

DEFINING SAVING FAITH

LUKE 19:1-10

Main Idea

Genuine faith is demonstrated by the actions we take based on receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior.

1. CROSSING PATHS (VS 1-2)

Jesus approaches each person personally.

- A. JESUS (1)
- B. ZACCHAEUS (2)
- C. US

2. A DESIRE TO LOVE AND BE LOVED (VS 3-6)

Every person has a natural desire for relationship.

- A. LOOKING FOR JESUS (3-4)
- B. JESUS LOOKING FOR ZACCHAEUS (5-6)
- C. JESUS LOOKING FOR US

3. LOVE IN ACTION (VS 7-10)

Loving God causes us to act out in love.

- A. NO UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS (7)
- B. PRETTY GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS (8)
- C. UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS' MISSION (9-10)

Defining Saving Faith

Luke 19:1-10

I think that it is important to keep in mind that we are nearing the end of Luke's travel section. Jesus is in Jericho, just 17 miles away from His final destination. Jesus is headed for Jerusalem to accomplish His main mission; to suffer and die on the cross as atonement for our sins. On this journey, Jesus interacted with all sorts of people. He has healed and saved many people. His main invitation to people was to be reconciled with God and to enter God's Kingdom through faith. This invitation met with some very surprising results. The people we would expect to understand and receive Jesus' offer, don't; while the people we least expect to understand and receive Jesus' offer, do. In this morning's text, we will again encounter a guy who we would think had no chance of receiving and following Jesus. This man was a hated and despised tax collector.

Everyone hated this guy and his kind. Let me just remind us that Jesus encountered a tax collector at the very beginning of His public ministry. Jesus approached Matthew; who was collecting taxes at the time. Jesus introduced Himself and invited Matthew to become His disciple. It seems as if Matthew did not hesitate. He left all his money behind, left the job behind, and followed Jesus. Matthew became one of the 12 Apostles and authored the Gospel of Matthew. In a parable, Jesus described a very religious man and a tax collector going to the temple to pray. At the end of the parable, Jesus had the tax collector leaving the temple reconciled with God, while the religious guy left the temple estranged from God.

I have no answer for this question but I wonder why Matthew didn't write about this encounter with Zacchaeus since they were both tax collectors. After all, it seems to me that Matthew could have better understood the psychology behind this conversion better than Luke. I have no answer. I just wondered about it.

So let me get back to where we are on Jesus' journey. He is still in Jericho; 17 miles outside of Jerusalem. In next week's passage Jesus will tell one more parable and then we will see Him in Bethany on the Mount of Olives which is just 1½ miles outside of Jerusalem. From there He will kick off His final mission with what the church labels "The Triumphal Entry." From there we will encounter "The Last Supper," "The Passion," "Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus."

Things are still moving forward at this point but at a leisurely pace. When we get to the Triumphal Entry, the pace will pick up and move at a hectic pace.

But for now we will see Jesus again stun the crowd. I think sometimes we are fooled into thinking we know who is good, who is bad, and who should enter God's Kingdom. But life with Jesus and life in the church is filled with unexpected twists and turns.

For example, there was a certain man who joined the choir. The problem was that he couldn't sing. He had no rhythm and he could not sing on key. Several people hinted to him that he could serve in other areas of church ministry, but he enjoyed singing in the choir and kept coming.

The choir director finally became desperate and went to the pastor. “You’ve got to get that man out of the choir,” he said. “If you don’t, I’m going to resign and most of the choir is going to quit. Please do something.”

The pastor approached the guy and suggested he leave the choir. “Why should I leave the choir?” he asked.

“Well, five or six people have come to tell me you can’t sing.”

“That’s nothing,” the man responded, “Fifty or sixty people have told me that you can’t preach. ...”

