
A CLEAR MISSION STATEMENT

Luke 19:1-10

Let's pray. Lord, open your word before us, we ask. You tell us in 2 Peter Chapter 1 that no scripture is open to our own private interpretation, but that this is your word. These are the oracles of God. This is your truth, understood by your Spirit. So we kneel before you in our hearts, Lord, and ask you to help us by your Holy Spirit to hear, to understand, to comprehend, to respond in faith and in obedience to your word, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Luke Chapter 19, verses 1-10: A Clear Mission Statement. A Clear Mission Statement.

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

For two weeks - today and a week from today - we will be talking about the subject of discipleship. We are starting discipleship classes on Wednesday nights in the New Year. So, in January there will be Wednesday classes, and we want to take today and next week to envision you about the subject of discipleship -- a very important, biblical topic. We don't typically do this. We typically take a book of the bible and we go through it from beginning to end. We just completed Philippians. We will be starting the gospel of John two weeks from today, and we will be celebrating the Christmas story from John's gospel, then continuing right on in our study.

But this is, we believe, I believe, of critical importance for us. Wednesday nights in the New Year there will be something for people of all ages, from babies all the way up through all of our adults.

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The youth will continue to meet. Emerge and Transfer will still be happening. There will be a new children's program and there will be adult classes. There will be two or three classes going on at one time. That number may increase in time, but to begin with there will be a couple of adult classes. They will be approximately six weeks long and they will deal with three main categories:

1. Biblical Knowledge
2. Doctrine, and
3. Life Skills

We want to teach you the scripture. We want to teach one another the word of God. It's absolutely essential for you as a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, to be growing in biblical knowledge. The promises of God strengthen us and allow us to know God, to take part in his life, and to grow. So we are going to just give time to teaching the scripture, to teaching doctrine. Doctrine is whatever the bible has to say about a given subject -- marriage, heaven, salvation, sin -- various topics that we accumulate the teaching of God's word together to talk about a given doctrine. Those two go together. We want to establish our doctrine based on biblical knowledge and we can't just pull a verse. When we come to Luke 19, we need to understand that this is in the New Testament, in the gospel of Luke, the difference between a gospel and a letter in the New Testament and the Old Testament, and to whom this was originally written, so that when we take that verse we use it consistent with its context.

So, Wednesday nights: Classes on bible doctrine, bible knowledge, and life skills. Marriage, parenting, how to handle finances -- all kinds of life skills will be taught in these various classes. You are going to want to take more than one class when they are offered. You are going to look at the two or three classes and say, "Wow, I want to take both classes." Right? Of course you are. Because of that, you will be encouraged to know that we will repeat classes and repeat cycles so that you will have an opportunity to take a class, if for some reason you had to miss it.

We are also going to move our monthly prayer service to Wednesday night so that on the first Wednesday night of the month, the church will gather in prayer. Youth will be going on, there will be a children's program, there will be nursery, and the adults will gather to pray. Maybe on occasion we will bring the youth in with us, but normally the adults will gather to pray. We are going to change the format. There will be worship, scripture reading, testimony, and prayer

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together as a church on that first Wednesday night of each month. Then the rest of the month we will be doing classes.

Are you still with me? Yes, you are correct. This is one massive commercial before I preach, because I want to envision you to be a part of these discipleship courses. I am excited about beginning the New Year with prayer together as a church. I am hoping that you will just turn out in force, and then the courses will begin. You will be hearing more about the individual course offerings in the next few weeks.

If you are a part of Riverside Church, if you consider this to be your church home, I would like you to prayerfully consider three commitments of your time:

- Sunday morning - to be here every single Sunday morning, not once or twice or three times a month, but every single Sunday
- To be a part of a home group
- To participate in Wednesday nights

This year 2015 has been a year where we have been strengthening our home group structure. We have started about a half dozen new home groups. We have been giving emphasis to that. We hope that you are committed, in relationship, in community, and we want to add to that in 2016 these discipleship courses. They are here to help you, to help you grow. They are here for your benefit.

It is important, because we want to give some biblical underpinnings now as we launch this new opportunity. So this week I want to give you A Clear Mission Statement, a mission statement of Jesus, a mission statement regarding discipleship, and it's found here in this marvelous passage that we just read in Luke Chapter 19. It's just a perfect fit for us. We are getting ready for the New Year. It's a great time to consider a new commitment. It's the right time for us to launch these new classes. But it also makes sense because it answers a critical question: Why Christmas? Why did Jesus Christ, the Son of God, become a man? And the answer is given here: To seek and to save the lost. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost. This is our mission statement for discipleship. And I hope this morning, by the grace of God, that God would awaken this glorious mission in our hearts.

