

MERCY AND MISSION

THE RISING // DARK

Luke 19:1-10 // Craig Smith

March 26, 2017

I BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY AS I BELIEVE THAT THE SUN HAS RISEN, NOT ONLY BECAUSE I SEE IT, BUT BECAUSE BY IT I SEE EVERYTHING ELSE. - C.S. LEWIS

CRAIG: Good morning. Welcome to Mission Hills I've been super excited about today because we're launching our six-week Easter series. Don't worry, you still got a few weeks to buy candy and whatever else you need to do. But we wanted to get started right away sort of moving ourselves towards Easter, because I think, sometimes, Easter...it kinda bursts on the scene so quickly that we don't have the opportunity to really settle in and reflect on what exactly it means. And so, to get ready for Easter we're gonna be following along in the Gospel of Luke, as we look at some of the key events that led up to the crucifixion and the resurrection.

So, if you got a Bible -- and if you don't please grab one from the seats in front of you -- I'd love to have you join me in the Gospel of Luke. We're gonna be in chapter 19 this morning, and while you're finding your way there, let me just say we're gonna be looking this morning at a story of a man named Zacchaeus. And if you are new to the Bible, if you're new to church, that's awesome, and you may not know that name. And I'm actually gonna say that if you don't know who Zacchaeus is, I kind of envy you, because you're gonna actually be able to come to the story with fresh eyes this morning. But those of us who maybe spent some time in church or especially if you grew up in Sunday schools kinda thing, Zacchaeus is an immediately familiar name. And we actually might have some blinders that really keep from seeing what God wants to say to us here, so let's just take a quick moment and actually ask God to allow us to see everything that He has for us this morning.

God, we thank you that Your word is true and we thank you that it's timeless. I know that it has significance for us today that You have something to say to each and every one of us, and I just ask that You move in our hearts and in our minds to get rid of anything that might get in the way and allow us to fully understand what it is You're speaking to us this morning. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Luke 19:1 begins this way. "Jesus entered Jericho and He was passing through." He's passing through because He's on His way to Jerusalem. He had already told His disciples earlier in the book, "We're going to Jerusalem and I'm gonna die, and then I'm gonna rise again." So Jericho was sort of a waypoint along the way, but it was an important waypoint because verse 2 says that, "A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and he was wealthy." And I wanna make sure you understand that Luke has gone out of his way to emphasize Zacchaeus's name. Luke actually doesn't usually use proper nouns of people that sort of Jesus encounters. Luke usually says things like "a certain man was there" or "a woman was there," but in this particular case he kinda breaks his pattern and he specifically mentions this guy's name, even though we're only gonna encounter them for these few verses. Why does he do that? Well, I think it's because his name's a little ironic. The name Zacchaeus in the Hebrew was built off of the word for 'purity,' and Zacchaeus is anything but pure as Luke describes him. He tells us two things that suggest that Zacchaeus is not living up to his name. He says that he is a chief tax collector, that's the first one. He's chief tax collector, and the tax collectors in general are probably not the most popular people, right? About that time of year, can I get an "amen"? Yeah, okay.

In ancient Israel it was far worse, though, because in ancient Israel, they were considered traitors and thieves, traitors because they collected money from their own people and then they sent them off to a foreign government. Okay? So they're considered traitors. They're also considered thieves because they typically extorted far more than was actually due for taxes from the people and then they lined their own pockets with it. And so the whole idea of a tax collector is really...in the Jewish mind, it's somebody



who is not a friend of God or of his people. But Luke actually goes a little bit further and calls him a chief tax collector. And in doing that, he actually creates a new word, he takes the word for sort of 'top' or 'chief' and he shoves it together with 'tax collector,' so it's all one big word. And I've never seen it anywhere before, and I'm not entirely sure what it means. It might mean that he was in charge of other tax collectors, or it might mean that of all of the tax collectors, he was the most tax collector-y.

