

KEEPING IT PERSONAL

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Luke 19-1-10.

The Christian faith is not about words and ideas. It is not an academic subject to master. It is a life. The Bible conveys the truth in words that we might then live the life that it speaks to us about. The word of God is designed to enlighten us in the very depths of our being and to give true food to the soul. In the end it reveals to us a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to know Him and to be known by Him. In that way it is all very personal.

This is what we find in the events related in Luke 19: 1-10. It is very personal. What happens between the Lord Jesus and Zacchaeus is something very special between two people. Zacchaeus finished the time they spent together calling Him 'Lord'. His own self-interest had given way to bigger things and there was now someone different, the Lord Himself, who was governor of his soul.

1. First person singular.

The first Person to consider in this narrative is indeed a singular and unique Person – our Lord Jesus Christ. We find Him here on the way out of Jericho. That city was privileged on this day to have this exceptional and remarkable Person in their midst. The kinds of response the Lord received in the places He went can be seen from Luke 18:43. People brought their sick family members and friends to Him, such was His reputation. There would usually be a crowd (v3) wherever He went. Not that the crowd was always sympathetic. They were unhappy at His teaching very often and annoyed with Him for failing to validate their view of the religious life. He was, of course, frequently very negative about their religion. So we find people complaining about His behaviour (v7). He embraced people that mainstream opinion rejected.

Yet all agreed that He was a very singular Person. His great works were pointers to His divinity. He was fully human but it was not blasphemous to say that He was God too and call Him such. This was all indicated by His virgin birth, by the miracles He did and by the soon-to-happen resurrection that He predicted (Luke 18:33). Yet, as said, He was also un-mistakably human. It was not a fake humanity but a very real humanity. We could have sat and ate with Him, and literally rubbed shoulders with Him.

We would also have been able to observe His compassion in action. We would have seen Him acting with such conviction and commitment to what He was called to do. We would have found Him spending time with mothers and children (Luke 18: 15-17). Then He also spent time with socially significant people, like the rich young ruler (Luke 18: 18-23). He was with people and it is very telling that he called Zacchaeus by name (v4).

2. Second Person singular.

Zacchaeus, as we learn from Scripture, was a chief tax collector. People in Judea did not like tax collectors due to their connection with the Roman occupiers, and they especially would not have liked chief tax collectors. He was aware of his standing in the eyes of the general population, that he was despised and distrusted. Perhaps he reacted against that hatred that he felt people had towards him by feeling entitled to take some extra money from tax payers beyond what he was meant to.

Yet he must have felt some hope when he heard the Lord was passing through the city. He would have been curious to see Him after what he had perhaps heard about the kind of company the Lord was known to keep. He ate with prostitutes and tax collectors. In fact, Zacchaeus might even have been aware that one of the Lord's disciples, Matthew, was a tax collector.

Nobody was going to make room for him to get to the front of the crowd so he has to resort to the famous climbing up the tree. He was at this point a lost man. Perhaps he was already realising that fact and was now ready to listen.

3. A personal touch.

It would have been a source of amazement to Zacchaeus, and the crowd, that the Lord called him by name (v4). But the crowd was also pre-occupied with their criticism of the Lord, going to eat with a tax collector. We are not privy to the conversation between them both but the effect was electrifying. Zacchaeus was a changed man. He had heard the Lord's diagnosis of him, that he was a lost man, and had responded in repentance.

He was lost, like we all are, in sin. That is what we all are by nature. We can often be very vague about the kind of people we are and have very imprecise ideas. But now Zacchaeus is thinking very clearly and with alarm about his spiritual state. He had owned up to his deep spiritual need and examined his own heart. We too, like him, have to confess our immorality, our uncleanness, our cruel thoughts, our jealousies and our selfishness. Then we realize the wonder of being able to find a place in the Lord's family, experiencing His love and assured that He will be with us forevermore. His changed heart is seen in his willingness to give half his goods to the poor, a sure sign that he is parting company with his covetousness, and will restore what he has stolen from others.

All of this is a sign of true life. The Lord has touched his innermost being and ousted the old self and begun to reign in the man's life. Zacchaeus had now surrendered his wrong desires and had accepted the Lord to be his Lord. Have we called upon yet and found His personal touch for ourselves? We give up our sin and gain our souls when we do.