

Outgoing King, Outgoing People

Let's start with two hypothetical scenarios:

Scenario One

And the ship springs a leak. The alarms are sounded. You need to evacuate. Unbeknownst to everyone else, you quickly run to your cabin and grab some supplies. You grab a bottle of water, some spam, a banana, you shove it in your bag and you launch yourself off the boat and cling to a piece of driftwood in the ocean.

Then, in the distance, after a few hours of floating on the sea you see land in the distance. But you see this. It's dark and foreboding, and there appears to be no sign of life or food or anything. Then as you look, your friend next to you leans over and says, "Mate, I'm really thirsty, you don't have anything to drink do you?" What do you say?

Scenario 2

But then imagine this. You're on the boat and the alarms go off and you grab your spam and water, or whatever, and you're drifting on the sea and again you see land in the distance. But *this time*, as the land comes into focus you see that it's a beautiful island paradise. You can see fish swimming in the clear waters around you. A freshwater stream is gushing forth, and you can see plump fruit and coconuts practically falling from the trees.

Then your friend turns to you and says, "Gee, I'm thirsty?" What would you say?

Now aren't you far more likely to give your mate a drink in the second scenario? And why is that? Surely it's not because you are a more moral person, or you've tapped into some hidden power of kindness inside of you.

It's that your *vision of the world that has changed*. You are still the same bundle of selfishness and sin you always have been, BUT you have seen an abundance ahead of you, you are celebrating and you know that everything is going to be OK, and so you are liberated to open up your tin of spam for your neighbour.

It would be very easy to have a bleak view of the world right now wouldn't it? We're stuck inside, everything's cancelled, and there's a deadly virus sweeping through the world. Maybe the immediate future seems to you like a lifeless and uninhabitable rock.

The super-market hoarding, the social media posturing, and the stuff-it-I'm-just-going-to-the-beaching, are all examples of the me-first, cling to what you have attitude that arises out of such an outlook on life and the future.

So how can we live differently? In this moment, how can we open ourselves up, reach out to our neighbour and live generously with what we have been given. Well, we need to refresh *our vision of the world*. We need to remind ourselves of Jesus, of who he is, and all that we are in him. We need to see clearly all that he has given us.

So let's read together from **Luke 19:1-26**.

Jesus: Seeker, Saviour, Giver

There is good reason, that Jesus' encounter with Zacchæus is so famous. The comedy of a short little man trying to climb up a tree is unforgettable. But far more striking than that is the concern of Jesus for a lost sinner.

Jesus is the key figure of this passage, and we learn three key things about who he is.

He is a *seeker*, a *saviour*, and a *giver*.

Jesus is a *seeker*. For all of Zacchæus's efforts to *see Jesus*, it is Jesus who takes the initiative to *meet Zacchæus*. Jesus is a man on a mission, earlier in Luke's gospel we are told that he *resolutely set out for Jerusalem* in order to die and rise again for the salvation of the world. Jesus could perhaps have been forgiven for walking by the little man in the tree.

But he doesn't. It turns out that this meeting is not in conflict with his cosmic mission at all. In fact, as he tells us in verse 10, it is precisely for little lost people like Zacchæus that Jesus has come. Jesus says: *the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost*. So he stops at the tree and calls Zacchæus down. He says that he *must* stay with Zacchæus. That's who Jesus is, he is a *seeker*.

He's not *just* a seeker, however. He's not playing a divine game of hide and seek. He is on a *rescue mission*. The lost are not just the directionally challenged, they are in deadly peril. This was certainly true for Zacchæus. We're told he was a chief tax collector, and that's not a good thing.

It turns out that the crowd are entirely correct in their assessment of Zacchæus. He is a sinner. He is a traitor and a thief, who has gathered great wealth for himself at the expense of his fellow Jews.

The crowd are entirely *wrong*, however, in their assessment of Jesus. Perhaps they were expecting Jesus to call Zacchæus down and give him a proper dressing down for all his underhanded dealings. But Jesus invites himself into Zacchæus's home and into his life. Not to affirm him, but to rescue him.

Zacchæus is lost. Perhaps he thought that life was a barren and uninhabitable rock and so he had greedily gathered whatever he could for himself with no thought of others.

But by receiving Jesus, Zacchæus received salvation from his own helplessness and from his own sinfulness. His life was utterly transformed, because that's who Jesus is: he's the *saviour*.

Then finally, Jesus is also a *giver*. He gives salvation to Zacchæus. And he gives the wonderful declaration that this outsider and outcast is a true Son of Abraham. And he gives Zacchæus a new vision of the world that frees him from clinging to all his own possessions, that he might use them generously for others.

