



**All Saints' Thornton Hough Sermon**

**Zachaeus. Luke 19 1-10.**

When I was growing up, it seemed enough for a company to have a trading name and a brand name. Now it seems that everybody has to have a mission statement. Mission statements dot com says 'A strong mission statement brings your essence into focus so it is crystal clear who you are, what you do, and why you do it. So for example Starbucks: 'To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.' What, I wonder would be Jesus' Christ's mission statement? I suggest to you that it would be the very words that we read in v10 of our NT/Gospel reading this evening:

'For the Son of Man (that is Jesus) came to seek and save what was lost.' I suspect you may be very familiar with the story: Jesus and his disciples visit Jericho, large crowds attend him. A local employee of the Inland Revenue – not a popular man to say the least – name of Zacchaeus desires to see Jesus. However, this 'nasty little cheat' as one children's Bible describes him is, shall we say, vertically challenged – too short to see over the people lining the road. Nobody was going to move aside for the most unpopular man in Jericho. So, extraordinarily, he runs ahead and climbs into a sycamore fig tree. (Isn't it remarkable, by the way, that Luke researched this story so carefully for us, that he even records the type of tree that Zacchaeus climbs into.) I guess that Zacchaeus was hoping for a glimpse of Jesus, but then something quite spine tingling happens: blow me down, Jesus actually stops and looks up into the tree and spots Zacchaeus clinging to the branches. And then, wonder of wonders, he addresses him by name: 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' Jesus seems to know the guy's name – no evidence that they had ever met before. Zacchaeus must have been utterly flabbergasted, but delighted at the same time. He welcomes Jesus gladly but the crowd are filled with disapproval. Zacchaeus is completely changed by his meeting with Jesus, who proclaims that salvation has come to his house, which is another way of saying that Zacchaeus the lost man is now found and Zaccheus the man who was in grave danger is now saved.' The story is surely one of the high points of Luke's Gospel.

You may know that tax collectors were doubly hated in the Israel of Jesus day. Firstly they worked for the hated Roman government – the foreign power

occupying the country of the Jews – and secondly they earned a living – a good living – by swindling people out of more tax than they owed and keeping it themselves. This Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector – the lowest form of pond life so far as the people of Jericho were concerned, but Jesus says (v9) this man too, is a son of Abraham. The one who had been cheating Abraham's natural descendants, is called a true son of Abraham. It is no surprise that the crowd were disgusted that Jesus should want to stay with this Zacchaeus, but for us, this is a highly significant account and one of which we should take careful note. Two points this evening:

1. Jesus came to seek what was lost.
2. Jesus came to save what was lost.

Let us look at those things one at a time.

### **1. Jesus came to seek what was lost.**

Zaccheus was undoubtedly one of the lost men of Luke's Gospel, not in the sense that he had forgotten his way home but in the sense that he was a stranger to God and far from him. He had no idea how to get back to God and I suspect that he realised that there would be a day of reckoning with God one day and that it would not go well for him. Zaccheus was helplessly lost. At Leck Fell in Lancashire is a cave with the melancholy name of 'Lost Johns' cave. The cave is a popular venue for modern cavers, but curiously the apostrophe occurs after the 's' at the end of Johns and not before. According to legend "two men - both of whom were named John - having once, after their candles had gone out, utterly lost their way". I have done some caving and I can think of few things more terrifying than being lost underground in complete darkness. And yet the state of Zacchaeus the tax collector was worse even than this.

Zaccheus was in no position to help himself, he needed someone to find him and that is exactly what the Lord Jesus did. Jesus Christ came to Jericho to find lost Zacchaeus and, as ever, he did. It was a divine set up – a rescue engineered by God himself. Who gave Zacchaeus that desire to see Jesus? Who compelled him to run along the road and climb that tree, making a complete spectacle of himself? And there there is the mysterious knowledge that Jesus seemed to have of the man; 'Zaccheus'! Jesus calls him by name. 'I must stay at your house today.' This was not a chance encounter, Jesus Christ quite deliberately invited himself to Zacchaeus' house because he was on a mission to find a man who was lost and bring him home to God. Here is the Good Shepherd going in search of the lost sheep and finding him in a tree in Jericho.

The call to Zacchaeus, filled as it is with the irresistible authority and grace of God overwhelms Zacchaeus and he responds immediately with glad obedience. Welcome Lord Jesus, welcome to my home. Zacchaeus has not

found God, as the popular press would have it, God has found him and he is full of joy.

The disapproving crowd mutter that Jesus 'has gone to be the guest of a sinner.' In one respect they are quite right, Zacchaeus is a sinner. But that is the Lord Jesus all over. He was once called the 'friend of sinners.' The name was meant by his enemies as an insult, but Jesus wore that particular badge with pride and he does so still. What the crowd does not see is that they are just as lost as Zacchaeus – strangers to God and far from Him.

I can identify with Zacchaeus. It was when I was a boy at Prep School that I first came to an understanding of the good news of Jesus. The news that although I was a sinner and deserving of God's judgement, Jesus Christ had come to this earth and had suffered and died in my place, bearing my penalty so that I might know his complete forgiveness and acceptance. In God's goodness he compelled me to welcome Jesus as my saviour and my Lord. I take absolutely no credit at all for that. I wasn't even looking for Jesus when, as it were, he came looking for me. God has sometimes been compared to a bloodhound in the way that he graciously tracks us down.

## **2. Jesus came to save what was lost.**

Look, if you will, at v9: 'Today' Jesus says, 'salvation has come to this house.' Zacchaeus has just been saying that he intended to repay all his ill begotten gains with interest. Was it because Zacchaeus had committed to doing this that Jesus pronounced him a saved man. Was Jesus saying 'well now that you have cleaned up your act, you have redeemed yourself?' A thousand times no! Zacchaeus reacted in this way because he was already a saved man when he decided to repay the money. He did not repay the money and then become saved, rather he was saved by Jesus and responded by repaying the stolen cash. It was a sign that Zacchaeus was already a saved man.

You see Jesus calls Zacchaeus 'a son of Abraham.' As a Jew, Zacchaeus probably did share a few genes with Abraham but that was not the point. The real point is that Zaccheus' attitude was so like that of Abraham that they were like Father and Son. In the Bible, Abraham is held up as the prime example of a man who trusted God and relied upon God to fulfill his promises. The Bible says that Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' (Rom 4: 3). Zacchaeus, like Abraham before him trusted Jesus for his forgiveness and acceptance before God – that is what made him a true son of Abraham. 'It is not the natural children who are God's children', says Romans 'but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.'

What Zacchaeus understood imperfectly, we can see with greater clarity because we have a complete Bible. Jesus has come to us, he has died for the sins of the world and God promises that all who come to him, trusting in the sacrifice of Christ and not in any merit of their own, will enjoy his complete

forgiveness and acceptance for ever, just as Zacchaeus did. Some of you may have heard me talk about the lightning conductor....

You may not be up a tree, but will you hear the call of God that he repeats over and over again in Scripture: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' (Matthew's Gospel)' In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent...' (St Luke writing in the acts of the apostles). How will we respond to such a call? Will we be like that crowd that distained the Lord Jesus, or will we be like Zaccheus who welcomed him gladly. Zacchaeus' house is not the only one that the Lord Jesus wishes to enter. In the book of Revelation, he said to those in the church at Laodicea ' here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.