

Zacchaeus finds Life

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There was a man who was called Zacchaeus and there came a point of time in his life when he met the Lord Jesus Christ and there is recorded for us a passage, **Luke 19: 1-10**, the encounter between the Lord Jesus Christ and Zacchaeus.

As we look to the Lord together, I hope that we will be able to learn some helpful lessons in this encounter in the salvation of Zacchaeus.

And my main interest would be to look at three categories here: One, Zacchaeus himself; secondly, the Lord Jesus Christ; and thirdly, the people around them.

As we look at their values, their attitudes, their conduct, their response to the situation, there are lessons which may be helpful for us to ponder over that we too may learn to reject that which is negative, to receive and to follow that which is helpful and positive.

Luke 19: 1-10

- 1 And He entered and was passing through Jericho.
- 2 And behold, there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; and he was a chief tax-gatherer, and he was rich.
- 3 And he was trying to see who Jesus was, and he was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature.
- 4 And he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way.
- 5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."
- 6 And he hurried and came down, and received Him gladly.
- 7 And when they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."
- 8 And Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."
- 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.
- 10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

We are told that the Lord Jesus Christ was coming into Jericho and passing through and in this region there was a man who was rich and he was a tax-gatherer. In fact, he was a chief tax-gatherer which implied that he would have a number of men under him, under his supervision. And during those times, the tax-gatherers who collected the taxes for the Roman people often became rich through improper means.

And in this context we see that this man in **verse 3** we are told he was trying to see who Jesus was and he was unable because of the crowd for he was small in stature. However, he was not deterred by this difficulty but he ran on ahead, climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him for he knew that He was passing through that way.

So we see here an enthusiastic little man, rich and one who was generally despised by the people because during those times, these tax-gatherers were despised by the Jewish people as they worked for the Romans. And he had great enthusiasm in trying to see Jesus, to see who He was.

Perhaps we can ask ourselves the question: Why was Zacchaeus so enthusiastic? Why did he want to take all the trouble to climb up into this tree and to find out who this Jesus was?

I looked up a well-known commentary and there was just a statement that said, "Zacchaeus did all this basically because he was curious; he wanted to know who this man was, so out of curiosity he climbed up on this tree to know who Jesus was.

I can accept that this is a possibility that he may be curious to find out who Jesus was but I think it highly unlikely that that is the only reason for his doing so.

It is possible, but the text does not tell us what is the reason why he did that. Curiosity is a likely reason in the sense that as Jesus moved about, performed miracles, many people followed Him; word must have spread about His work. And in fact, we know that Pilate, Herod also knew about the Lord Jesus Christ and people in such positions would also like to see Jesus performing some miracles. So, certainly a sense of curiosity would often be present among the people who had come to hear of Jesus.

So in this particular case, it seems that Zacchaeus had not yet a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus but he probably had heard about Him and he wanted to see who He was.

Could it be that in his heart there was also a longing and desire to know who He is in the hope that perhaps his life could be changed, a desire to respond to Him? Now here again we are not told that this is the case, but as we look on further in the whole passage, it would seem that at least such a desire is likely to be present to some extent.

But later on we will go on to consider how the Lord Jesus looked at the whole situation.

So in this situation we cannot be certain what was in the heart of Zacchaeus, why he did this. Perhaps there was a mixture of a number of motives in his heart.

And in this regard it is helpful for us also as we look at people not to easily jump to conclusions as to what they are, not only to look at certain angles of their lives because within the heart of men there often are many conflicting thoughts, ideas and longings.

And on the one hand, Zacchaeus may be a man who longs to be rich and quite easily may cheat people to do so, it is not impossible that in his heart too there is a sense of loneliness, a sense of need and a recognition that life is without meaning if he were to continue just that way.

And this we know also as we relate with people that in the heart of man there often is such a longing though often not clearly expressed.

Anyway, whatever was his motive, whatever was within his heart, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ passed by this way and He took special note of this man.

So in **verse 5** we read when Jesus came to the place where Zacchaeus was, He looked up at him where he was on the tree and He said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." So as Jesus passed by this way, we are told that He looked up at him and He said to him, and He called him by name. As far as we can gather, the Lord Jesus had not met this man before but He was totally familiar with him.

He knew his name, He knew why he was there up in the tree and He looked up at him and He called him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."

As we reflect on this, it is helpful for us to think about the Lord Jesus: the way He approached people and His love and His concern, His understanding of human nature. The Lord is fully aware of each one of us – by name as well as by circumstances. And in the gospel of **John Chapter 10**, the apostle John tells us the degree of knowledge, concern and understanding the Lord Jesus has of the people that He seeks to bring to walk with Him.

John chapter 10 speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd and **verse 3** says:

"To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out..."

We know that many people, they keep dogs and cats as pets in their home and very often they would give a name to their dog or their cat so that they can call them and they would respond. But so far, I have not come across shepherds who give names to sheep and call them one by one by name because generally speaking, shepherds looking after flocks, we know that there are many, many sheep and it is very difficult to identify them – they all look very much alike. And generally speaking, they are treated all about the same and without any special name given to them.

