what is going on here? This good man, this rich ruler, he goes away sad. And this irreligious man is filled with joy and generosity.

The gospel tells us, don't they, that Jesus spent a lot of his time and his energy affirming and being with people who were lawbreakers on the margins, moral failures, prostitutes, tax collectors, outcasts, lepers, the regular society of his life. These were people he had time for. He reserved his harshest comments for those often who were cloaked in religious moralism. Jesus' rescue mission isn't for the good people. Jesus is for the helpless and the weak and the broken.

He's for those who realize that they're not good enough. He's for moral failures. Lots of people find that very offensive today. Lots of religious people find that offensive. Lots of secular people find that offensive. People don't like to hear that message. You see, the rescue mission of Jesus Christ puts each one of us in the same category. Before God, we are all needy sinners. You know, for some people that is an absolute scandal. You mean to say that I, a respectable person in the community, a churchgoer, a faithful husband, a good parent, you mean to say that I'm in the same place as the prostitute who sells her body on the streets? You mean to say that I, an honest, upright person in the same boat as that man peddling drugs to youngsters? Well, in a word, yes, that is exactly what the Bible says. Paul says in Romans 3, 22, 23, this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference for all of sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace. There is no difference. We need to hear that and we need to understand that. All through Luke's Gospel, Jesus indicates the welcome that heaven reserves for people who've made an absolute mess of their lives. Other religions very often offer a ladder up to God. Keep these rules, follow this discipline.

[11 : 31] You'll find your way to God. You can do it if you try hard enough, if you work hard enough, if you're good enough. It's religion for the strong and the self-sufficient for the great and the good. And Jesus' teaching and ministry confronts and challenges that kind of thinking completely. He comes near to those who are in need. He draws near to those who can't make it on their own, to the broken, hurting, the lost, the outcast, the weak. Comes to throw a ladder down from God to the spiritually desperate. Jesus says, I've come to seek and to rescue lost people.

I've not come to call them righteous but sinners to repentance. And so Jesus' mission is directed towards the lost. The Bible tells us that we're all lost. We're all not where we should be in relation to God. Some are like Zacchaeus. Lost rebels, prodigals in the far country. Others like the rich ruler or the elder brother in Jesus' story are lost in their goodness and their morality, even their religion. But no matter who we are, apart from Jesus Christ, we are lost to God. Some people find it very hard to admit that they're lost. You know, if I'm in the car, driving somewhere, my wife is saying we're lost, aren't we? She says, no, we're not lost. I know exactly where we are. No, I'm not. We have that argument, that discussion frequently. We don't like to admit that we're lost. Pride is a terrible thing. But we need to admit that we're lost before we can ever be found. I wonder if there's someone here and you need to admit that this morning.

I'm lost. I'm not where I should be. If you could admit that to yourself and to God, then I've good news for you. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost. It's a rescue mission, directed towards the lost. Secondly here, it's a rescue mission in which God takes the initiative.

It's the second thing I want you to notice here. You know, on the surface, when you read that story, it appears to be about a man seeking Jesus, doesn't it? But actually, when you begin to think about it and you begin to look at the story, you begin to realize that the reverse is true. Oh, well, wait a minute. You say, well, didn't Zacchaeus want to see Jesus? Yes. Didn't he run ahead of the crowd? Didn't he climb the sycamore fig tree to get a better look? And all that is true. Verse 3 tells us that. But when we look a little closer, we discover that this story is not so much about a man called Zacchaeus seeking Jesus as it is Jesus seeking a man called Zacchaeus. It's Jesus who seeks and finds, not Zacchaeus. It's Jesus who calls out to Zacchaeus. It's Jesus who calls Zacchaeus.

