

The Call of Grace

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All right. If you would, open your Bibles to Luke chapter 19. We read the end there of chapter 18 and we saw the Lord is on his way to Jerusalem. He is going to suffer and die. And on his way to the cross he passes through this city Jericho because he has got a lost sheep there. Just like he must needs go through Samaria, he must needs go through Jericho. And as he passes through, he is going to demonstrate to us the kind of people that he is going to go suffer and to die for. And what I want us to look at tonight is this subject. The call of grace.

Now every one of us here is very familiar with this passage of Scripture. I cannot remember not knowing the words to the song about Zacchaeus. He is a wee little man and a wee little man was he. I can't remember not knowing this story. But as I have studied this this week I have learned this week I have learned new things and been blessed by new things I never saw before. So just because this is a familiar passage of Scripture, don't take it for granted. Let's see if the Lord might be pleased to teach us something here. So Luke chapter 19 verse one.

And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.¹

¹ Luke 19:1-10.

Now the first thing I want us to see about this call of grace, the call of grace is a gracious call, a gracious call to a sinner. The Lord Jesus came to Jericho and we read earlier. Before he entered the city there sat blind Bartimaeus by the wayside outside of the city begging. The Lord healed him. He had mercy on him. He gave him his sight. And verse one Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. He entered and passed through.

Now this is a pretty sizable city and our Lord passed through. It is not recorded that he had any dealing with anyone else in that city. It is not recorded he had mercy on anyone else in that city. He passed every one of them by. But now Zacchaeus lives in this city and he had a desire to see the Lord. But he was so sure he knew he would never see the Lord because of the crowd that was sure to be around him, he couldn't see over them all. And isn't that a picture of us sinners? We are too short. We are too short. We cannot see God. We have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It is impossible for us to see God. We are too short. It is an impossibility. But Zacchaeus still desired to see the Lord. So he went out of town. He knew the road that the Lord should be traveling on and he went out there on that road and he found him a sycamore tree. He climbed up in it so that when the Lord passed by he could see over the crowd. He would be able to see the Lord.

Now where do you think that desire came from? What made Zacchaeus go to all this trouble to get out there? Here is this rich man out there climbing a tree like a little boy to see the Lord. What brought all this to him? It is the call of grace. The call of grace is a gracious call. What Zacchaeus has right now is prevenient grace, grace which goes before. Zacchaeus sought to see Jesus who he was. And it doesn't just say he wanted to see him. He sought to see Jesus who he was. And if you don't find that out, if you don't seek Jesus to find out who he is, if you can find that out, you will find salvation, because the Lord Jesus is salvation. And this is on Zacchaeus' heart, because the Lord was already working on his heart. The Lord... Zacchaeus was seeking the Lord, because the Lord had already begun seeking Zacchaeus. Now that is gracious. The Lord of glory is already seeking this sinful man, the chief publican.

So Zacchaeus goes out of town and what luck, he finds a tree in just the right spot. Isn't that lucky? No. No. Even the location of that tree is prevenient grace. God almighty planted that tree in that spot for this purpose. He is going to save one of his elect there. God put that there on purpose, on his purpose.

Now maybe someone here—and I pray this is so—someone here tonight is like Zacchaeus. Everyone who is here is here on purpose. You are not here accidentally. You didn't just stumble in here. God has arranged for you to be here tonight, to hear the gospel as he passes by in the preaching of his gospel. It is not accident. But maybe someone here is seeking the Lord. And maybe it could be the Lord is getting ready to cross your path so that you see him. He is going to reveal himself to you so that you see him. If so, the Lord is going to call you the same way he called Zacchaeus right here. So that is why it is important for us to pay attention. Every one of God's people he calls just like he called Zacchaeus.

Now you know this story well. The Lord came out of town and he came right to the spot where Zacchaeus was sitting in that tree and he called Zacchaeus. The Lord didn't call one other person from this city of Jericho, but he called Zacchaeus.

Now Zacchaeus, who is this man? He is the chief publican. Now the publicans were Jews who collected taxes for the Romans and typically they cheated people, you know, when they collected those taxes. Zacchaeus is the worst guy in town. Everybody in this town knows this man is a sinner. He cheated honest, hard working people by overtaxing them and skimming off the top for himself. Everybody knows this man is a sinner. People in this day put a publican on the same moral plane as the put a harlot. This man is the chief publican, the chief harlot. He is the worst of the worst.

