

**No 6 The welcome guest who invites Himself Luke 19 v 1 to 10**

Here is a story which many of us will have heard in Sunday School. It is rather quaint – after all, not many people run along the street and climb a tree to see a passing celebrity. It follows on from the previous chapter where Jesus is approaching Jericho and heals a blind man (called Bartimeus in Matthew and Mark) – Luke 18 v35f. Just before that Jesus had been talking about his final journey to Jerusalem where he must suffer and die. It is clear that his disciples still don’t understand the nature and meaning of Jesus’ death.

But the crux of the incident is in the last verse – two people, with different needs, have their lives transformed by his power. They are both ‘lost’ people. Jesus came to seek the lost and that is why he has to die if lost people’s sins are to be dealt with.

1. Do we think of people as ‘lost’ if they have not yet committed their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Do we just think of such people as being in need of a Saviour?

If we say ‘everybody is free to believe as they choose’, do we lack the urgency to point them to Jesus?

Zaccheus is a ‘chief tax- collector’. That means he has other tax-collectors working for him and he takes a cut of their already ill-gotten gains. It was a massive racket and Zaccheus had done very well out of it. On the face of it, he had a good life, probably had a nice house, ate well and, almost certainly, had servants. He’d made it even though he was hated by most of the population for being a Roman stooge.

1. Why was this man of short stature so keen to see Jesus?

Where had his faith come from which drove him to get a clear sight of the master?

What do you think he thought of his own lifestyle – what were its positives and negatives?

Whatever else he was, he was certainly determined. A sycamore tree has a short trunk and wide lateral branches so it wasn’t that hard to gain height. It’s almost certain that he wasn’t expecting Jesus to stop. Why should he talk to one of the most hated men in Israel? There was a good selection of mutterers close by and we see a similar reaction to one we have seen before in the ‘meal stories’. Jesus is expected by many of the Jewish leaders to hang out with the upper echelons of society.

1. Jesus stops very deliberately and calls him by name and then tells him to climb down.

How would you sum up Zac’s reaction to Jesus’ call?

What is the significance of Jesus wanting to go to his house?

This is a very immediate response - should we expect such things to happen today and, if so, where?

The reaction of the people on the street is negative. Jesus does not hide his joy at meeting Zac (v6). Respectability seems to be the dominant value amongst the crowd. Zac is considered to be the lowest of the low. In the crowd’s eyes, Jesus is a teacher who wanted to be listened to so why should he associate with someone so derided? First century Jewish religion was riddled with respectability.

1. We read so often that Jesus had time for people whom society regarded as rejects.

Jesus invited himself to Zac’s home and he was made welcome.

What does it mean to have Jesus in our homes?

What makes our homes different because of the presence of Jesus?

When Jesus forgives your sin, the past is dealt with. Until we go to glory, we will still commit sin but we know how to get it dealt with. But Zac went further. Having been given the privilege of relationship with Jesus, he tried to change by living differently. His job was with money so it was his dealing with money that he changed. He decides he needs a new future and he deals with his past.

1. He starts to give to the poor. Is that a challenge to look at both our creation care plans and how we use the resources God has given us?

One commentator says – ‘If later Judaism is any guide, it was considered generous to give away 20% of your possessions’. Zac’s recompense deal was way over the top.

Are there issues in our past that we could put right?

This is Jesus saying material possessions need a light grasp on them – are we too clingy about the things we own rather than offering them to someone with a greater need?

Zac has a new life whereby his whole value system and lifestyle will be changed. He is a changed man and it has impacted not only his relationship with God but the way he lives his daily life. No more crooked deals – no more exploitation. Jesus has sought him out and done what he said he would do – ‘seek and save the lost’. Jesus uses his ‘Son of Man’ title to impress on his listeners that he is the promised Messiah who has come to save.

1. Have we lost the idea of ‘lost’ and ‘saved’?

Are we clear that people’s lives can be changed when they meet Jesus and are challenged by his life and teaching?

Should we spend more time talking to friends about their relationship with God?

Is the idea of personal commitment to Jesus something we talk about enough?