It's Jesus who invites himself to the house of Zacchaeus. And the punchline in verse 10 highlights this point. The Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost. We don't rescue ourselves. We don't seek after God. In Christ, God seeks after us. God is not the one who is lost. We are. In my experience, you know, the car keys don't find themselves. And those parables that Jesus told in Luke 15, the shepherd goes out to look for the sheep. The woman goes out looking for the coin, even in the parable of the protocols. It's the father who goes out to both sides. In Romans 3, 10 and 11, Paul says, there is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. We're lost. We're unable to find our way back to God. But Jesus Christ has come to seek what was lost. We cannot find Him, but in His grace and mercy, He can find us. And so the gospel, the good news is not good advice telling us to, you know, to pull up our socks and do a bit better. The gospel is Jesus Christ breaking into our lives. The gospel is Jesus Christ calling you by name. Zegias come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. But why has Jesus come to seek us? Find us, rescue us. Why do you search for anything? So you're walking down the street and you pull, you know, maybe you pull a hankie out. God, this one's clean. You pull it out anyway. [16:42] Should have checked that before I came. You pull out your hankie and as you pull it out, a one pence piece, penny piece, falls out, flips up into the air, drops down on the ground, rolls along the pavement, down a stank or a drain. And you look down and you see the penny in the drain, down in the muck, down in the gunge that's gathered there. You know, I don't know if you have a look in drains, but not very nice. You know, you look down there and there it is. You can see the penny, it's stuck in all the gunge and all the guff, it's horrible. It's smelly, it's disgusting.

What do you do? You know, oh, you get down in your hands and knees, try as hard as you can to pull out the penny. Oh, you may have your good clothes on. Oh, never mind. Get down into the gutter, get your hands rolled up, get your hands right down into the drain, try and get that one penny piece. Try as hard as you can to pull it out. Or do you say, well, just leave it. It's only a penny piece. Why search for anything? Only if it's valuable. Only if it's worth something to you.

Jesus says, I'm searching. I'm on a rescue mission for something valuable to my father and to myself.

You see, the gospel tells of a God who mysteriously so values and loves us that he's stooped down on his hands and knees and humbled himself and got himself dirty that we might be fine. That is an astounding message. Amazingly, mysteriously, the gospel tells us that we are valued and loved and dear to the heart of God. We live in a world where so many people feel worthless and of no value. Perhaps the key is felt like that. I imagine he did. Despite all his great wealth, he was a man who was empty inside. He felt worthless. Perhaps someone here, perhaps you feel like that too.

[19:22] Maybe you've been reading and listening to the scientists and the intellectuals of our age who tell us that we're simply the products of chemical, biological, evolutionary chance. We're utterly

insignificant. We've come from nowhere and we're going nowhere. You're simply a blob of matter. You're a pile of chemicals. You're no more important than a rock. What an unbearable perspective that is. Maybe you're someone who in your life has gone wrong. Things have taken a turn for the worse. Maybe there are problems in the family. Maybe there are financial problems you're not coping. Maybe you feel worthless. Maybe you've been through the breakdown of a relationship. It's left you feeling alone or empty or unloved. Perhaps you're someone who's always been told. It's amazing to me as a minister how often I discover this. Maybe you've been told since you were a child that you were no good, that you were a waste of space. You'll never amount to anything. You're no more than a dirty one pea stuck in a filthy drain. And who wants that? I mean, who is going to get their hands dirty for you? Let me tell you, if it Jesus Christ did, he got his hands dirty. Not just his hands, he got his heart dirty. He's got his whole self dirty. He came into this world with dirty one peas like you and I. He got dirty, he got messed up, just to rescue us and to pull us up out of the mud and mire. Jesus Christ was plunged into all the filth and dirt and squalor of this world. Where was Jesus going? He's on the road here to Jericho. Where was he going after Jericho? Well, he was going to Jerusalem and to the cross. And on the cross, he was going to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He was going to take upon himself all that makes us feel worthless, all our sin, all our guilt, all our shame. He was going to be covered as it were in all our filth. That we might be pulled to safety and be made children of God. But the cross God is saying, I treasure you and I love you. I shed my blood for you. You're special to me. You're my son. You're my daughter. You are a somebody. That's what this meal proclaims. That's what the bread and the wine tell us. That's what happened to Zacchaeus when Jesus came into his life.

Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham. Let me ask you this morning, do you know yourself to be loved by God? Gospel tells us that we have a God who values us and treasures us. And we come to know and experience that love for ourselves. When like Zacchaeus we welcome Jesus Christ into our lives. This is what Zacchaeus did, verse 6. He came down at once and welcomed him gladly. It's a rescue mission directed towards the lost. It's a rescue mission in which God himself takes the initiative. And finally here it's a rescue mission that changes people's lives. God's grace comes to us where we are but it never leaves us there. It pulls us up out of the mud in the mire, gives us a firm place to stand, puts a new song in our mouths, a hymn of praise to our God. That's what happened to Zacchaeus. The verse says Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, look Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. If I've cheated anyone out of anything, I'll pay back four times the amount. What has gone on here? [23 : 51] Suddenly those things that had so gripped his life, he's now willing and able to let go, cheerfully, gladly. Those things that meant that he was in control, he now gives up. He gives up control of his life. He suddenly wants to please Jesus Christ. He wants to help others. He becomes generous because the presence of Jesus brings transformation and change. The idols of his heart are laid aside.

Their hold, their power is broken by the power of Christ's love and grace. Notice that this is not in a condition of Zacchaeus entering into the kingdom of God. It's the result of it. It's not as if Zacchaeus had to become generous before Christ would have anything to do with him. His generosity is not a work that qualified him for acceptance with God. It was the fruit of Jesus' presence in his life. That's really important to understand. I hear lots of people say things like, well, yeah, well, I could never become a Christian. I could never keep it going. I could never do all those things that Christians do. I could never give this up. I could never give that up. I could never be good enough. And they're right. But what is impossible with men is possible with God. Christianity is about Jesus Christ coming into your life. Without him, Christianity is impossible. Without the presence of Jesus Christ, this kind of deep change that we see happening in Zacchaeus' life simply cannot happen. This generosity that Zacchaeus displayed went way beyond what the Lord acquired because it was the product of a changed heart and a changed life. That's the power of God's grace. When Jesus Christ, the Bible says, comes into your life, he makes you a new person, a new creation. We cannot renovate our own lives. We don't have the power. We don't have the motivation.

And if Jesus Christ isn't in your life, then your Christianity or your religion, such as it is, will be joyless and superficial and unforgiving and judgmental and insecure and self-righteous. Zacchaeus didn't give away his money to the poor to make himself right with God or to make his life acceptable

to God. He gave away his money because he knew that God in Christ had already accepted him and lavished his love upon him. Only the presence of Jesus Christ can make the doing the right thing such a joy and a delight, not a burden or a means to an end.

So is Jesus Christ really in your life? Is he at the center of your life? Has he lifted you up out of the mud and the mire? And do you know God's love? Not as some kind of vague abstract idea, but as a living power in your life and in your heart. Are you a child of God? Are you valued?

[27 : 20] What are you worth? What do you mean financially? There have always been two kinds of religion in this world. Religions that seek to do God a favor and a religion that seeks the favor of God.

Religions of works and a religion of grace. Religions in which men and women seek after God and a religion in which God seeks after men and women. Religions are all about self-help and doing your best and a religion that's all about a rescue. Which one is yours? And so many other religious faiths, God says, well here are the rules, do your best, work hard, I'll see you in heaven.

When Christianity God wants out to meet us and embrace us, to find us, to rescue us, to lavish his love upon us, salvation is not a matter of self-effort, not 10, not 5, not even 1%.

It's all a matter of grace. And we don't find God's grace. God's grace finds us. Just as it finds Echiass in the sycamore victory. As his grace found you, as Jesus found you, the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost. Rescue is his business. Hear his voice this morning. He's calling your name. He's saying I must stay at your house today, in your life today. Be like Echiass. Welcome him gladly. Rescue his business as he done business with you. Let's pray. Father we thank you that you sent your Son Jesus Christ into this world, the save sinners. Or help us by your grace and by the power of your Holy Spirit.

Open our eyes and to open our hearts that we might see who Jesus really is. And that we might welcome him gladly into our lives. And that we might experience his life changing power and presence.

[30 : 11] Yoschit in his name. Amen.