I think that's why Jesus tells the parable to the crowd in the second half of our passage. Jesus tells the story about a nobleman who goes away to be installed as King. As he goes, he distributes about 3 years worth of wages to 10 of his servants and he tells them to put it to work. Despite opposition he is made King and returns home. On his return he discovers that two of his servants have made a great profit from what he gave them.

But one has hidden it away, and gives it back with no profit at all, to the great ire of his master.

Now there's certainly a stern warning that we will need to hear from this parable in few moments. But notice for now, how generous this King is! He gives each of these servants 3-4 months wages and gives them the freedom to put it to work. And to those who are faithful he grants *whole cities* to rule. Of course, the King is Jesus, who not only seeks and saves his people, but generously supplies them with the gifts and freedom they need to serve him.

This is Jesus, seeker, saviour, giver. He finds the lost, he rescues them, and then he equips them to serve him while they wait for his return.

And, brothers and sisters, despite whatever else is happening in the world, Jesus has not changed. He still finds people who are lost, and he calls for them to come down, and invites himself into their lives. And he still generously gives his people what they need so they can serve him.

You and me: Found, Saved, Gifted

And so what does that mean for you and me?

It means that we once were lost, but now we have been found.

It means that we were once dead in our sin, but now we have been saved.

It means that we were once poor and destitute, but now we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

If you have received Jesus, said yes to his invitation and welcomed him into your heart, this is who *you* are: you are found, saved, and gifted.

This is the truth about you, however things may appear. These things are true of you because you have Jesus.

The Outgoing People of the Outgoing King

And that changes everything. All of a sudden, the future is not bleak and foreboding. Jesus has overcome the grave! He has given us his new life! He has brought us home, and we have all been given the gifts of his grace with which we can serve him and serve others for his sake.

Now, remember the parable contained a warning. Well, here it is: **Jesus is coming back, and he will call us to account for how we have used what we have been given.** And again, it is having a clear vision of Jesus that is going to help us. For did you notice what the third servant said when the King returned in verse 20?

'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man.'

A hard man? Who is this servant talking about? The master has distributed a great amount of wealth to his servants and given them great freedom to *risk it* as they see fit! But this servant, with the wrong view of the King, has disobeyed the King's instruction, and he finds himself with nothing at all...worse than nothing!

The other two servants knew better didn't they? And Zacchæus knew better. He met the generous Jesus and all of a sudden he took what he had and put it to work for the poor and those he had cheated. And we know better too! Jesus is the generous King who freely offers salvation to all who trust in him, and he pours out every blessing on his people.

So even in times of scarcity, God's people always have an abundance ahead of them. And so just as our King went out to seek and to save, we too are to be an outgoing people, looking for ways to serve others, opening up our own lives, and our own possessions, and our every opportunity and ability for the good of those around us. We can crack open our bottle of water, and our tin of spam, for there is life, abundant life ahead of us!

And this is so important for us to remember right now. For it will be tempting for us to think that the fullest extent of love right now is to stay home. Now, let me be very clear, we *must* submit to our government, we *must* heed the best advice we are given, we *must* care for the vulnerable in our society by wisely avoiding physical contact with others as much as possible.

BUT, that is the *beginning* of our love, not the end of it. As tempting as it is to withdraw into ourselves, we must open ourselves up to serve those around us. We need to discover ways to be out-going, even as we go out less. Now, that is going to take more creativity at the moment that's for sure, but Jesus has given us everything we need. And like the servants in this parable, he has given us the freedom to put those gifts to work. It's like he presses the mina of grace into our hands and with a smile says, go on, take a risk, make something of this!

And I've already heard some great ideas this week:

- Just picking up the phone and giving people a call
- Filming some family workout videos
- Doing art, or sharing ideas for craft at home
- Helping others with shopping
- Offering to pray for people, or suggesting to read the Bible online
- Starting a youtube channel
- Sharing the link to our services with a family or friend
- Virtual games over the internet
- Writing letters to everyone in your street letting them know you're a Christian and you're praying for everyone and happy to help out in any way possible.

What opportunities has God given you in the past week? And have you taken them?

Brothers and sisters, a global pandemic is no excuse to retreat into ourselves in self-protection and self-service.

Even as we wisely distance ourselves physically from each other, the task that our King has given us remains unchanged. It is our *responsibility* to serve him, and to use what he has given us to serve others.

In fact, this present moment presents us with an opportunity to creatively invest what we have given so that others would see - and know - the abundance that we have with Christ. We have an opportunity to serve each other and those around us with not only this earthly life in view, but also the eternal life that awaits us when our King returns.

For our master is not a hard man. He has gone to hell and back to seek us and to save us, and all who are lost in this broken and hurting world. And he presses every blessing of his generous grace into our hands, and he says, "Go on, put this to work, until I come back."