But this is not so with the Lord Jesus Christ. He has many sheep and all of us may look alike in some ways but He knows each one of us by name. He takes a personal interest in us and He is fully aware of all our circumstances, our personal lives, our struggles, our needs, our longings.

And at this time as He passed by that way, He must have seen through the heart of Zacchaeus: what was within him, why did he climb up the tree, what was he looking for, what did he want. And the fact that the Lord Jesus paid such attention to him would, in my mind, imply that it is likely that Zacchaeus had a greater longing for something deeper in life which Jesus would be able to satisfy in his life. And Jesus understanding that looked up at him and called upon him.

The way in which we relate with people may often be on just outward appearances. As we see certain people showing interest we may respond in a certain way; others not doing in the same manner, we may respond to them purely by our outward observation of situations. But very often we may not quite understand or know what is within the person and the full circumstances of their lives.

It is quite possible for us to treat people purely from the point of view of principles and situations on the basis of, for example, in the case where a person is poor, we give them some food to eat; when a person is in a situation where he needs other kinds of help, we offer that to them as we understand and see them.

But many of these things that we may do in that kind of manner, if we think about it, we realise that many of these things that we attend to in people's lives could very well have been done also by a robot that understands. When we feed in this information – the person in that kind of state or position, you supply that kind of thing – it is possible just to treat people in that kind of way.

But the Lord Jesus did not treat people purely from the point of view of just principles. He understood their individual circumstances well, and the love of God in His heart reached out to them in full appreciation of their lives.

And in the life of Jesus we see these two principles constantly operative, and I think it helpful for us to reflect on this too in our own lives.

In **Luke chapter 14** we see the Lord Jesus Christ emphasising a very important principle of life: **Luke 14: 33**

"So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions... "

"He who does not renounce or forsake (say goodbye to) all he has cannot be My disciple... "

We see here the Lord Jesus making a very stern statement; it was a principle of life, it was something objective and something He had to lay down because those were His standards – that is the kind of life that He requires.

And in that sense we may view the Lord Jesus Christ as if He did not really understand our circumstances: "How could He set such a high standard? How can He call us to do so such a thing? I have my problems, my difficulties; I have so many things to think about, there are so many struggles in my life; how can I ever respond in this way? He does not really understand!"

So sometimes the Lord Jesus Christ in communicating to us clear principles of God's standard, objectives and demands, may give us the impression that He does not quite understand us in our own individual circumstances.

Yet, it is something important for us to realise and to understand: If we are to properly help people, to love them and to care for them in the way that God does, we too would need to know what are the standards and requirements of God.

We cannot just consider people purely from their individual circumstances. We need to know God's standards and these standards cannot be lowered. The truths of God cannot be compromised just because of human weaknesses and problems and difficulties.

So when the Lord Jesus made such a statement, it is true to say that many of the people would have turned away from Him, many of them would not meet those requirements, many of them would not be prepared to follow Him.

Jesus knew their struggles, He knew their difficulties, and yet He made this statement. That is basically because God is true to Himself; God is true to His very nature. He wants purity of life, He wants holiness, He wants truth, and that is what He calls for. Unless we love truth, unless we want to be like Him, then the Lord would not be prepared to really go along with us according to our standards, our demands and our wishes.

So to be able to understand the principles of life and stand by them is very important. And in spite of the fact that many people misunderstood Him, in spite of the fact many people turned away from Him, Jesus remained steadfast in what He called for. And if we are to be a true disciple, we also need to learn this.

But while this is true that He was unwavering in the principles that He held and demanded, we see the Lord Jesus was very tender and understanding of people. He appreciated each one, their individual circumstances; He was concerned for them; He was prepared to go a long way to help them but only on the condition that they really loved the truth, they really wanted to follow Him, and they really were willing to choose that path.

So Jesus took a personal concern and interest and if we see the way He dealt with different people, it is a very helpful exercise for us in meditation of the way to live our lives.

The way that Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well in **John chapter 4**, the way in which He spoke to Nicodemus in **chapter 3**, the way He stood and responded to the woman who had the haemorrhage, the way He touched the little children, the way He spoke to Zacchaeus – all speak to us of the kind of individual attention that He could give to each one because He loved them and He cared for them, and He was prepared to make allowances for their weaknesses without compromising the principles and the demands of the kingdom of God.

And so too, in our lives: We should learn in our interactions with people, not to approach them on the basis of objects – we have certain objective to accomplish, if we want to tell them something, and they must respond to that truth. And sometimes, in the enthusiasm of Christians seeking to witness to non-Christians, we may treat them purely as objects.

“I want to share with them the gospel, and well, if they respond to the gospel, I have done something good.” But what happens if someone is in need of your help but there is no likely opportunity to share the gospel in the way that you understand it in your own concept, would you want to help that person? Or would you say, “No, it is not worth it; only if I can share the gospel in that way would I help”?

But the Lord requires us in the expression of the love of God to care for people as they are in their different circumstances – of course, we bear in mind the areas of priority and concentration, what is more important.