And in either way, what Luke's point is, is like whatever is wrong with normal tax collectors is doubly wrong with this guy. Okay? The other thing he tells us about Zacchaeus that's not flattering, is that he says that he was wealthy. And throughout the Gospel of Luke, wealth is consistently portrayed as an obstacle to trusting God. In fact, just a little bit before this, Jesus had an interaction with a rich ruler and He made this declaration. He said, "Indeed it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." He says, "Think about the biggest animal you guys know, think about the smallest opening you know and try to imagine that big thing going through that little thing, and you're gonna understand how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God," but that's not because riches are inherently evil, it's not because money is inherently evil. It's just that money exerts a tremendous gravity on us. It tends to pull us into its orbit and make us feel like we've got it, we're taken care of and we depend upon it rather than God, and that's a consistent theme throughout the Gospel of Luke. And so when he tells us his name was a chief tax collector and he's wealthy, not only does he have the sort of the natural temptation of his wealth to prevent him from really seeing God well, but we also know that he got his wealth by extorting it from his people. And so, in his ways Luke says this guy is not pure. His name might be 'purity,' but his life is absolutely not a reflection of that. This is a guy who is not a friend of God and is not a friend of God's people. It's the kinda guy you wanna avoid like the plague, but that's not what Jesus did.

"Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. But because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. And so he ran ahead and he climbed the sycamore fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way." Now, I wanna pause here and make sure that we understand what Zacchaeus wanted to do and why he was having trouble doing it. And what did Zacchaeus wanna do? Well, Luke's very clear, he says, "He wanted to see who Jesus was." And pay attention to that phrase, he says, "He wanted to see who Jesus was." He doesn't say he wanted to see Jesus, he says he wanted to see who He was. It's not a casual glimpse, it's not like he heard Jesus was around and he's like, "I've always wondered what that guy looked like." [inaudible 00:06:24] "Oh, he looks like that." No, no, he wanted to see who Jesus was. He was seeking not a glimpse, he was seeking understanding.

Now, we don't know exactly why he was so interested in Jesus. But Luke makes it pretty clear that he was...my translation says, "He wanted to see," the Greek word there is actually, "He was seeking to see." It's a pretty powerful word. It implies a certain amount of emotional investment. It's actually the same word that we're gonna see a little bit later this morning. Jesus said, "I came seeking the lost." It's not just a casual outing like, "Oh, let me take this guy out." Zacchaeus has some kind of an emotional investment in finding out who Jesus was, there's something driving him. I mean, you don't even need to sort of, you know, unpack the meaning of 'wanted' or 'seeking' here, maybe just think about what happened. The guy climbed the tree, like an adult man climbing a tree, that's a little bit embarrassing, right? It sort of shows you he was serious about this, he really had some kind of investment in this. And then, I don't wanna belabor this, but in those days they wore robes -- some of you are with me, right? -- which means that if you're climbing up a tree, your business is exposed to everybody underneath. You've got to be committed to this search. If you're willing to climb, don't think about that too much, okay? But you see what I'm saying. I mean, if you just look at the story, you're definitely left with the impression Zacchaeus is serious about this. And in fact the perfectly natural way to translate what Luke says here would be, say, "Zacchaeus was desperately searching for an opportunity to see who Jesus really was." But he had a problem, right? There was something getting in the way of him seeing who Jesus was, what was it? He was short. He was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. Can I get an Amen? No, no, no, don't do that.

Sunday school...by the way, if you have no idea what people are laughing about, old Sunday school song about Zacchaeus. Okay, let me just give a quick apology. I'm gonna call that into question. I'm not saying it's wrong, because it's certainly a possible interpretation of what Luke says here, and he...I can understand why most translations go that way. It's possible, but I'm not sure that it's probable. And let me explain why I say that, I'm gonna actually put up a very literal translation of what Luke says



here. “But he was not able on account of the crowd because he was small of stature.” And “small of stature”...I mean, obviously we go, “Oh yeah, he was a short guy,” and again that’s entirely possible, just not sure that that catches everything that is going on here. This word for stature can refer to physical height, but it’s not a common word to refer to physical height. It’s normally the word that was used to refer to age and maturity. You would talk about a child growing up into their full stature, becoming mature, literally. But figuratively, it was very commonly used to talk about social standing, it was a way of saying that somebody was respected by the community. And you can see how the two go together. Young children, small children, don’t have much social standing. They’re loved, but they’re not respected, right? They’re adorable, but you’re not gonna put them in front of congress to testify on something because they don’t have that kind of social standing, they don’t have that kind of status, they don’t have that kind of stature. But as they grow up, as they become not only physically bigger, they also grow in their respect from the community. They come to have a certain amount of status.