One of the topics of discussion among theologians is how to reconcile what the Apostle Paul says about salvation, namely that we are saved by faith and not by works; with what Jesus’ brother James says about salvation, apparently that we are saved by the works that accompany our faith. Again I want to point out that the theologians who wrestle with these issues are much smarter than I am. I’m sure that I have oversimplified this in my mind but it makes sense to me. I have consistently defined faith as the action we take based on what we believe. I think that is a pretty good working definition. There will be many things I may believe but never take action on.

For example, you may come to me and say, “John, I know that Yahoo stock is going to double in the next 3 months.” Because you seem to know what you are talking about, I may believe you. So I could say that I believe Yahoo stock is going to double. However, this belief only becomes faith when I take \$100,000 out of the bank and buy Yahoo stock. Do you see the difference between belief and faith? The main idea of this morning’s text seems to demonstrate this. **GENUINE FAITH IS DEMONSTRATED BY THE ACTIONS WE TAKE BASED ON RECEIVING JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR.** In other words, it seems to me that knowing and following Jesus should affect the way we think, speak, and act. As we look at this exchange between Jesus and Zacchaeus, let’s try and see how our relationship with Jesus has affected us.

1. CROSSING PATHS (VS 1-2)

Verses 1-2 illustrate what crossing paths with Jesus looks like. The interesting thing about the God of the Bible is this. **JESUS APPROACHES EACH PERSON PERSONALLY.** In Luke’s account of this incident, there are two main characters.

Verse 1 informs us that Jesus is on the move. If you remember from last week, Jesus healed a blind man as He was approaching Jericho. He is now passing through Jericho. Everywhere Jesus went; there was someone who was in need of His touch. Jesus is still on the move today. Whether you are not yet a believer or if you have been a believer for many years, Jesus is still passing through where you and I are. Even though Jesus was speaking to believers, it still applies to those who are not yet believers. Listen to the heart of Jesus:

“20Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends” (Revelation 3:20 / NLT).

Jesus is passing through each one of our lives. His desire is to enter our hearts and journey through life together with us. Please watch this now because we can see that Jesus is destined to meet a particular person here in Jericho.

In verse 2, Luke introduces us to the other main character in this meeting. Zacchaeus is a tax collector. However, he is not just a local tax collector. He seems to be a regional administrator. Luke identifies him as a chief tax collector. He was rich. At this point, we have to ask ourselves about Luke's choice of words. The word he used to describe the chief tax collector is the same word he used to describe the rich young ruler Jesus met in the last chapter. They were both rulers and they were both rich. That's where the comparisons will end. The rich young ruler was a religious guy. He kept the commandments diligently. Zacchaeus was a sinner. The rich young ruler couldn't part with his money in order to follow Jesus.

Zacchaeus ended up giving a ton of money away as a way to demonstrate his love for Jesus. Zacchaeus left this encounter filled with joy and saved. The rich young ruler left sad and lost. The incidents call for us to examine where our relationship with Jesus is.

In addition to this, we must remember that Jesus told us that money, power, and status, have a natural bent towards evil. We don't see this in our English translations but Luke starts off verse 1 with the words "And look." The King James Version starts out the verse like this, "And behold a man named Zacchaeus." Luke has this word "look" then coming out of Zacchaeus' mouth in verse 8. He says to Jesus, "Look, Lord!" and then goes on to say he will give a lot of money away. We too are invited to look; to look at Jesus and to look at how we are living our lives in faith.

And that brings us to the topic of us. In other words, our paths are crossing with Jesus here and now. Last time, Jesus met a blind man and healed him. We asked ourselves in which ways we were blind to areas of our lives that were not pleasing to God. This morning we will come to learn that Zacchaeus was short. He was physically short but the Bible is clear that we have all sinned and fall short of God's glory. It would be good for us to allow God's Holy Spirit to show us in what areas we are falling short.

I want to slip in a little irony and encouragement. When Zacchaeus met Jesus, he was not living a godly life. In fact he was living the exact opposite of what God wanted from him. But his name Zacchaeus means the righteous one, pure, clean, and innocent. Even though we are but dust of the earth, even though we are blind to the sin in our life, even though we fall far short of God's standards, and even though we continue to sin; we have great potential through Jesus Christ.