Nevertheless, the love of God is expressed in all situations of life. And very often it is in situations where we may do things which apparently have no spiritual significance that a person is touched by the love of God and the message comes through and the heart is open to receive what you have to say about the sinfulness of man and the Redeemer who came to rescue us.

Of course, in the way in which we seek to show our personal concern for people, there is a great need for wisdom and I certainly would caution if we were to adopt a personal approach in our concern for people to bear this in mind.

For example, it is not uncommon that there are many people who come to worship services or Christian gatherings to look for a husband and a wife rather than to worship God. And in a situation like that, it may not at first be something very prominent or very clear and obvious, but many people have mixed motives in their lives and it is situations like that where out of concern you show a very personal interest, it can very easily be interpreted in a manner that is not intended and result in many entanglements, resulting in many difficult problems to resolve.

So our personal concern for people would have to be worked out with much wisdom and understanding of different people, situations, the responses of men.

Nevertheless the principle is valid that the way we care for people and love people should be along the lines that Jesus expressed and the way He cared for others.

I want now to go on to consider another aspect in **verse 5** where Jesus told Zacchaeus: "... hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house".

Not many of us would make a statement like this, but the Lord Jesus had no hesitation to invite Himself to come to Zacchaeus' house. He said, "... today I must stay at your house". Generally speaking, we would wait to be invited before we will consider, but in the case of Jesus, He invites Himself: "I must stay at your house".

But of course, we can also see that in this context, although Jesus said this, it is quite clear that Zacchaeus had a choice - he could say, "No, no, I do not want You to come to my house; I just want to talk to You here; I want to see what You look like but that is all I want." Now Zacchaeus could have said that; it was not imposed upon him. Although Jesus invited Himself, the choice still belonged to Zacchaeus. Would he or would he not welcome Jesus?

Many a time the Lord too may speak to us though not in the same way, not with an audible voice, but in principle and in spirit, He may impress upon us many things He would like to enter into our lives with us, to do together with us. But would we welcome Him or would we say, "No, no, this I want to do myself; other things I would like your presence but not this. During times of worship, reading the Scriptures, Home Fellowship Group meetings, I think it is good that You come, but at other times there are many other things that I want to do myself - not convenient." The choice is still ours. The Lord Jesus may say, "I would like to be with you in all these things, would you welcome Me?" But many a time, sadly, we do not respond to Him to welcome Him.

While it may seem as if Jesus imposed Himself - He invites Himself to the home - yet, just a brief consideration should show to us that actually it was the greatest privilege that men could have to welcome Him and to serve Him, for remember, He is our Creator, He is our great King, the King of kings, the Lord of lords.

He is the One who sustains the universe. He is the One who is our Redeemer, our Saviour. He is the One that God would bestow all the glory of heaven. And such a person invites Himself to be involved with us! What kind of response do we show to Him?

In times past, when the kingship in England was prominent, who would not consider it a great privilege if a king would invite himself to one of the homes? How much time and effort people would spend to prepare the home, scrub and polish and decorate, to do everything possible to welcome the king! Who would say, "So much bother and trouble"?

And yet, in the spiritual realm, the Lord in His greatness and majesty – how many of us really welcome Him in our lives? How conscious we are of His desire to be involved with us in our lives, to lodge in our home within our hearts, to live with us, stay with us, to do things together with us? Would we welcome Him?

So often Christians grumble and complain about the lives that they live, that God is not fair to them – many problems that they have to go through, the many things that they think God demands of them in their lives that they have to do. All this is an indication of our lack of understanding, appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the greatness of the privilege that we have to know Him, to serve Him, to welcome Him.

But ultimately the choice is ours and the Lord will leave the choice to us. If you refuse Him, He will not force His way in. He waits for us to welcome Him.

What was the response of Zacchaeus to Jesus' self-invitation?

Verse 6: he responded exactly as Jesus said. **Verse 5,** Jesus says, "Hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house". And he hurried and came down and he received Him gladly, or received Him rejoicing.

So, as Jesus invited Himself, there was an immediate response from Zacchaeus. Jesus says: "hurry and come down" and he hurried and he came down. He was so glad and he received Him. He was very appreciative of this invitation that Jesus had made and he responded.

However, at this stage, even though there is this outward response and it is indicated he received Him gladly, it is still not very clear what was in Zacchaeus' heart.

Was it because he felt it was such a great honour that a person so famous as Jesus would come to his house and he felt proud? Could that be the reason? Or was it more than that? At this stage, it is still not very clear why Zacchaeus was so very eager and keen.

Many of us may come to such a stage also in our lives. When we hear something good or something that appears to us very exciting and meaningful, we may respond very rapidly. But how much depth is there? What reality lies within?

Well, with different people it can be different. There was another man who showed some aspects of this keenness, maybe in an even more marked manner. Perhaps we can just turn to **Mark chapter 10** to see a similar kind of situation of a man who showed much enthusiasm in coming to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark 10: 17-22

Here we read that Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and *began* asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

So here we see again a man very enthusiastic. As Jesus was setting out on a journey, this man ran up to Him. And not only that, he knelt before Him, which means that he must have recognized Jesus to be far beyond any ordinary man for him to run and to kneel before Him.

