

The Kingdom of Love
Loving the Lost
Luke 19:1-10

Intro: I don't know who Zacchaeus would have brought to church. I am not certain that he had any real friends. Maybe a few he had purchased along the way. I suspect he had a lonely heart.

I. Love Them GEOGRAPHICALLY: Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through (Luke 19:1).

A. Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

1. Jericho was a nice place, the city of palms, a veritable paradise in Israel. At 1,000 feet below sea level, it is the lowest city on earth. Archaeologists suspect it may be the oldest permanently inhabited place on our planet. Today it is occupied by 20,000 Palestinians. When you cross the Jordan River going west, the first city you reach is Jericho.

2. It is out of the way if you are going from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus made a wide swing east on his journey. I think he knew some people who needed him were in Jericho.

3. You go out of your way to love the lost geographically.

B. Jesus stopped under a tree because a lost person was in that tree. You will have to do the same.

1. Keep an eye out for people who are in need. They may be in need of a friend or comfort. It may be at the snack bar or in the café or in the checkout counter line. You love people by paying attention, watching for the signs of God's work in them.

2. Stop and get acquainted. This is loving them. You are always in a hurry. I know that I am. But we must slow down enough to address the people who are in need. Love is patient.

C. Jesus went to his house. This is another way to love those who are struggling spiritually. Make a visit.

1. Visit them in their homes.

2. Visit them in prison. Jesus mentioned this specifically. Prison is a great place to make a visit. How long has it been?

3. Visit them in the hospital. When people are ill, they need someone to encourage them, pray with them, and love them.

D. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria—ends of the earth.

II. Love Them INDIVIDUALLY: Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today (Luke 19:5).

A. The streets were crowded with a great array of people. The wealthy lived here for the climate; the beggars lived here for the alms. The great caravan routes from the North and East came through Jericho. Robbers and soldiers and priests and pilgrims moved through this city. It was the way up to Jerusalem for the pilgrim; an easy ambush for the robber.

Jesus loved all these people in Jericho. How do we know that he loved them all? How do we know that Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world? Because he loves me—that is how we know. We know Jesus loved the people of Jericho because we see him loving Zacchaeus—and Bartimaeus.

B. Love them immediately. Jesus looked at Zacchaeus. What do you think Zacchaeus was thinking when Jesus looked up and noticed him and came over to that tree? He thought he was in trouble. But Jesus loved him from the first.

C. Zacchaeus has gone out on a limb here. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him (Luke 19:3-4). People go out on limbs when they are in need. They reach out to others, seeking understanding and comfort. When people go out on a limb to initiate a conversation with you, to seek a relationship with you, do not rebuff them.

D. Jesus loved this one, this lost sheep. And he is asking us to do the same. We are to Love this city one by one for Jesus' sake.

1. You cannot love all of them in practical ways even though you feel love for all the lost sheep.
2. Focus love on one of them--a child in Central City or a mentally ill person living on the streets or a lonely person living in a mansion or a fellow worker going through a divorce.
3. Make eye contact with that person for Jesus' sake.

III. Love Them SURPRISINGLY: All the people saw this and began to mutter (Luke 19:7).

A. I imagine Zacchaeus might have been preparing for a good tongue-lashing. He has been cheating people, stealing from people. He is a representative of the Romans. He is hated for his compromise, hated for his lies, hated for his riches.

When Jesus looked at Zacchaeus, I imagine this little man was preparing for the worst--public humiliation by a prophet from God sent to point out his sin. Jesus surprised him with love.

B. Jesus surprised the crowd with his love. He loved this man DISAPPROVINGLY. The crowd muttered their disapproval. But Jesus was loving the crowd, too, helping them understand that God loves us all, including the ones we see as "sinners."

C. If you have not surprised someone with your love—either the one being loved or the bigots watching—you have yet to imitate Jesus in his love. He surprised sinners with his love. He surprised the religious people with his love for sinners. Do likewise.

IV. Love Them UNCONDITIONALLY:

A. Jesus uttered no words of judgment or condemnation to Zacchaeus. I want you to notice this truth. We do not hear Jesus speaking condemning words to the harlots, to the homosexuals, to the thieves, or to the adulterers that he ran into.

These sins were just as big in the public view then as they are today. Zacchaeus is in the same group with William Jefferson or Oliver Thomas or Edwin Edwards. He was running a scam. That is what the tax collectors did. Do you hear Jesus anywhere in the gospels confronting these dumped on, hated, ostracized, and outcast sinners? As a matter of fact, Jesus puts that specific condemnation on the lips of the self-righteous Pharisee praying in the temple, "I thank thee that I am not as other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers—or even as this publican" (Lk 18:11). That is the only time that the KJV puts "adulterers" on the lips of Jesus.

B. Jesus saves most all his specific words of condemnation for religious people like us who want sermons on all the evils which we ourselves think we do not commit.

1. Zacchaeus would get the message about his sins without any specifics from Jesus. He knew what he was doing wrong.
2. The scandalous sinners of our day are the same. They may justify their sin outwardly but inwardly it eats them up.
3. It is much easier to call the sinners to repentance than the righteous. A preacher can preach on pride, on greed, and on gossiping, and some of his congregants will accuse him of avoiding preaching on sin. Why? The self-righteous only hear the sins which they themselves are not committing. They see no jealousy, envy, sloth, lust, or pride in their own hearts. That is why Jesus majored on calling religious people to the reality of their own sin and calling scandalous sinners to the reality of the love and grace of God.

C. Love the lost even when your love does not bring evident change. Jesus did.

1. He healed 10 lepers. Only one came back to thank him. He healed all the sick. Many of them never really understood who he was or why he came.
2. Zacchaeus came to repentance. But we do not know anything about the spiritual impact the Good Samaritan had on the object of his love, the man in the ditch. Jesus chooses to leave out any response on the beaten man's part in order to teach us that our acts of love cannot be contingent upon the response of sinful people. Unconditional means unconditional. Jesus loves the lost even when they are consigned to hell at their own insistence.

D. Unconditional love means the idea of "limited atonement" is ludicrous. Jesus died on that cross for both thieves—the one who was saved and the one who died a derelict. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors and our enemies BECAUSE he loves them all.

1. Our mission strategies should not be based solely on "response." We go to the "responsive" peoples. With limited resources we must make choices. But we better not represent Jesus out there in the world as if Jesus was only interested in building institutions and getting baptisms.
2. The world will pick up on our self-centered, conditional "love" when they see us closing down our deeds of kindness because people are not becoming Christians. They will know then that the deeds of kindness are contingent upon them becoming like us. They will know then that they can "purchase" our kindness by becoming Christians. And we will have polluted the gospel message, scandalized the cross, and undercut our purpose of evangelism in the world.

CONCLUSION: People will always disappoint you. People will frequently confuse you, confound you, and condemn you. Jesus will love you, receive you, and forgive you.

If people have been standing between you and God, forget them! Your life is too valuable to throw away because people haven't measured up. Think about it. You haven't measured up either. People looking at you are in the same shape as you are looking at them. We are all imperfect. Look to Jesus. He will love you and lift you. If you cannot see Jesus because of the crowd, climb up higher. Stand upon the shoulders of the apostles who have written about him.