In fact, Luke seems to use this exact same word when he talks about Jesus. You don’t have to turn there, but in Luke 2:52, when he’s describing Jesus growing up, he says, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature in favor with God and men.” He grew in wisdom and in stature, same word, in favor with God and men, and clearly, growing in wisdom is connected to His favor with God, and growing stature is connected with His favor with men. I don’t think he’s saying Jesus got taller, he’s saying, people began to look to this guy. People began to look up to him and he was respected, he had a social standing. And so we know that Luke uses this word sometimes to refer not to physical height, but to the respect that somebody had from the community and so what he may be saying is that, as far as Zacchaeus goes, the community had no respect for him. They looked down on him, which makes perfect sense given what he’s already told us about Zacchaeus, right? But you know what? Honestly, whether he’s talking about physical height or social standing, that’s a secondary issue. The primary issue that Luke draws attention to is not Zacchaeus in his small stature, whatever that means, it’s the crowd. He says “he was not able to on account of crowd.” In Greek, the order of words tends to be a little bit more significant than in English, and in the sentence, Luke puts the crowd front and center. He says, “Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, but he couldn’t because of the crowd.” And then he offers kind of a side note, “because he was small of stature.” That’s interesting.

Luke says that the primary obstacle to Zacchaeus seeing who Jesus was, was the crowd. Now, I’ve always wondered, I remember being in Sunday school and wondering. I remember asking the question and I was kinda swooshed. I said, “Why didn’t he just go to the front of the crowd?” I mean, if he’s just a short guy and the crowd’s full of tall people...and by the way, Luke could’ve said that. He could’ve said he could not see who Jesus was because he was short and the crowd was tall. But even in that case, I mean, short people go to parades. I’m a short guy, I go to parades. You just have to put yourself in the right position. Right? I mean, all Zacchaeus would have had to have done was to push forward to the front of the crowd, right? I mean, yeah. I mean, that would’ve required a certain amount of what the Jewish people call a chutzpah. We call it moxie or gumption or self-assertion. I mean, yeah, he would’ve had to, like, push his way through, but he’s a tax collector, he’s a wealthy tax collector. I’m pretty sure he’s got a little bit of self-assuredness. I’m pretty sure he’s not a guy who lacks assertiveness. So why didn’t he just push his way to the front of the crowd to see? Because the crowd wouldn’t let him, the crowd actively resisted. Whether his problem was because he was short or his problem was that he was despised, the point that Luke is making is the crowd actively prevented him from getting to the place where he could see Jesus. The crowd made themselves into a literal wall, forcing Zacchaeus to take more drastic actions.

Here’s the thing, Jesus loves to knock down the walls that others build up that keep people from Him. You hear me? People put up walls that keep others from getting to Jesus, Jesus goes, “That wall’s coming down.” Jesus loves to knock down the walls that others put up to keep people from coming to Jesus, which makes it really important that we not be part of those walls. “Now, when Jesus reached the spot where Zacchaeus was, He looked up and He said to him, “Zacchaeus come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” And so he came down at once, and he welcomed Him gladly. And all the people saw this and they began to mutter, “He’s going to be the guest of a sinner.” This is the key moment, not only in the story, this is the key moment really in the Gospel of Luke. This is a significant waypoint on the road to the cross, because what we see happening here is we see Jesus’ heart, we see the people’s heart and we see that they don’t mesh, what we see is they clash.



We see Jesus' heart because He initiated this interaction with Zacchaeus. I mean, clearly they hadn't met yet, but Jesus knows his name, Jesus calls at him, Jesus takes the initiative, He reaches out to this despised man, to this sinner. We see the people's heart, too, because they're not happy about it, are they? They began to mutter, and that word 'mutter'...it's not just like they were saying it under their breath, what it means they were grumbling, they were complaining, they were calling Jesus' character into question. "What's this guy doing? Why would He hang out with a sinner? Don't you understand what a disgusting mess this guy is? Why would you go to be...? What is up with this Jesus guy? I thought He was on our side. I thought He was a good guy, what's He doing?" They're calling His character into question. And as I said, this is a pivotal moment, because up to this point, Jesus has been pretty popular with the crowds. He's had a few run-ins with hypocritical religious leaders that are concerned that they're losing power as Jesus gained popularity. But apart from the religious leaders, Jesus has been thumbs up with the crowds.