Such was the enthusiasm and here it is obviously expressed that he came to Jesus with the desire to find eternal life. He knew that Jesus had the answer and he came to Him.

There were various things he was prepared to do. But the sad thing is that this man did not respond deep enough. Jesus looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property.

So this man was not prepared to fully respond to the Lord. Various things he was willing to do but not sufficient; he was not sufficiently willing to respond to the Lord. The depth was not sufficient, his response was inadequate and he turned away – so just enthusiasm by itself does not mean that the Lord will accept us.

And even in this passage in **Mark chapter 10** we are told that Jesus looking at him loved him. There was that personal concern for him, the hope that he may respond, but still we notice the choice was his. He could choose to give up and to follow Jesus or to cling on to his possessions and to leave the Lord. He chose to stay behind with his possessions instead of following the Lord.

That is the kind of choice that is open to all of us. The enthusiasm we show to the Lord: how deep it is, how far will it go, what kind of test will it stand? Is it just temporary, momentary? Is it basically self-centred, self-seeking? Or are our longings deep enough and we recognize who He is?

So we go on to **verse 7** in **Luke 19**: And when they saw it (that means the crowd, as the people who were around, they saw it, they saw what Jesus had said to Zacchaeus), they all *began* to murmur or to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner" or "He has gone to lodge with a man who is a sinner", to stay with him.

So notice the behaviour of the crowd, the people around. It says here "they all" – it was a general thing, a general response in that situation, the people around – because they knew who Zacchaeus was probably, they knew who Jesus was, what He was teaching and seeking to bring men to response to the truth, and they could not reconcile the two, and they were very upset and they were murmuring and grumbling, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner".

Basically, we see that these people were judging primarily by outward appearance. They looked at the situation and they felt: "Zacchaeus is such a terrible man; he has done all these bad things; how can Jesus go and stay in his house? Would that not show that He approves of his life? Would that not show that He has compromised His principles? Would He not be contaminated by Zacchaeus?"

And so too we know that many people misunderstood Jesus, were critical of Him because He loved the sinners; He loved people and He cared for them and He was willing to associate with them in order to rescue them, to bring them out of their circumstances to save them.

But many people would say, 'How could He associate so closely with these people who are so obviously sinful people?'

However, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ did not just judge Zacchaeus purely by the outward appearance and condemn him but He knew that within Zacchaeus' life and in his heart there is the hope that he might respond to the truth, that if he were to respond, the Lord could transform his life, that he could become a great man, a good man; he could become a jewel in the kingdom of God; he could contribute to the work of God, he could help other people.

Jesus saw within him the potential of a life that could be given to God to serve Him and we see that He was prepared for the misunderstanding, the opposition from the others.

And this is an aspect of our Lord's life which is helpful for us also to think about. As a Man, the perfect Man, Jesus manifested again and again that He had the courage of His convictions: He would stand by the truth; He would live by what He had come to know and believe. He would not waver just because of public opinion. He would not turn away - turn aside - just because men might misunderstand.

He knew what He had to do because He loved mankind: He had a mission to accomplish. He came to save the sinful and He did that even though people misunderstood Him, criticised Him, ridiculed Him.

What kind of lives do we live in comparison with the Lord Jesus Christ? How much are we tossed here and there by the opinions of man? How firm are we in our convictions? Do we know the God that we believe in? Are we clear about the life we ought to live?

But, of course, the Lord Jesus could stand the test in such circumstances basically because His motives were pure, because He was sure of Himself, the attitude of His heart, His life, His direction, and the stand that He took.

But for our part, if we were to learn to live like Him, we would need to bear in mind that we need to deal with our own lives if we are to stand firm in the truth because passages like this, while on the one hand, can be very helpful to us, teaching us how to stand in the truth despite misunderstanding by others, can also be used as an excuse for us to do things which we ourselves want but just to rationalise: "Well, people do not understand me but my motive is very good", but actually we are doing things out of our own selfish desires. So that is important for us to distinguish.

If we are clear and we are sincere before the Lord and our lives are lived in a similar kind of manner as Jesus did – life of purity and holiness – then we can be firm and clear also in the stand that we take, but we need to beware not to use situations like that as excuses for our own lives to do the things that we please.

Of course, there are other considerations as well: the wisdom of our involvement, the degree of our spiritual strength to be involved in difficult circumstances like this. Can we stand it? Are we able to go through it? Does the Lord want us at this stage of our lives to help the people in those circumstances?

There have been many people who have good intentions and who have sought to help people but have ended up instead a victim of the situation, compromising their values and following the world instead. So we need to be wise and to know our limits.

We are not the same as the Lord Jesus Christ but the more we grow in strength and wisdom, the more we will be able to live as He did. But in our limitations we need to regulate ourselves, to understand how far we can go and to modify accordingly.

But the principle behind it is very important, that we should learn to stand by the truth that we have come to know. If we are convinced that the Lord has revealed to us from the Scriptures the direction, the path that we ought to take, the kind of life we ought to live, then however pressurising the circumstances, however great the difficulties, we must not waver from that. Even if people were to misunderstand us, even if there will be much opposition, we must persevere and carry on as long as it is clear to us that that is pleasing to the Lord.