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Allow me to say this by way of general observation as we begin, that the account is very intentional. It is purposeful. Everything that is recorded here about the life and salvation of Zacchaeus is to illustrate this mission statement: that Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost. With that in mind, here are three observations regarding discipleship, discipleship that requires a clear focus. Alright? #1: We see here a despised man. Let me give you the three observations: A Despised Man, A Dramatic Conversion, and A Clear Mission Statement. This is our outline, if you are taking notes:

1. A Despised Man
2. A Dramatic Conversion
3. A Clear Mission Statement

#1: A Despised Man. You could hardly find a more hated man in all of Jericho than Zacchaeus. He is the least likely candidate for God's salvation, for God's blessing. Jesus saves him. More than that, he goes to his house and stays at his house. When this happens, look at the response in verse 7: "...when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'" He was hated. He was despised. Why?

Well, in the tax system in Rome, there were publicans. A publican would be given a certain region to collect taxes, and everything that he collected over that he would keep for himself. So he would hire tax collectors in his region to collect taxes. Then those tax collectors would be grouped together under a chief tax collector. You had these multiple levels of individuals collecting taxes, and virtually everything was taxed. You were taxed for just breathing, directly and indirectly. Your land, your harvest, sales, you move from one region to another region -- taxes were constantly being collected, and it was a system that seemed to reward greed and dishonesty. So Zacchaeus, as part of this system, was absolutely hated.

Jesus seeks out Zacchaeus. The story is not about -- and when I use the word "story" I do not mean by that "fictional" or "make-believe" -- but the historical account, which I refer to as a story, is not about Zacchaeus seeking Jesus. He is curious. He wants to see Jesus. He climbs up in a tree, but he gets much more than he bargained for. Jesus is seeking him. Jesus calls him by name and he is fulfilling his mission. Jesus is fulfilling his mission. He is seeking. He is modeling his mission. He is showing us how to seek, and his heart to save the lost.

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Just a few thoughts on what this first point means to us. Zacchaeus was a despised man. He was a terribly sinful man. And this is our universal condition. We all need Jesus. Romans 3:10: "...as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:23: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." The point is not that some need to be saved, but that all can be saved. The point is not that some people are really bad and they need salvation. That's not why Jesus picked Zacchaeus. He picked Zacchaeus, in part, to show us that he loves everyone and that no one is beyond his reach.

That means, by way of application, that you are not too far from Jesus to be saved. You are not so lost that you cannot be saved. The truth is, the thing that will probably keep you or me from salvation is not thinking that we are too bad, but thinking that we are too good, thinking that we don't really need to be saved. This passage, along with many other passages, models for us that Jesus loves people. Jesus loves you. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

It is just like Jesus to save the person you hate the most. Let me say that again: It is just like Jesus to save and to bless the person you hate the most. Do you know what he does in that moment? He reveals two things. First, he reveals your hate, because it rises up and it gets exposed in that moment. He reveals your need for salvation, because you resent it that this person is blessed. And then secondly, he reveals his mercy, his incredible mercy that is available to you and me.

Zacchaeus was a despised man. Jesus seeks him. Jesus saves him. And this illustrates for us that we are loved by God, and when we are changed by God, we will love other people.

There is one further application before we move on. William Wilberforce illustrates it for us. If you know Wilberforce, he is a hero to Christians. He gave his life to end slavery in England. It was a lifelong pursuit for him. He was a Christian. He was an evangelical Christian by our standards, by our definition, and he was successful. He was powerfully successful. On his deathbed, he was given notification that at last the slave trade and the existence of slavery in England was outlawed. He was a godly man. He memorized the longest chapter in the bible, Psalm 119. When he walked home from Parliament to his residence, he would spend his time quoting that psalm in its entirety.

But part of his ultimate success -- and this is the part of his life that illustrates for us this particular truth -- Wilberforce was successful in England because he created unique partnerships. He partnered with individuals who completely disagreed with him. He partnered with people all over the political spectrum and with people who were not Christians, with people who opposed him on

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many of his other godly initiatives, but he found this common ground and brought them together and partnered with them.

There is a misunderstanding sometimes that Christians, well if I could just be frank, we sound hateful in the way we address people and we sound hateful about everything. So stop it, stop hating - because Jesus loves. Forgive me, I mean, we have probably all said this if we are Christians. We create these trite, superficial ways of trying to capture these truths and we say, "Well God, he loves the sinner but he hates the sin." That's probably not a helpful phrase, not that it's not true. That's not the point. But it seems to communicate: "You are the sinner," when in reality we are all sinners. So we have an opportunity.