And when our Lord goes to his house they say, they all murmured in verse seven: He has gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. That is how they identified Zacchaeus. He is a sinner. The fact that the Lord would be guest with the man that is a sinner, the fact that our Lord received sinners and eats with them, makes these self righteous religious people angry. But that is a great comfort to a sinner, isn't it? Oh, the Lord has gone to be guest with the man that is a sinner, who is sinful just like I am. That gives comfort to a sinner who needs Christ. And this is exactly who the Lord always calls. He calls the lowest of the low. He calls sinners. Zacchaeus was the most unlikely candidate in that town for mercy. That is the one the Lord always calls, the one who is the most unlikely.

Why did the Lord call Zacchaeus? Because verse 10.

“The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”²

Zacchaeus like all of us is lost, lost in sin, lost in shame. And if he is going to be saved, it must be by grace. Salvation is by grace.

If there is anyone who was sought and saved without having done anything to deserve it, it is Zacchaeus and the thief on the cross. But that is who God saves, those who are undeserving. He saved both of those men because of their gracious call.

Secondly, the call of grace is a personal call. “Zacchaeus, you come down.” The Lord came to the very spot where Zacchaeus sat and he looked up there in that tree and the Scripture says he saw him. That wasn't the first time our Lord saw Zacchaeus. Christ saw Zacchaeus in his Father's eternal will and purpose. He saw Zacchaeus chosen in grace before the world began. He saw Zacchaeus lost in Adam. He saw Zacchaeus up a tree and called him by his grace.

Later that day he saw Zacchaeus in a state of grace and right now he sees Zacchaeus in glory because of this amazing, gracious call. And it is a personal call. And you will notice the Lord knew exactly where to find Zacchaeus, just like the Lord knew exactly where he would find that Samaritan woman at the well. When the Lord went to call Matthew he knew exactly where he would be collecting taxes. He saw Nathaniel. Before Nathaniel

² Luke 19:10.

every saw the Lord the Lord saw Nathaniel sitting under that tree. He knew exactly where he was. When the Lord went to call Peter and Andrew he knew exactly where they would be fishing. When he went to call those sons of Zebedee, James and John, he knew exactly where they would be mending their nets. And he knew exactly where Zacchaeus was sitting in this tree. He knows his sheep. The Lord knows exactly where to find all of his sheep. His sheep are lost. But now if he is not looking for something he lost and doesn't know where to find it. You know, I am looking for my keys and think I lost them and I don't know where they are at. The sheep are the ones who are lost. They don't know where they are at. They don't have any idea how to get back to the shepherd. They are not lost to the Lord. He knows where all of his lost sheep are and he is going to get every one of them. He is going to find and save every last one of them just like he found Zacchaeus. The Lord knew where you were when he called you, didn't he? Aren't you thankful? Aren't you thankful it wasn't up to me to know where to find the Lord? He knew where to find me. He came and got me where I was.

Now there is such a thing as a general call of the gospel. Everyone here tonight is hearing a general call of the gospel when you hear me preach. That is a general call of the gospel, a commandment to come to Christ. But now those of you who believe, you may have heard the gospel many, many times. And then one day you heard. One day you saw the Lord Jesus Christ with the eye of faith. What happened? What was different that day than all those other days? It was a personal call of grace. Roy, come down. Cecil, come down. Mike, come down. It is a personal call of grace.

The Savior called Zacchaeus by name. He didn't just use a shotgun approach, you know, scatter as much out there as you can hoping he might hit something. God uses an arrow of grace and he hits the mark every time. The Lord didn't come to that tree and cry, "Whosoever would like to be saved, you know, come to me." He said, "Zacchaeus, come down."

Now don't you bet Zacchaeus was shocked. He had never seen the Lord before. He was seeking the Lord to see who he was. He didn't know who he was. How did the Lord know his name? He had to be just shocked. Of course he knew his name. Zacchaeus' name was already written in the Lamb's book of life. He put it there. Look over in Isaiah 43. Of course he knew his name. Isaiah 43 verse one.