That, of course, does not mean that we do not bear in mind the effect of our lives on others. In wisdom, we would also seek to minimise situations which would hinder people from receiving the truth or cause misunderstanding in their lives due to misinterpretation – we can minimise such circumstances.

Nevertheless this principle must stand first and foremost.

As we go on to **verse 8**, it would seem that Zacchaeus himself was affected in some way by what was happening. **Verse 8** says:

And Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."

So we are told here Zacchaeus stopped or he stood still, and he responded to the Lord, and this is recorded for us immediately after the description of the people grumbling that Jesus had gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.

Very likely, Zacchaeus responded in this situation as he heard the people murmuring and grumbling and he told the Lord what was in his heart.

Somehow Zacchaeus had come to the point where he recognized what he ought to do. When that occurred we do not know but in **verse 8** we are told that he had decided. He had made a decision, and he would act upon it, and he says, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor”. That was not something that was required of him that he had to give half the possessions to the poor, but he voluntarily did so. “If I have defrauded anyone of anything I will give back four times as much”. Well, that part of it is more the general requirement that there must be restitution – in the Old Testament they were taught in **Exodus 22: 1** how there should be similar kind of restitution.

So in the case of Zacchaeus he says “I will give...”. We notice that in Zacchaeus’ response to the Lord, he did something, he took practical steps – it was not just words that came from his mouth but it is clear from the context that he intended to carry them out. He was going to act upon and to do what he had come to see to be the proper course of action.

Many times in our life, we may have recognized the things that we have done to be wrong, but have we responded in like manner to Zacchaeus? It is a helpful thing for us to reflect on our lives to evaluate: How have we lived our lives before the Lord?

We may say that Zacchaeus was a notable sinner, many people knew him. The way he got rich: very likely he had defrauded many people, he had cheated people. And the way he spoke implied strongly that he recognized that he had sinned against God.

Of course, that is not the only situation that he sinned against God but this was something quite obvious to many people.

What about our lives? Can we reflect on our lives and consider in what ways we have sinned against the Lord and what are we going to do about it?

It is a helpful thing for us as we consider our lives before God to ask this question: How far am I prepared to go to correct the wrongs that I have done? How far am I prepared to respond to the Lord, not just in terms of the desires of my heart, but the practical steps that may be necessary for me to take in order to get things right with man and with God?

For example, when we have hurt somebody, when you have done something unjust to someone else, it is not too difficult for us in the quietness of our room to say "Lord, I am sorry."

It will require more, much more out of us to go to someone else and say, "I am sorry that I have hurt you", or if the hurt has resulted in practical loss in some way or other to take practical steps where feasible to replace them. Would we do that or would we just say, "Lord, I am sorry", and expect that that is the end of the matter?

Well, in certain situations, it does not require, the Lord does not require us to take such steps specifically towards other people, but many a time it would be required if we are to deal with that problem sufficiently deeply. It is not so easy if you are to confess in a situation where others may, in our own mind maybe, think lower of us or laugh at us in some way and we may be too proud to do that.

But it is something which will be very helpful to us because in so doing, very often the Lord will enable us to establish a much deeper bond of friendship, of love, of fellowship with the people whom we have offended in that way.

The same thing can be applied in other areas of our life, not just in relation to other people, but in terms of our response to the Lord.

Many of the things that we know we ought to do, that the Lord desires of us and we have failed and many a time we have said, "Lord, I am sorry", but has it remained just "Lord, I am sorry"? Have we really taken practical steps to correct the situation, to do something about it?

For example, we find that our prayer life is so shallow, we hardly spend time to pray, or our knowledge of the Scriptures is so insignificant, and we say, "Lord, I am sorry that I know so little after so many years as a Christian", but would we as a result of that really take practical steps, discipline our lives, do something about it? Of course, not in the flesh, not just by depending on ourselves, but earnestly praying to the Lord to help us, to lead us.

It does not mean that taking such a step we will be immediately successful. We may still fail again and again, many, many times but the question is: What kind of choice will we make, how determined are we to press on to achieve that goal, which we believe is of the Lord?

The apostle James says "faith without works is dead". And while it is true that the Lord cannot bring us to heaven just on the basis of our works, nevertheless a genuine response to the Lord will result in practical steps, practical expression of our lives in obedience to Him in doing the things that will please the Lord.

As I reflect on this passage, it seems also to me that the way in which the Lord Jesus dealt with Zacchaeus would have had a very deep impact upon him.

Just consider Zacchaeus himself, from his point of view looking at Jesus: From what Zacchaeus had known of Jesus, He was such a great man and He was so busy and He had so many things important to attend to. "Here am I, Zacchaeus, a man despised by everyone else. I have lived such a sinful life. Who would be interested in a man like me? Who would care about me? Everybody despises me. It is true I have landed in this state because of my own sinfulness and my own greed, but really, who would care for me?"