Two weeks ago I went to a small meeting where Jim Daly was speaking. He is the president of Focus on the Family. You may associate Jim Dobson with Focus on the Family. He is no longer the president, and hasn't been for quite some time. This is a massive Christian organization -- millions and millions of dollars in their budget every year - and their mission is to equip and help families, and parents, and marriages. Daly talked about how there was a time when Focus on the Family gained a reputation for being about political initiatives, and how in his own mission he was trying to restore Focus to its original mission of helping families and helping marriages. But in his application of that, he created some unique partnerships. He partnered with non-Christian groups that disagreed with him, with Focus, with us as Christians, in some critical areas, but found other areas of agreement.

For example, he created some really unique partnerships to try to work to end human trafficking. It was interesting. As Daly was addressing this small group of a few dozen leaders here in South Florida, he talked about the opposition that he received from some Christians, from some large donors. He told one specific story about a donor who would give a million dollars a year. It's wonderful to have a million dollar a year donor. Every church should have one. We are looking for one. See me afterwards. There is time to get started this year.

Obviously, as leaders we see that and we think, "Look at the ministry that can be done with that." But Daly told about this conversation and he has made it public. Basically, he felt like he was being blackmailed, saying, "Listen, you have got to stop partnering with them." So Daly opened his bible. He read this man scripture, scriptures like this, scriptures where Jesus was criticized for going into

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the house of sinners, only to hear the person on the other end of the phone say, “Yeah, I agree. I understand, but I’m not giving you the money if you don’t stop.”

Zacchaeus was the most despised man in all of Jericho. And that is you and me when it comes to our lack of righteousness before God. That’s observation #1.

Observation #2 is: A Dramatic Conversion. A dramatic conversion takes place. It is recorded in verses 8 and 9: “And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.’”

In Judaism it was considered exceptionally generous to give away 20% of what you owned. In fact, this was seen as the limit of generosity. Anything beyond this was ridiculed as foolishness. Furthermore, if you stole from someone, the law required you to pay back an extra 20% -- everything you stole, plus an additional 20%. There was one very harsh exception: If you stole livestock, you had to replace it fourfold, because livestock was critical to a family’s existence, so there was a particularly harsh penalty for this particular crime.

Zacchaeus gives away not 20%, but 50%. He restores not an extra 20%, but fourfold, which was the penalty for stealing cattle or livestock. There is a dramatic transformation that takes place in this man’s life. Then Jesus pronounces: “Today salvation has come to your house.” What’s interesting is the language seems to...it’s very clearly a public pronouncement. In other words, Jesus restores this man in the community and announces to everyone present: “This man is a child of Abraham.” Zacchaeus was a Jewish name. He worked for Rome. He was hated by the Jews, and in a moment of transformation, his heart is changed. Jesus saves him. Jesus restores him, and then announces to basically all of Jericho: “This man is a true Jew.” That’s awesome, isn’t it?

You see, I can stand as a pastor and say, “Listen, I want to ask you to make three commitments, and if I haven’t done that, I want to ask you to make three commitments: every Sunday morning, home group, discipleship courses.” Of course, the problem with that is that it assumes a transformed heart. There may be a lack of understanding. It’s very possible in our Christian culture, in our American secular culture, that we don’t understand the critical nature of relationships.

It’s difficult because I would like to steer away from ultimatums. But I want to say to you that it’s very, very, very unlikely that you will grow apart from the knowledge of God’s word and apart from

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vital Christian relationship. You desperately need and probably don't know the extent to which you need community. You may be full of bible knowledge, but apart from relationship, you have such...

Listen, let me tell you what a golden opportunity you have. You are in one of the more diverse churches in the world. We are not there yet, but we are growing in diversity. The chances of you showing up on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night or in a home group and sitting next to someone completely unlike you are very, very high. You have an opportunity to blend your life, to open your heart, and to grow in genuine relationship at an accelerated pace. In fact, if you go to a church where everyone is like you, your growth will probably just shrink way up. Don't leave. Now, I'm playing, in part. There are all kinds of churches and we are just one. You need people.

The point I want to make here is that when you really see Jesus and your heart is changed, He becomes Lord. Zacchaeus starts his confession with these words: "Behold, Lord." There is a moment where transformation happens -- where the athlete quits telling the coach how to do it, where he quits cheating on the refs, compromising the form, and he says, "You tell me and I'll do it." There is a place where the addict stops telling the counselor, "I'll tell you how to help me." There is a place where the creature says to the Creator: "You are God. I will do it your way! Because I have beheld you! I have seen you, and nothing in this world can compare! I will stop arguing about all the various ways I think you are wrong." "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." That is an astounding statement. A transformation has taken place in this man's life.

Now, to really understand this you have to go just a few verses earlier to the previous chapter, to Luke 18:18. Can we go there together? Just flip the page if you would, and go to Luke Chapter 18.