Interestingly enough, in Luke chapter 15, in describing one of these encounters with the hypocritical religious leaders, this is what they say, that's Luke 15:2, "But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered..." -- exact same word by the way -- "...This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Sound familiar? Yeah, it's almost exactly what the people are now muttering. And you understand, what I'm saying is that this is a pivotal moment, because previously what had been confined to the religious leaders now is spreading into the crowds. Previously, it was only the hypocritical religious leaders, they were upset with Jesus and what was happening, but now we are beginning to see that same dissatisfaction, that same frustration, that same anger, it's spreading into the crowds of people.

See, the people were thrilled of what Jesus had to offer them, but they were upset about who else He was willing to offer it to. You see it? They were thrilled with what Jesus offered them, healing and hope and all these great things, but "You're gonna take all the stuff you're gonna offer me and you're gonna offer to that guy?" for all that Jesus offered them, but upset about who else He was willing to offer it to. And as I said, this is a pivotal moment. If we were standing, I think, on the streets that day and if we looked to the distant horizon, we would start to see storm clouds gather. This is a pivotal waypoint on the road to the cross. This is the reason why even though the series that we're talking about is called, "The rising," we're starting in this place we're calling "The dark" because it's beginning to get dark. The same crowds that are just grumbling now, in a few weeks, are gonna be screaming, "Crucify Him." Why? Because His heart and their hearts not only don't mesh, they conflict.

But Zacchaeus stood up and he said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I've cheated anybody out of anything I'll pay back four times the amount." And we need to understand what is happening here. I've read several different interpretations over the years, but in my opinion what we're seeing here is Zacchaeus is trying to justify himself to Jesus. And I think that there's a "but" at the beginning of that sentence that I think it's pretty important. The crowd said, "This guy is a sinner," but Zacchaeus said, "No I'm not. I'm a good guy. I can prove it here, I'll prove it. I'll give half of what I possess to the poor. Would a bad guy do that? Would a sinner do that? No. I'm a good guy, don't listen to them. Don't withdraw your invitation. Please, don't revoke it. Please, please come. Don't listen to them, I'm a good guy. And you know what, even if I'm not, I can fix it. Even if I've cheated anybody, I'll give them back four times. I'm a good guy, and even when I'm not I can fix it. Don't listen to them." The problem is he's not a good guy. Luke's already made that clear. And the problem is that he can't fix it, none of us can.

But Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham." Now, most translations don't have a "but" at the beginning of verse 9, but it's there in the Greek. And I think it's important, because in the same way that Zacheus is responding to his rebutting, the crowd's assessment of him, Jesus is rebutting Zacchaeus' attempts of justifying himself. The crowd said, "He's a sinner," but Zacchaeus said, "No I'm not, and even if I've sinned, I can fix it." But Jesus said, "Yes you are, and no you can't. But Zacchaeus, it's okay. I'm not gonna withdraw the invitation. I'm coming to your house because you're a sinner. I came to your town because it's full of sinners, I came to Earth because it's full of sinners, and that's why I came. That's not gonna turn me away, this is my mission."

He says, verse 10, "The Son of Man..." -- his favorite title for Himself -- "...the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." He came to seek and to save the lost. And He's doing kinda a little play on words, He said to Zacchaeus when he looked up, "I