And for Jesus to stand there and say, "Zaccheus ... come down ... I must stay at your house" and for Jesus to pursue that course in spite of the misunderstanding of other people, surely it must have had an impact upon Zacchaeus: "How great must be the love of Jesus for me! How much must He have cared for me to be willing to go through all this! In the midst of His busyness, there are many things He had to attend to - He is willing to care for a person like me!"

Well, that is the love of God that reached out to him and he recognized it, he saw it and he responded to the Lord. And he stopped and he said to the Lord, "Lord, behold, this is what I will do."

The apostle John in **1 John chapter 4** tells us that it is the love of God that has helped us to learn to live a life of love and truth. In **1 John 4: 19** the apostle John says:

1 John 4: 19

We love, because He first loved us.

It is a short statement but very deep in meaning as we reflect on our lives: How have we really learnt to love in the kind of love that is of God – that quality of love?

We have learnt to love because He first loved us, because we have come to recognize the love of God, the way He has loved us and we have responded to Him, and the love of God is now shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us. It is on that basis that we can learn to love: love for people, love for the truth, love for the kingdom of God, love for that which is good.

And we see that basically Zacchaeus responded to the Lord not because of many arguments, not because of convincing arguments that were brought forward that he believed and he recognized.

Well, many people must have told him, “Zacchaeus, the life you are living is very bad! You should not live like this!” Many people may have hurled abuse at him: “How can you live such a life? You are so cruel and wicked. You must change! Zacchaeus, you must change!”

But what was the effect? Those arguments he might have recognized to be true: “Yes, I should change”. But was he really willing to change? Maybe he could not see how to change and what to change into – that was the kind of life he was used to; how to change and how to live?

But when he met Jesus, he knew that he could change. He had met someone who could help him, who could transform his life, and he was prepared to follow Him. And so from the depths of his heart he could tell the Lord, “This is what I will do, in recognition of who you are, in recognition of the love that you have for me and my recognition of the path of truth.”

So the general direction of Zacchaeus' life was therefore a response to the love of Christ and to the life of Christ, as he must have known that Jesus was a Man who lived in righteousness and in truth and He would not tolerate deception, corruption. So if he were to respond to Jesus, He must respond according to truth and he must give up whatever is corrupt and evil.

And in this regard, he may have appreciated this lesson more than many of us because many Christians on the one hand, want to be spiritual and yet on the other hand they do not seem to understand that true spirituality cannot come about without excellence in moral life.

God is a God of moral perfection. How can we be truly spiritual without developing moral qualities of life?

It is not by exercising many great spiritual gifts alone that would constitute spirituality in life. Though spiritual gifts are helpful in God's kingdom, it is primarily as a result of response to God's moral being that we will learn to be spiritual - it works the other way round. True spirituality is in the context of God's character.

And so, if we want to be spiritual, there are many things in our life that we have to deal with, and if we are not prepared to deal with them, then it will always remain just a dream.

If we really want to know God, we want to experience power in prayer, we want to understand more deeply the Scriptures, we want to be able to resist the evil one and overcome him, these things will not be very much a part of our life if in the first place we are not prepared to deal with our own lives drastically and deeply in moral transformation.

Verse 9 shows to us that the Lord Jesus Christ saw beyond just the outward expression because while Zacchaeus could say, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much”, this statement and the actions that follow do not necessarily constitute true repentance.

A person can do this for show; a person can do this in order to gain man’s approval. Such steps do not necessarily mean that he has repented. There are many people who are prepared to give thousands, millions of dollars to charity, and yet within their hearts they are full of greed and corruption. Outward manifestations of this nature do not necessarily imply a heart of purity and true repentance.

But it is here that we can see the Lord Jesus Christ looking beyond just the outward manifestation and He saw the heart response of Zacchaeus, and that is why Jesus could pronounce this statement: “Today, salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham”.

Jesus did not say this until Zacchaeus expressed this for that was the decision he had to come to. But Jesus saw beyond this and as Zacchaeus made this pronouncement of his intentions and decision, Jesus made it known to everyone else: “Today, salvation has come to this house” – that salvation came with the response of Zacchaeus. As he chose God, as he chose to respond to Jesus, as he chose to respond to the truth, the Lord granted him salvation.

And it is in this context that I refer you back to the earlier question: What was in Zacchaeus’ heart when he first came to Jesus with such enthusiasm? It is quite possible that he came purely out of curiosity and was so very affected by Jesus that he changed, but it is much more likely that in his heart there was a longing for truth and for reality.

And many a time we may not realize this, we may not see it in the lives of men but there is great hope as we witness to people and share the gospel as the Lord may lead us – there is great hope. People who may seem very unlikely to respond – people like Zacchaeus, so unlikely to respond – they may in their hearts be longing for the truth. It may seem impossible in such a situation how such a man can change, but very often within the heart of man there is such a longing, but without God's power, God's grace, they may not change. But if we co-operate with God – together with God minister to people as the Lord may lead us – many a time we may find that there are deep longings for truth and reality that we are not aware of.

Situations may not be so obvious but the kind of churnings within human hearts, the longings that people have, the conflicts within them may, very often, not be visible to us.