"But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."³

Zacchaeus was not a religious man. I am pretty confident of that. It could be he heard these verses read. But it never dawned on him that the Lord would know his name. But he did and the Lord called him and a gracious call and a personal call.

Third, the call of grace is as an urgent call.

³ Isaiah 43:1.

“Zacchaeus, make haste and come down.”⁴

A sinner is in great danger. And that danger requires that sinner to make haste and come to Christ. It is dangerous to delay, dangerous. Scripture says:

“To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”⁵

“But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”⁶

In Acts 24 this is such a sad story. Felix trembled at the preaching of the apostle Paul. Paul got done and this man trembled. But what did he say? Paul, go your way for this time. And when I have a more convenient season I will call for you. Tomorrow never came. Make haste. Make haste while the Lord is passing by. The Lord never passed by that tree again. Make haste.

None of us are guaranteed tomorrow. The Lord told that rich man in the parable:

“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.”⁷

Make haste. Come to Christ now and beg mercy for your sinful soul. The call of grace is an urgent call.

Fourth, the call of grace is a call downward.

“Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down.”⁸

Now isn't it amazing that empty, vile sinners who get so puffed up with pride that we have to be told to come down. We are already.... you can't get any lower than we are by nature. You would think it would be natural of a sinner to be... he is already down. But dead sinners have everything upside down. And we have got to be commanded to come down before God will ever call us up. The Lord must strip us of our filthy rags before he will ever clothe us in the righteousness of his Son. God will never allow the righteousness of his precious holy Son to be mixed with our works, the filthy rags of our righteousness. We have got to be stripped of those things before he will ever clothe us in the righteousness of his Son.

The Lord must empty us. We must see ourselves as completely empty of anything good before he will ever fill us with his Son. The Lord must slay us. We have got to die before he will ever give us eternal life. We must come down.

⁴ Luke 19:5.

⁵ Hebrews 3:15.

⁶ Hebrews 3:13.

⁷ Luke 12:20.

⁸ Luke 19:5.

Now listen. You cannot climb up to heaven. You can't do it, not through your good deeds, not through your church membership, not through your good attendance, not through your knowledge of the Scriptures and knowledge of doctrine. You can't climb to God through those things. You must come down, down, down.

I remember the first time Donnie Bell preached there at Williamsburg. Jan started laughing as soon as I sat down. And those folks were shocked by Don Bell. And he came... I won't do it, because I cannot be as demonstrative as he... he came around from that podium and got down on his knees and started slapping the floor. He said, "You have got to come all the way down to the rock bottom before..." That is where you find mercy. God will never have mercy on anyone that is not all the way down.

If you think anyone is worse than you, if I think anyone is worse than me, I am not come down far enough yet. You have got to come down to where there is no one worse than me. I have got to come down till I am the chief of sinners. That is a person who is a candidate for grace. The call of grace is a call downward. All the way down to what we really are.

Fifth, the call of grace is a call from the King. That is a very different call than the call that religion puts forth today. Today so-called preachers call on you to do something. You know, won't you let Jesus into your heart? Won't you make Jesus the King of your life? Did the Savior say anything like that? Look what he said here at the end of verse five.

"...make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house."⁹

I must. This is not optional. I must. Now this is a picture of the new birth. I must abide in your heart, in you.

How important is the new birth? How important is it that Christ be formed in you? It is a necessity. I must abide at thy house. And did the Lord just invite himself over to Zacchaeus' house? He did. But more than that he told Zacchaeus he is taking up residence, not just in his house, but in his heart. And where the Lord Jesus Christ takes up residence, brother, he rules. No when is King and he sits on the throne and rules as sovereign King.

Felix could tell the apostle Paul, "Tomorrow. I will call you at a more convenient season." He wouldn't say that if God called him. You can tell John and you can tell me, and Dale and Harry, "Yeah, you know, I will listen to you tomorrow, next Sunday, next Wednesday." You won't say later if God calls you. This is a call from the King. It is not an invitation. it is a commandment. You come down. I must abide at thy house.

And it is a good thing. Salvation is from the King. It comes from the King. He makes his people willing in the day of his power and he comes in. He doesn't allow you to invite

⁹ Luke 19:5.

him into your heart. He comes in. He gives a new heart and he abides, never leaves. This is the call from the King.