must come to your house, I must come to your house,” and now He says to Zacchaeus, “Salvation has come to your house. I come to your house, salvation has come to your house.” Did you catch it? Jesus is salvation. Jesus is salvation incarnate, Jesus is salvation in the flesh and Jesus invited Himself into Zacchaeus’ house, fully knowing that he was a sinner, that’s why He wanted to come. What Zacchaeus needs to do at this point is he needs to just fess up, just get real, just stop trying to justify yourself and recognize, “Zacchaeus, I still love you.” Jesus says, “This man is a son of Abraham.” And in the Jewish language what that means is he’s one of God’s people. He’s loved by God in spite of the fact that his behavior caused the crowd to think that he couldn’t possibly be loved by God. Jesus says, “Zacchaeus, you’re being misled by the crowd. The crowd is saying that I shouldn’t eat with you because you’re a sinner, so you’re trying to convince me you’re not a sinner because you think I can’t possibly love you. Listen, your behavior has no bearing on my love for you. Your behavior has no bearing on my love for you, I love you in spite of all that. So let’s just get real with each other, I’m coming to your house. Salvation is coming to your house.” And I think there’s an incredibly important truth here that we need to push into for a moment. We gotta get a handle on it, because it’s the only foundation that will really allow us to move out of dark in the dawn and then ultimately in the day to really celebrate and fully embrace the significance not only of the cross, but of the empty grave, that God loves the lost.

Listen, if you’re like Zacchaeus, please get a hold of this truth today, you’re lost, but you’re loved. Maybe you know you’re like Zacchaeus. Maybe you’re here today and you know your life is a mess. You know that you’ve not just committed sin, but you’re a sinner, and that you can’t break out of that on your own. You’ve tried and you failed and you realize that your life does not look like what you know God meant it to look like and you’re just...you’re broken and you’re going, “I get it, I’m a mess, I am lost.” Okay, great, but understand you’re lost, but you’re loved. You are exactly the reason Jesus came to earth, you are the one that Jesus came looking for. You’re lost, but you’re loved. Or maybe you’re really like Zacchaeus. Maybe you’re still trying to justify yourself, maybe you’re still saying, “Listen, I’m not a bad person. Listen, I’m actually, I’m a good guy, I’m a good. And even when I mess up I can totally fix it, I can totally make it right.” No, you’re not good, and no you can’t fix it. And I know that’s the hardest thing in the world to realize.

I mean, as a guy I get it. Admitting that you’re lost, not easy, whether you’re talking on the streets, or in life. But I had come to this point, I grew up in a good household, I grew up in a good family, I grew up as a good kid, but I still had to come to that moment when I went, “You know what, I’m not good. Not like God is. I’m actually...I’m a sinner. And I can’t fix it, I can’t make it right.” And it’s at that moment that I hear the words of Jesus, “Okay good, now we’re getting real. Okay, yeah, you’re lost, we agree. But you’re loved.” You know what, maybe you’re like the crowd. Maybe you’re like the crowd in the sense that you’ve received grace and mercy, you’ve been saved, you’ve been found by Jesus. You came to that point, you admitted, “I’m lost,” and you heard Jesus saying, “Yeah,” and you’re loved and you embrace the salvation that He offered to you, you’ve been rescued by Him, and now you’re in a place that you look around at the world and you’re like, “What is wrong with those people?” You look at people who are still lost and what you feel is contempt rather than compassion. What you feel is disgust and, “I just...get them out of here, get them away from me,” rather than a brokenness for where they are and where they’re headed, in which case you’ve got to hear the words of Jesus as well. “Yeah, they’re lost, but they’re loved.” If you’re like the crowd, hear the words of Jesus and grab a hold of them today and wrestle with them. They’re lost, but they’re loved.

Here is a difficult question, “Who do you think Jesus is more frustrated with this day? The man whose behavior upset the crowd or the crowd whose behavior prevented this man from getting to Jesus?” I’ll answer it for you. It was the crowd. In fact, throughout the Gospels, it’s very, very clear. It’s unmissable if you look. Jesus’s greatest frustration was with those who hoarded mercy without embracing mission. Hear this, it’s important. His greatest frustration is with those who hoard His mercy without embracing His mission, who receive His forgiveness, His grace and His mercy and go, “Thank you,” but not for those people, not for that guy, not for that woman who lives in my street, not for that person in the cubicle next to me, not for that person that I see when she’s picking up her kids from school and I’m picking up mine, not for them, you’re hoarding mercy and not embracing His mission, and Jesus’ greatest frustration was with those people over and over and over again the gospel, and that’s why the storm clouds are gathering, because what we’re gonna see over the next few weeks is that His mission is at the forefront and the people want nothing to do with that, not if it’s gonna involve people like that.