And it may be helpful for us to understand this point that human lives are very often like icebergs where we just see the tip of it and we do not realise that there is so much more beneath that we do not see and it requires the Lord's enabling and the Lord's help and teaching in our lives to look beyond just the outward appearance of man and to look at the heart for that is the way that God looks at our lives. He does not just look at outward appearance but He looks at our heart, what is within us, what we long for, what is the direction and goal of our lives because we can deceive people but we cannot deceive God.

And if we really want to understand people, then we must ask the Lord to teach us to learn to look at people in the way that He does and He will show to us.

Then, we notice that Jesus mentioned: "... salvation has come to this house". So it would appear that they had been walking along the way as Jesus told Zacchaeus that He was going to his house. It is quite likely that they were walking and they were reaching the house, or nearby, and it was there that Zacchaeus stopped and he stood and he said to the Lord in response to the way that people were commenting about his life.

When Jesus said "... salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham", the basic point that I felt helpful to think about also is this, that salvation came not just to Zacchaeus, but his life would have a bearing on his home. The kind of change that would take place in the life of Zacchaeus, the blessing of God that will come upon his life will have a bearing on the house that he lived, in the sense that God's presence, God's life and God's blessings will come. And if people are willing to respond in the home, others too can find salvation through him.

In the Old Testament we read how the man Joseph, because of his faithfulness to God, God blessed him. And God in blessing Him also blessed the people who were associated with him.

Of course, this does not mean an automatic salvation in the sense of ultimate acceptance by God; each one would still need to respond to the truth, but the home would be changed as Zacchaeus is changed.

So let us not think that our lives are just purely limited to ourselves. The way that we live will always influence other people and this is a very important aspect of human lives. If our lives are lived in the wrong way, we will affect other people adversely, we will hinder them, we will obstruct them, we will influence them negatively and God will hold us accountable, not just for our own lives but also for the influence of our lives on other people.

We cannot say, "It is just my life; it is up to them." It is true, they will be held accountable for the way they respond as a result of your influence; they will be accountable but that does not mean that you can escape the judgment of God. If your life has a bad influence, God will hold you accountable for the influence that you exert on others.

In the same way, if your life is meaningful, rich, pure and holy and you love God, your life will influence other people and God will reward you, on the basis not just of your own life alone but also the influence that you exert on other people's lives.

Of course, we know that we are living this life not just to look for rewards in a very monetary kind of sense but we live this life because we recognize that it is a path of truth, of goodness, of perfection. But the Lord has promised rewards for all those who walk in that path and of course, we know that the rewards that come from God are good and they will be consistent with God's character and surely we will also want that kind of reward.

So let us remember that our lives will continuously affect other people, for good or ill.

And the Lord Jesus says, "... because he, too, is a son of Abraham". As far as I am aware, this man Zacchaeus is a Jew who worked for the Romans. And Jesus says he is a son of Abraham and this term "son of Abraham" can be used in two senses, just as the word "Jew" we know is used in two senses, whether a natural one or a spiritual one. Naturally, in the natural plane, Zacchaeus would be considered a son of Abraham, a descendant of Abraham. But here Jesus is referring to the spiritual aspect, he was a son of Abraham: a natural Jew was becoming a spiritual Jew. And if you look at other passages in the New Testament you will understand the meaning of this phrase "son of Abraham".

In Galatians 3: 9

So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

So the identification with Abraham basically has to do with faith – a response of faith. Likewise, in **Romans 4: 11-13**:

Romans 4: 11-13

- 11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them,
- 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.
- 13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

So, a son of Abraham in this context would be one who responded to God in faith, just as Abraham responded to God in faith; he was justified by faith. So here basically Jesus was saying that He could see within the heart of Zacchaeus a response of faith.

So it is helpful for us also in seeking to help people, to recognize this that just outward profession alone may not mean that a person is genuinely born again. There are many people who say “I believe” and they may even pray the prayer to receive the Lord Jesus Christ into their lives, but whether there is a genuine response in their heart or not, it may not be so obvious to us at times, but the Lord sees through all this.

Whether a person is genuine or not or whether he is just putting on a front, whether he is just uttering words without meaning, all this the Lord can see. And in the case of Zacchaeus, Jesus declared that he was a true son of Abraham because he had responded to the Lord.

And in this context, it must mean that Zacchaeus had come out of himself to learn to trust in God. One of the aspects of faith is a turning away from the self towards God that we no longer consider ourselves adequate, sufficient, capable, justified – proud and arrogant. But knowing our need, recognising that we need to be saved, we need help, we come to God to trust Him – that He will save us, He will deliver us – to respond to Him.

Of course, such a faith that is genuine is in the context of true repentance: A true turning to God must always be in the context of real repentance where we have recognized that we want to turn away from a life of selfishness, a life of sin and corruption, a life of unrighteousness. So it is in that context then that we will be able to respond properly to God.

And in **verse 10** we see the Lord Jesus Christ describing Himself and His attitude: “... for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”. The Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and to save. Surely this must be a great encouragement to us. We in our helpless state, the Lord came from heaven to seek us out. He cared for us sufficiently to take the initiative to come into this world in order to sacrifice Himself for us.