Receiving Jesus and submitting to the leading of His Holy Spirit makes us pleasing and useful to God. When we receive Jesus and submit to Him as Lord and Savior, God no longer looks at us as sinners and rebels. He now looks at us through the blood of Jesus and calls us beloved children. **JESUS APPROACHES EACH PERSON PERSONALLY.** If you hear Him speaking to you this morning, please open up your heart to Him.

2. A DESIRE TO LOVE AND BE LOVED (VS 3-6)

Verses 3-6 describe one of the basic needs of human beings; a desire to love and be loved. EVERY PERSON HAS A NATURAL DESIRE FOR RELATIONSHIP. God created us out of love and created us to be in a personal, intimate relationship with Him. We have this deep down desire to love and to be loved. Because of sin, we have often chosen to fill this need in sinful ways. In our culture, we have substituted sex for love. People in our society move from one sexual encounter to another looking for love. But the point is we can never fill this desire to be loved with sex or anything else. We get involved in all sorts of unhealthy relationships. Those too are unfulfilling and become exhausting. Only Jesus can satisfy our need to be loved.

In verses 3-4 we see Zacchaeus looking for Jesus. Luke mentions this in passing but we need to think about how badly Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. He seems to be physically short. Can you see him jockeying through the crowd to get a glimpse of Jesus? Can you imagine what kind of abuse he took in the middle of that crowd? Everyone knew exactly who he was and no doubt took the opportunity to give an anonymous poke, shove, or elbow to the ribs. At any rate, he didn't seem to be having much luck.

He then devises a plan that involved two actions dignified men avoided. He ran ahead to find an appropriate viewing spot and then he climbed a tree. He didn't care how undignified it was to run and climb a tree. All that mattered to him was that he get to see Jesus. Do you remember the crippled man whose friends wanted him to receive a touch from Jesus? They carried him on a stretcher but because of the crowd, they couldn't get near Jesus. They carried their friend on top of a roof, and illegally punched a hole in the roof and lowered their friend down on ropes and a stretcher. They lowered him down, right in front of Jesus. Jesus did not disappoint them. He healed their friend. Jesus is emotionally moved by those who seek Him out. Zacchaeus is now ready. He has his place above the street on the limb of a tree. I don't know where our modern day saying comes from but it figuratively and literally applies to Zacchaeus. He went out on a limb to see Jesus. It could be literally risky because he could fall off the branch or the branch could break.

Figuratively he was out on a limb because all people hated him, especially religious Jews. What if Jesus rejected him too? What if Jesus singled him out to publicly insult? He was taking a real risk in meeting Jesus. But it seems that he didn't care. He just wanted to meet Jesus.

Where does church life come in our priorities? Is it difficult for us to make it to church one hour out of our entire week? Do we find it hard to give another couple of hours a month to come and participate in church activities? It seems to me that church is pretty low on our priority of things to do. I'm no legalist and I'm not here to judge anyone. But let's just think for a moment. There are 168 hours in a week and yet we find it difficult to make it to church and give God a good solid hour, just one hour a week. We find ourselves late to church or if we don't feel like it, we simply don't come to church. We are not late to work. We make sure our children are not late to school. We make it to piano lessons, sporting

events, movies, and all sorts of other activities; but that one hour a week for God seems to be a chore.

Let's say we have two additional events at church per month. On average there are 720 hours in a month and let's say that each of the extra church events are just two hours each. Do we really have trouble finding 4 hours out of 720 hours to serve God in church? I don't sense any religious zeal in the United States' church life. I think we each need to quiet ourselves before God and review what our priorities are. Zacchaeus has made his decision.

In verses 5-6 we see Jesus looking for Zacchaeus. I think Luke worded this to catch the irony of the situation and the playfulness of Jesus. Jesus reached the spot where Zacchaeus was ... and looked up to see him. Zacchaeus is a little man both physically and spiritually. Jesus is a spiritual giant. But here He chose to look up to Zacchaeus. After all, Jesus was looking for Zacchaeus and Zacchaeus was predestined to meet Jesus. Jesus met a woman and asked her to give Him a drink.