Why does Jesus care so much about the lost? Two very simple reasons. The first we've already said, because the lost are loved. Jesus cares about the lost, and He's so frustrated when His people who have received mercy refuse to embrace mission, because the lost are loved. They're created as God's image, they're His beloved children, but He has a lost relationship with them. Their relationship with Him is broken, it's severed, and that grieves God. I'll go so far as to say it hurts God, because God speaks in consistent terms about His deep and abiding passion for them. That's why Jesus said, "I came seeking the lost," not just casually looking to see if there's any out here. No, He came desperately searching for the lost because He loves them.

I have actually never shared this apart from this weekend, and I think just because even when I talk about it hurts. But several years ago, I woke up in the middle of the night one of those sort of, you know, 2 a.m. awakenings from a terrible nightmare, and I don't think I talked my wife about this, but the substance of that nightmare was that one of my kids grew up and decided they wanted nothing to do with me. Moved out, wouldn't answer phone calls, wouldn't respond to emails or texts, wouldn't come back, wouldn't allow us to come, just complete and utter severing of the relationship. And the thing is, like, when I woke up, there was a part of me that knew that's a silly nightmare, that's not what my relationship with kids look like, there's no reason to think it would ever go that way, but what I remember vividly is just the weight of sadness at thinking that that could ever happen and in realizing laying there at night that the sadness that I felt over a silly nightmare...I probably had a bad pizza that night. But the weight of sadness at the thought of having a broken relationship with my child is nothing compared to what God feels about the broken relationship he actually has with so many of his children. The lost are loved, and that's why Jesus cares so much about them, that's why He gets so frustrated when people will hoard His mercy but not embrace His mission to them. And the second reason that He cares so much about the lost is that hell is real, hell is real.

If you've been coming for a while, you know I don't look for opportunities to talk about hell. I don't use it as is a bludgeon to try to scare people into the gospel or into the church. I don't use it as a guilt tool to try to guilt people into sharing the gospel. I don't do that, but we have to recognize what the Bible says, because the Bible says it pretty clearly. There's only two possible destinies for human beings: there is a destiny of eternal joy because we're in the presence of God, or there's a destiny of endless agony because we're finally and utterly separated from the God of hope, comfort and peace. We call that hell. The Bible is clear. Those are the only options, and the Bible is clear that apart from our relationship with God through faith in Jesus, that is the destiny of the lost who are so deeply loved. And that is why Jesus is so frustrated with people who are willing to hoard His mercy but unwilling to embrace His mission to the lost. And that's why we need to ask this question as we move forward in this Easter series, "Where do I find myself in this story? Where do I find myself in the story? How am I like Zacchaeus? How am I like Zacchaeus?" Maybe you're here today and you go, "Yeah, that that's where I find myself, I'm I am Zacchaeus. I'm lost and I've been trying to fix it, but if we're gonna be really real, if that's what you really want to happen, yeah, I can't fix it. I get it."

Okay, you know, I've got great news for you today. Saying you're lost is not bad news. It's the first step to the great news. You're lost, but you're loved and as long as you're willing to admit it, you can take hold of His love and His mercy and His grace. You can be forgiven, you can be made clean, everything about you from now for the rest of eternity can be turned around.

Here at Mission Hills, I often use this pretty simple thing, and I hope that it doesn't oversimplify the good news, but I think it illustrates it so well. Taking hold of what Jesus offers you if you're like Zacchaeus, if you're lost, you just say, "I'm lost, I admit it." Then there's other ways you can say it. You can say, "I sinned, I've done wrong," but you say, "I'm lost." And then you say, "I'm sorry, I own it." And then you say, "Jesus, thank you for going to the cross for me. Jesus, thank you for rising from the dead to prove that you've done it. Please come into my life and save me." With those five things, you see what happens is we take hold of His lifeline, we take hold of his promise, we take hold of salvation.