That does not necessarily mean that the Lord will take the initiative to speak to every single one of us as such but the general initiative that He has taken and the work of the cross of Calvary has opened the way for all to turn to Him. Whoever will may come: The general invitation is open to us. He has taken that initiative.

Yes, He may continue to speak to each one of us, He may help us further but basically He has opened the invitation to us. He has come and He has died on the cross for us. The way of salvation is open for all who would desire to follow Him.

But will we respond to Him? Will we now be eager enough to seek Him? The Scriptures, on the one hand, says the Lord has come to seek us; on the other hand, it says, “seek the Lord while He may be found”. There is a need for our response. How eager are we to seek Him? He is available – He is willing to help us; He has provided for us – will we do that?

Similarly, the way that we care for people, we should likewise follow His example. How deep is our compassion for others – our burden, our concern? How much would we be willing to do, to give up of our lives to care for others?

That is the example that Jesus has set for us. He came to seek and to save, would we do likewise together with Him? But again, of course, in the practical manifestation, it needs much wisdom in the way that we do so, but the principle is there: the kind of love that we should have that should motivate us.

A good example of this, of course, we can see in the life of Paul, how he was tireless in his efforts to reach out to the people who needed him. He was willing to labour night and day, he says, with tears because of his concern, his love, his compassion for them.

How preoccupied are we with just our own little world? How deep within our hearts is our concern for the Lord’s work and His people and those who are lost?

So I will close with **verse 10** where Jesus said He came to seek and to save that which was lost. “That which was lost” tells us that there is a mission for us, that there are many people in the world that are lost. Jesus came to rescue them.

If we are His disciples, we will be involved also in the mission to rescue those who are lost. And of course, we know that helping people who are lost includes bringing them to the fullness of life that God intends for them – the total purpose of God.

So in summary, I just want bring to your attention a few areas that we can reflect upon in our own lives as we look at the salvation of Zacchaeus, how Jesus treated him and how Zacchaeus responded and the way that others viewed the situation.

One area that we can bear in mind is the personal love that Jesus has for each one of us, that He understands us individually and personally. How comforting it is for us in our struggles and difficulties to know that He understands us and He cares. Whatever your problem and difficulty, He understands and He cares.

But this must be viewed always in the context that Jesus in His care and love will not compromise His principles. They have to be upheld: truth and holiness and righteousness. If we are not prepared to go together with Him in this path, then He will leave us behind. But if we are willing, then though we may struggle, though we may fail and falter but we continue to choose that path, He will help us – He will exercise patience, He will continue to persevere in teaching us and building up our lives. But that is the path that we must choose.

Also, remember the great privilege it is for us to know Him, to welcome Him in our lives. How much do we appreciate Him? How much are we concerned that He knows about our life, that we can do things together with Him – every area of our lives? Yes, Jesus may want to do so, but the choice is still ours. Do we really want Him? Do we ask Him? Do we tell Him? How appreciative are we in our response?

Then, in the case of the people who grumbled and murmured: Are we also very often like that – critical of people without understanding, without seeing beyond the outward appearance, lacking in real compassion and love? Or are we like Jesus, who can see beyond the outward, and in spite of opposition and misunderstanding would do what He believed He ought to do in love and in truth.

As we consider Zacchaeus' response, let us also consider our own lives. Very often we are sad about the way we have grieved the Lord, we have failed Him. What do we do about it? Does it just remain as longings in our heart? Or do we take practical steps continuously, seeking the Lord, praying that He will enable us, discipline us, strengthen us, but persevering together with the Lord to correct our lives, to change our lives, to respond to truth, to live by righteousness? Do we appreciate enough the love of God for us that we will learn to love as He loves? Is our life characterised by the love of God in our lives and the love for people, the way that God loves us?

As we notice how Jesus sees the heart response of man, let us also remember that we too should learn to look at people deeper and more realistically than just the outward appearance, and to bear in mind too that our lives will always be an influence on other people. The things that you say, the things that you do, the whole spiritual life that you manifest every day will be an influence on the lives of others and you will be held accountable for that. For good or ill, the Lord will hold you responsible to the degree that you have influenced others.

The response of faith to God is at the heart of what God requires in the turning away from self to God in the recognition of our need. This principle of faith will always be applicable to our lives.

Have we come to the stage where we think that we have known enough that we can trust ourselves? Or do we continue to learn to walk by faith, to trust God, to obey Him, walk in His way?

Jesus came to seek and to save. That was the greatness of His love – a willingness to sacrifice. How about us? Are we identified with Him in His mission: to seek and to save that which is lost and to build a bride for Christ, holy, unblemished – to build the kingdom of God for eternity?

Let us reflect upon the Lord's attitudes, His values, His conduct... Let us consider the response of Zacchaeus and consider our own lives. Is there any area in our life that the Lord is speaking to us about that we need to change, that we need to respond to Him? Have we welcomed Him in the way that we ought to?

As we think about His work on the cross, remember what He has done for us. Are we grateful enough to respond to Him deeply?

So let us spend time before the Lord that the Spirit of God may search our hearts, help us to understand ourselves and we need then to choose to follow the Lord... or to follow our own way...