The text prefaced that meeting by saying Jesus had to go through Samaria. Here Jesus told Zacchaeus that He must stay at Zacchaeus' house. Again, Jesus did not have to go through Samaria and there were plenty of houses Jesus could have gone to eat at in Jericho. For sure He could have eaten at some good people's houses. Jesus had to go through Samaria because His meeting with the woman who need a touch from Him was predestined by God. The touch Zacchaeus was going to receive from Jesus was also predestined by God. As we watch this play out, we will see that not only does the Person of Jesus go to Zacchaeus' house but a genuine offer of salvation accompanies His visit.

Zacchaeus' risk pays off. Not only did he get to see Jesus but Jesus saw him, and was now going to spend some one on one personal time with him. Zacchaeus scampered down the tree and took Jesus home with him. Luke says that Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly.

Many of us Christians have lost that glad feeling of meeting and being with Jesus but the truth is that Jesus is still looking for us. I don't say that to judge anyone because even though I enjoy the times I spend with Jesus in quiet, in Bible reading, and in prayer; I often don't find the time in my "busy" day to meet with Him. I know Jesus is waiting for me and has invited Himself into my life. I know that I love those times and yet it seems as if I fill the day with a lot of second rate activities. I need to get much better at that. My hope is that you are doing much better at this than I am. We were created with a purpose. EVERY PERSON HAS A NATURAL DESIRE FOR RELATIONSHIP.

3. LOVE IN ACTION (VS 7-10)

In verses 7-10 we get a chance to see what love in action looks like. We are going to see what genuine faith produces. LOVING GOD CAUSES US TO ACT OUT IN LOVE. We are back to my definition of faith; actions that are based on what we believe. We just said that we have been created with a deep desire to give and receive love. That desire can only be filled as we receive the love of God in Jesus and offer our love back to Him through obedience, submission, and humility. Once we have this relationship flowing, God's love will overflow

us and spill out onto those around us. Notice the progression. Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God and the second greatest commandment was to love one another as He has loved us. Loving God ought to manifest itself in our love for others.

Verse 7 illustrates that religious people often demonstrate no understanding of Jesus. Some of the most judgmental, gossipy, nasty people I know claim to be Christians. How can that be? The people saw that Jesus was going to be entertained at the house of a sinner. All throughout Luke's Gospel we see that the crowd expects the Pharisee, the rich young ruler, and other religious people to be praised by Jesus. Instead, Jesus reaches out to those the crowd would condemn; sinners.

Remember that word sin means to miss the mark. I have already pointed out that we all miss the mark. If the mark is the righteousness of God; then we all fall short of the mark. Jesus never seems to make religious people happy. If I read the Gospels correctly, the more mature we become in Christ, the more gracious we should become. And yet, the modern day church seems to be the exact opposite. The longer people are Christians, and the more active they are in church programs; the more judgmental they become. They find fault with people in the congregation. They find fault with the church, with the leaders, and with the pastors. In the Gospels, when people come to know Jesus they are at the same time broken and filled with joy. The religious crowds had no understanding of Jesus.

Verse 8 describes a guy who has a pretty good understanding of Jesus. Zacchaeus was anxious to demonstrate to Jesus that Jesus did not make a mistake in choosing him. He said to Jesus, "Look Lord!" but at the same time, it's almost as if he is defending Jesus in front of this religious crowd. Which one of them would be willing to do what Zacchaeus is about to do? What Zacchaeus takes upon himself is unsolicited and is totally voluntary on his part. Jesus did not ask him to do a thing. But look at this generous offer. He goes above and beyond anything anyone could have told him to do; even if they wanted a pound of flesh out of hatred.