Look what he says here in verse nine.

“And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house.”¹⁰

Salvation came to you not because you, you know, wanted it or you deserved it. Salvation didn't come to you because you decided to accept Jesus. Salvation came to you in grace and power, sent by God to every one of us lost sheep. Every one of his lost sheep has this call of grace from the King. This call is a commandment.

Sixth, the call of grace is an effectual call. It gets the job done. Look at verse six.

“And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.”¹¹

With Zacchaeus there was no debate about a more convenient season, was there? This is the best season there was. He made haste and came down to the Lord. This rebel has become an obedient son and he obeyed quickly. And he received the Lord joyfully. Of course he did. What greater joy could there be than the Lord to say, “I must abide at your house today.”

Now Zacchaeus' joy is not money. It is not power. It is not influence. There is a new sheriff in town. His joy now is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look back at chapter 15. This was Zacchaeus joy. But do you know there was joy in heaven at this moment, too? In chapter 15 look at verse eight.

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.¹²

There was joy in heaven. Just like there was joy in Zacchaeus' heart. There is joy in heaven. Here is a sinner who repented at the call of grace.

Seventh, the call of grace is a life changing, life giving call. Look at verse eight.

¹⁰ Luke 19:9.

¹¹ Luke 19:6.

¹² Luke 15:8-10.

“And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”¹³

If you have taken anything by false accusation? If? You know he did. This is how this man became rich. This man is a son of Jacob. He is a cheat. But I love this. No one sat down that afternoon and told Zacchaeus, “Now, Zacchaeus, in order to be saved, you have got to do this and this. You have got to give this much. You have got to do this much.” Nobody told him that. He just willingly, from a willing heart made this statement. I am going to give half my goods to the poor. If I have wronged any man I will restore him four fold.

Why did he make that statement? He had a new want to. Zacchaeus never wanted to give away money before. He always wanted to horde it up. Now he is giving it away. What happened to Zacchaeus?

Look over at 2 Corinthians five. What happened to give this man new desires, new loves? He is a new creature. That is what happened to him. 2 Corinthians five verse 17.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”¹⁴

That is what happened to Zacchaeus. He was born again. And now all things became new. He has got a new heart. He has got a new love for the Lord, a new love for other people. He is a new person.

Now Zacchaeus went to bed that night with a much smaller bank account, but he went to bed that night with riches untold. The Lord was abiding in him.

Look over at chapter 18. We just read this at the opening of the Scripture, Luke 18 verse 25. Our Lord said:

“For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”¹⁵

Well, it must be hard, but it is not impossible, because the call of grace is a life giving, life changing call of grace. And Zacchaeus said—this is not speculation on our part, our Lord said so. Look here at the end of verse nine.

“This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.”¹⁶

¹³ Luke 19:8.

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

¹⁵ Luke 18:25.

¹⁶ Luke 19:9.

Well, of course he is a son of Abraham. Zacchaeus has always been a Jew. He has always been a physical descendant of Abraham. That is not what our Lord is saying. He had been born again. Now he is a spiritual son of Abraham. He is a son by faith, the same faith as Abraham.

Now in closing let me ask you this. Have you heard the call of grace? If you have, give thanks. Oh, give thanks. God in his mercy and grace has made you a son of Abraham, just like he made Zacchaeus a son of Abraham. And leave this place and go home joyfully. God blessed you beyond measure. I don't know about your bank account, but I know if you have Christ you are exceedingly rich, wealth untold. And if you haven't heard this call of grace my advice to you is this. Find your sycamore tree where you can perch yourself and stay there and see the Lord as he passes by.

To people driving down this road this building might not look like much, I grant you. But this place is a sycamore tree that God almighty passes by every week with his gospel and his priest. And if I was you and I hadn't heard this call of grace I would make it my business to be where the Savior is preached, if not here, I would find me another place. I would find me a sycamore tree and I am telling you there I would perch and beg God to do to me what he did to Zacchaeus.

Frank, come down. Make haste and come down. Today I must abide at your house. It could be he would call you like he called Zacchaeus and if he does it is going to be through the preaching of his gospel. I would make it be my business to be right here, wouldn't you?

All right. I hope the Lord will bless that to your hearing.