

“Lost and Found – Outstanding!” 2/03/13

Luke 19:1-10

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the blood of God’s own Son,

Haven’t we all been to a parade where clowns and other participants throw candy into the crowd? Haven’t we seen little children trying hard to catch and pick up the goodies along the parade route? We expect this kind of behavior from children. Maybe we have shared their joy, even their candy! But how strange it would be if one of the wealthiest people in our community ran down the street in his suit and tie, seeking the attention of the clown and some of the goodies he offered!

There were no clowns in the parade described by Luke in our text. But there was a man along the parade route who really stood out from the crowd in order to get what Jesus offered. His name was Zacchaeus. We will find a message for ourselves in his story.

ZACCHAEUS WAS LOST AND FOUND – OUTSTANDING!

I.

Luke begins with the word, “**behold,**” because the whole story about Zacchaeus is exceptional and outstanding! First of all, consider the man’s name. It means “pure one.” But Zacchaeus was not pure by any means! The publicans, or tax-collectors were known by the people to be swindlers and cheats. To be a “tax-collector” was to be a “sinner” as far as the people were concerned. But this man was not only a tax-collector; he was the “**chief**” Tax-collector, and he had become rich by his cheating, money-grabbing ways!

Jesus had taught the people that it is extremely difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. He said that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter heaven. How much more difficult it must be for a man like Zacchaeus, whose riches were gotten by cheating and taking advantage of others!

II.

Everyone knew that Zacchaeus was an outstanding sinner; but his desire to “**see who Jesus was**” was also outstanding! Only a few days before, the people of Jericho had heard how Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Now the people lined the streets of Jericho by the thousands to get a look at this famous healer.

Zacchaeus had also heard of the miracles and teachings of Jesus, but

he had not yet laid eyes on Him. What an effort he made to see the Savior! He was not able to see over the crowds because he was too short. Yet this grown man ran on ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree in order get a look at Jesus.

When our Lord came to this spot along the road, **“He looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”** The little man scrambled down the tree and **“gladly received”** Jesus. He may have been thinking: Jesus knows my name! He must also know who and what I am! Yet He says that He must stay with me! There must be hope for me too!

III.

The fruit of Zacchaeus' faith was also outstanding! The crowd had heard and seen it all. Now, as they followed Jesus and this miserable little tax-collector, the people began to **“grumble”** among themselves. Rather than thinking about their own need for a Savior, these people were really bothered by the fact that Jesus was going to stay in the home of a known sinner. All they could think of was this man's reputation, not their own need! They did not realize that Jesus was doing the very work He was sent and had come to do. So , the rest of the scene was for the benefit of the crowd.

Zacchaeus was moved by the Holy Spirit to give evidence of the conversion and faith of his heart. We are told that he **“stopped”** right in the middle of the street and promised publicly to give up his self-serving ways. He promised to give half of his possessions to the poor, and to return **“four times as much”** as he had taken from his victims by over-taxing them.

Immediately, Jesus spoke for the sake of the crowd. **“Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham, for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”**

Do you know where the word “lost” comes from? It comes from the word “destroyed” or “ruined.” The original Greek word here pictures the absolute wreck that sin has made of all people – far from God, in night and darkness, shattered, broken, dead and without a spark of spiritual life in them! But Jesus our Savior came **“to seek and to save the lost.”** His seeking reaches out though the gospel of forgiveness which Jesus Himself

wrote with His own precious blood! Salvation belongs to those who receive Him by faith!

Zacchaeus was a Jew by birth, like most of the crowd. But he did not become a true son of Abraham except by the rebirth of faith. You and I are not Jews; but we too have the blessings of the true children of Abraham by a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin!

IV.

But those who have the outstanding faith of Zacchaeus also “stand out” from the crowd like Zacchaeus did. The crowd today is no different than the crowd which surrounded Zacchaeus. The crowd today believes that it already has “spiritual standing” before God because of its community service or its religious prayers. The crowd goes to church because they think God is impressed with their attendance and worship. But Jesus has come to seek and to save that which was “lost.” I pray to God that each of you here today “stands out” from the great crowd of the self-righteous who pride themselves in their own supposed goodness before God!

If you do, then you can appreciate the spectacle of the wealthy Zacchaeus running through the streets, stumbling, picking himself up, and finally scrambling up a tree like a small boy, just to get a look at Jesus! Zacchaeus would not allow either his physical condition or the attitude of others stand in the way of his own great spiritual need. He was not like those who never come to church or the Lord’s Supper, as if to say: “My sin is between me and God; I’ll deal with Him on my own terms!”

Zacchaeus seized the opportunity to have the Savior assure him of forgiveness and salvation. Zacchaeus also seized the opportunity to let the crowd know that his well-known sins were now forgiven, that he had put them away and would make amends.

Zacchaeus demonstrates for us how the kingdom of heaven is entered by sinners. On one occasion Jesus had said: **“From the days of John the baptizer until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.”** It has always been so. Those who despise themselves and their wickedness – the truly broken-hearted sinners – seize the mercy of God offered in the Gospel of Christ. They can’t get enough of it! They “storm the gates of heaven” by their continual desire for Word and Sacrament. Luther put it this way: **“A man cannot sleep his**

way into the kingdom of heaven.”

Do you feel the compelling need for Jesus that Zacchaeus felt? Because of the pressures of the crowd – friends and family – you and I may be hindered from sincerely confessing our sins and forcefully going after the forgiveness, life, and salvation offered in the Lord’s Supper. Are you content to be lost in the crowd while Jesus passes by? To what extent will you go to “stand out” from the self-righteous crowd in order to see your Savior in His Word and seize His kingdom by repentance and faith?

In the eyes of the world, to forcefully seize the knowledge and fellowship of Christ in His Word and Sacrament, is more foolish than climbing a tree in your best clothes to get a look at Jesus! People will seize the opportunity for financial advancement. They will seize food and clothing from others if they are hungry or naked. They will strive to get everything in order so that they have time to play and pursue the “fun” things of life.

But few stand out like Zacchaeus, forcefully seizing the kingdom of heaven. Few show a sincere faith in their Savior by giving back what they have taken from others, by making public confession of their public sins, and by trying to correct their disobedience to God’s Word.

If you are among the “**outstanding**” few, in whose hearts the Spirit of God is at work through the Law and the Gospel, then the attitude of your hearts speaks like this: “If anyone is going to receive the blessings of salvation offered in Christ’s doing and dying for sinners, it is going to be ME!” If this is the attitude of your hearts, then Jesus says to you: **“Hurry and come down! For I must stay at YOUR house . . . For I am come to seek and to save that which was lost!” Amen.**