That's it. "I'm lost, I get it, I admit it. I'm sorry. Thank you for dying for me, thank you for rising, please come into my life." And in that way we take...and you can say that today. Before the day is over, before the moment is over, you can ignore everything else I'm gonna say this morning and you can have that conversation with God right now and you will not be lost anymore. Please, if you're like Zacchaeus, do not leave today without taking hold of what He offers you. There's gonna be some people down here praying at the end of the service, and if you need some more processing time, if you wanna talk to somebody about that, if you



can't remember, "I'm lost, I'm sorry, thank you for the cross, thank you for the empty grave. Please, come into my life," if you can't remember that, come talk to one of those people, talk to me. But don't let today go any further, don't move any closer to Easter in a place of lostness because you don't have to be there anymore, He came to seek and to save you. Maybe the question is, "How am I like the crowd? What attitudes, what actions, what -- I don't know -- apathy keeps people from seeing Jesus because of me?" Maybe as I, said maybe it is, that you feel contempt rather than compassion, you need to confess that, the good news is that the cross of Jesus forgives that too. Maybe it's just that you don't care. Maybe you just don't care about the lost in the way that Jesus does, in which case, again, the cross forgives that. Just confess it, be forgiven and start new.

Stop hoarding His mercy and start also embracing His mission. But ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and say, "Yeah, you know what, you just don't care enough here or you just don't feel like you have time here, or maybe there's actually some animosity that's keeping you from really showing...maybe you're returning anger for anger with a neighbor or coworker or family member, but in what way are you like the crowd, actively preventing people from seeing who Jesus is?" That's not a place we wanna be as individuals or as a church. And then maybe the weirdest question of all, "How can I be the tree?" How's God calling you to be the tree, the thing that not only doesn't get in the way of people seeing who Jesus is, but the thing that actively allows people to catch that glimpse? How can I be the tree?"

You know, some really simple ways, where we talked last week about some evangelism training classes that were offering some opportunities to help figure out what it looks like to build relationships and really care for people and share the good news with them. And if you didn't sign up for one those, on your way out, stop by the Welcome Center and say, "I wanna sign up for one of those classes," and they'll get you signed up. Maybe that's one of the ways that you look to be the tree. Maybe last week as we were collecting those names that we said, "I'm gonna pray for this person and I'd like the church staff to be praying for this person, and maybe I'll invite them to an Easter service," we had 600 names collected, so excited about that. We were praying over all those names, but you know what? Maybe you didn't drop off one of those cards, and yet God put somebody on your heart, in which case, you know what? Grab that connection card out of the seats in front of you, write their name on it and drop it off in the Welcome Center and we'll join you in praying for that person. And we'll be praying that God gives you the courage to just invite them to come to an Easter service with you. Maybe that's how you'll be the tree.

Maybe God calls you to be the tree by heading out there at the Welcome Center and saying, "I will help on Easter, I'll cleanup between services, I'll help with kids, I'll help in the parking lot." We're looking at probably more than 8000 people here this Easter. We need your help to make them comfortable so that they get to hear the good news of Jesus, that they're lost, but they're loved. And so maybe just volunteering in one of those is one of the ways that you'll be the tree. Or maybe God put somebody in your heart and He's saying, "It's time for you to get to get real about reaching out to them," building a relationship with a neighbor or a coworker or a family member. It's the greatest frustration. And as we're gonna see this over the next few weeks, it was not a minor frustration. It developed even in the anger on Jesus's part. It was with people who were perfectly willing to receive mercy, but they were unwilling to embrace the mission. We don't wanna be those people.

Let's pray. Jesus, we thank you that you came for us in spite of the fact that we were lost and that you came for us because we were lost and your love for us was too profound, the consequence of our lostness too painful for you to not come. So we thank you that you came seeking to save the lost, because I was lost, every one of us in this room either was lost or is currently lost, but there's a solution to that. So if there's anyone here that has not received your mercy, I pray that you not let them out of this place today until they've taken a hold of it. Lord, we confess that it's pretty easy for us to become the crowd even accidentally by our apathy or by our attitudes and anger or whatever it is. We actually prevent people from seeing you and we confess those things. We ask for your forgiveness, and we're grateful that we know that we have it because of the cross and the empty grave that we're heading towards the celebration of. Oh, would you speak to each one of our hearts about how to be the tree in this coming week, or even before we walk out of this place today? In Jesus' name, Amen.