He voluntarily gave half of his entire worth away to the poor. And beyond that he challenged anyone who he cheated to come forward and he would make restitution four times of the amount they claimed. In my mind, this is saving faith. He wasn't there to make friends or impress anyone. He felt that if was going to follow Christ then he would have to act and live in ways that would reflect the Jesus Who came to save him. If there was a response similar to the rich young ruler, there would be no reason to think this guy had placed his faith in Jesus as the Promised Messiah. The rich young ruler couldn't part with his money but Zacchaeus had no such problem.

Too many Christians have confused belief with faith. Many people believe they are genuine Christians because they believe in Jesus and they believe a lot of theology and doctrines. However, by the way they think, talk, and act; it is pretty obvious they don't have the kind of faith that changed Zacchaeus. Since we are church people it is worth reminding us that Jesus said that there would be people who come to Him on judgment day expecting to get into heaven and He will reject them. They did a lot of religious things and were able to even perform miracles in His Name but Jesus said they did not exhibit God fruit. From a pastor's perspective, I need to warn us that over the years I have seen people make up their own religion that doesn't reflect any of the nature of the Jesus they claim to serve.

Here is a clue and a good check for all of us. Let's ask ourselves if we are more concerned about the sins of others than we are about the sin in our own lives. I know I have enough sin in my own life to rectify. I don't have time to look at anyone else's sin. If anyone thinks that they are pretty good, then my guess is that person is not spending much good time reading the Bible and allowing God to speak to them. There are tremendous benefits in coming to Jesus in humble faith.

Jesus made it clear that Zacchaeus had demonstrated an accurate understanding of Jesus' mission. Zacchaeus understood what godly sorrow was. He understood what true repentance was and he understood that restitution is an act of genuine faith and repentance. Zacchaeus understood that Jesus was the Messiah and placed himself under the Messianic Kingship of Jesus. Jesus was his king and he would now act in ways that would please his King.

Jesus stated His mission in verse 10. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came to seek and save you and me. Look what Jesus pronounced in verse 9. He stated that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house. Zacchaeus had received salvation by exercising saving faith in Jesus. I think Jesus had a double meaning in mind when he referred to Zacchaeus as a "son of Abraham." Abraham was not only the father of the Jews as a people and a nation; Abraham was the father of our faith. The New Testament writers hammer home the point that God rewarded Abraham because of his faith. Those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus for salvation are also sons and daughters of Abraham in faith. Let's quit living half-hearted Christian lives. Let's start to demonstrate Who our Lord and Savior is by the way we think, act, and speak. Let's let Jesus ooze out from every part of our being. If we truly love Jesus and have faith in Him as our Lord and Savior, we should be acting in ways that bring honor and glory to His Name. **LOVING GOD CAUSES US TO ACT OUT IN LOVE.**

Based on the way Zacchaeus acted out, there is no doubt that his faith in Jesus was genuine. If there was any doubt, Jesus erased that doubt by pronouncing salvation on Zacchaeus. I know that I have to take some time to think about what my priorities in life are. From time to time, it is good for us to take an account of how we are living our lives and what we value in life. **GENUINE FAITH IS DEMONSTRATED BY THE ACTIONS WE TAKE BASED ON RECEIVING JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR.**

I have seen too many people who talk and act a good game of religion, but their lives really don't demonstrate a genuine change of life brought on by faith in Jesus. William Barclay brings home this point graphically. He said:

"The point is brought home by a terrible story. There was a meeting in progress at which several women were giving their testimony. One woman kept grimly silent. She was asked to testify but refused. She was asked why and she answered, 'Four of these women who have just given their testimony owe me money, and I and my family are half-starved because we cannot buy food.'

A testimony is utterly worthless unless it is backed by deeds which guarantee its sincerity. It is not a mere change of words which Jesus Christ demands, but a change of life."

Do our lives reflect the Jesus of the Gospels? I hope so because nothing brings more dishonor to the Name of Jesus than Christians not living and acting in ways that are consistent with the Nature and Character of Jesus.