And a ruler asked him, (this is verse 18) "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then

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who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

So, you have here in Luke 18 and Luke 19, two rich men. One leaves unsaved. One leaves saved. The one who leaves unsaved is an illustration of the difficulty for the rich to be saved. I don't want to soften it. That is the teaching of Jesus in this passage and it's interesting for us to ask, "Why?" Why is it difficult for a rich man to be saved? Is it because all of us, if we have money, we use it to insulate ourselves, to control our lives, access to our lives, our time, so that we are inapproachable, making it feel like even God can't get to us? Or is it because we are tempted to trust in money? Or is it because we love money? Or is it because we just won't leave our stuff and we can't get us and all of our stuff through the eye of that needle?

It's not by accident that we have these two stories. Luke 19 in many ways is a commentary on Luke 18:27: With man it is impossible, but nothing is impossible with God. And then Jesus, just to make the point, goes out and finds the richest man he can and - bam - saves him, to show his mercy, and to show that every salvation is a miracle. Every salvation is God's mercy. Jesus, the Messiah, Jesus, the baby born and put in a manger, Jesus, the Son of God, came to seek and to save you, the lost. What a miraculous story of love. When we see it and it deepens into our hearts, we are transformed and we stop regulating what God can and can't do in our lives.

What is conversion? Conversion is very simple: It is faith and repentance. Verse 6 says that Zacchaeus hurried down, he came down, and he received Jesus joyfully. It's a picture of faith. He received him into his house, but he received him into his life. He received him into his heart. He trusted in Jesus Christ. He abandoned his life and he repented.

Repentance is an about face. It is a confession of sin and it is to turn and to go the other way. I have lived for this, now I live for you. I lived for self, now I live for you. Zacchaeus was converted. He was changed in a moment. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" - Romans 6:23.

The third and final observation is: A Clear Mission Statement. A Despised Man, A Dramatic Conversion, and A Clear Mission Statement. As I said earlier, this event is mostly about the initiative

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of Jesus, not Zacchaeus. There is this concise statement regarding Jesus' purpose in Luke 19:10: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

I would like to just leave us with a few thoughts about how to walk that out, how that begins in our hearts. It begins, very simply, with loving people. We love people because we are loved by God. He showed us his dramatic love, his immeasurable love and mercy.

You know, there is a part of this story that we haven't really mentioned yet, but it's a feature. It's a main feature in the story, and it was that Zacchaeus was short. He was unable to see Jesus, and the crowd made it even more impossible, so he ran ahead and he climbed up into a sycamore tree. The sycamore tree was like an oak tree that was lower to the ground with long lateral branches. It would have been an easy tree to climb up in. So Zacchaeus climbed up into it.

The story seems to say to us that there was more to Zacchaeus than his height, or lack thereof, and there was more to him than his wealth and how he acquired it. It has taken me a lifetime to learn that often as people, we poke fun at various features that make other people distinct. We call attention to size: big or small, tall or short, thin or heavy. We call attention to hair: to hair color, to thickness, curls, or gray, or lack of hair, colored hair. It has taken a lifetime for me to realize that this is generally not funny, and though the person often plays along, it's not really edifying for that individual.

I am not saying for a moment let's pretend there are no differences. Let's not fail to celebrate our uniqueness in God. God loves people. He loves short people. He loves tall people. He loves bald people. "Amen," someone said, right? He loves white people. He loves black people. He loves poor people. He loves rich people. He loves babies. He loves the elderly. He loves you if you are single. He loves you if you are married. He loves Jews. He loves Gentiles. He loves people. You know what? He loves sinners!

So we have here a mission statement. Classes on Wednesday night exist, not just for my benefit. It's not just, "Well, I think I could benefit..." "No! I'm on a mission to seek and to save the lost! I've got to get equipped! Who can I take with me? Who can I share this with? When I listen to this sermon, how will I take this truth so that I can translate it to someone else to help them grow? It's not just a dead end with me, because I have a mission, and this is the mission of Jesus: To seek and to save the lost." So when we walk into a room we say, "Lord, who are you seeking in this place? Who are you saving today?"

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What does it mean to seek? It means to care. It means to love. It means to listen. May God help us to cultivate a genuine curiosity about others, so that we are not just delivering a message or just delivering an evangelistic message. Jesus went to his house! Jesus fellowshiped with the man. He got into his life and he invited Zacchaeus into his. "I want you to come down from the tree. Take me to your house." Seeking, caring, loving, listening.

I think in many ways, Riverside, you excel in this as a church. I don't want to pretend that we always get it right, but I believe that this is a grace that's on you as a people. Today's message hopefully clarifies for us that mission in a concise statement: Loving people with faith for God to bless anyone, because no one is beyond the reach of God. Let's pray.