The Greatest of These Series

Loves Transforming Power

Luke 19:1-10

Slides highlighted

We're in the middle of our current series The Greatest of These where we're looking at the love of God that is first given to us, received by us, enjoyed by us, and then supplied to the world around us.

Watershed: "we receive, we enjoy, and we supply the love of God in Christ unto the glory of God."

Last week, we began by looking at the Great Commandment – "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength". (Mt. 22:37-28). We saw that the command to love God is an impossible command because it requires everything of us – not just love in action, but love from the heart, soul, mind – quite literally, everything. This is a very HIGH standard of love that God calls us to…indeed, apart from God FIRST initiating His love for us, we cannot love God as we ought to love Him.

This morning, I want to consider with you what it looks like when someone receives the love of God. What happens in the life of someone who receives God's love? What does God loving them look like, and what does it look like for them to receive the love of God? What are some of the obstacles that God's love has to penetrate through? What are some of the obstacles in the life of an individual that need to be surrendered in order to receive God's love?

Obstacles for the love of God: In order for someone to receive God's love, a miracle must take place. I want to say that again, IT TAKES A MIRACLE for someone to receive the love of God. Why do I say that?

- **We are born dead to God**: ***Eph. 2:1-3 - "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— [3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."***
- **Therefore, God must initiate by making us alive:** ***Eph. 2:4-5 – "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved"***
- **Regeneration*:*** God making dead people come to life. Affections, heart, sight, soul, mind – we are spiritually dead to God, but God, through His Spirit makes us alive to Him. There is a point in time when all of a sudden, miracle of miracles, you find yourself believing, desiring, new affections, the whole world has become new, God is now real to you. ***If you don't know what I mean, you may need this to happen to you.***
    - ***Ezekiel 36:26-27 - And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.***
    - ***John 3:3 - Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."***

- ***Titus 3:5 - he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,***
- ***Notice that regeneration is something that God does…He initiates it. WE receive it. The heart, soul, mind that was formerly dead to God, is now very much alive to God.***
- ***Conclusion: Unless you are born again, you CANNOT love God as He commands you to. Which means that what God commands, he also provides. LOVE TAKES A MIRACLE.***

Transition: ***What does it look like when someone is touched by the love of God? What is an example of someone who had all of these obstacles, and even more, and yet the miracle overcomes? There are many examples in Scripture, but I chose to look at a man by the name of Zacchaeus.***

Why do I choose Zacchaeus? –

- **The bigger the obstacles, the stronger the power.** This story is about God's Love and it's transforming power. Zacchaeus had many obstacles to being loved by God, and God removes all of them through the power of His love. God is flexing His muscles of love to show just how big they are and to what lengths they will go to in order to demonstrate the kind of foreign, alien, unconditional, pure love that God offers to sinners like you and me.
- **Zacchaeus is NOT the person you would expect in any story to be loved.** He is the villain, he is small physically, and he has a puny heart, despicable, he is the guy in the P.E. lineup that you would NOT choose for your team. He is greedy, he is selfish. He is shameful. He is the person in the movie that you want to see "get his" in the end. Yet, God chooses to initiate the miracle and chooses to love someone that is unloveable. This is NOT our default, this is a godly, a holy, type of love…it's foreign to us…this is something we don't know…we need to be taught it…to love God this way.

Context: This is exactly why Luke and the Holy Spirit through Luke choose to share this story! The gospel of Luke is the gospel to the outcast. If you compare Luke with the other 3 gospels he makes far more mention of Jesus reaching the outcast. It is the gospel to those who have lost their way. The stories of Jesus' encounters center on Gentiles, women (who were looked down upon) and villains like Zacchaeus – people who had lost their way…the world had given up on them, but not Jesus.

We pick up our story as Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem for the last time…He is moving closer to the hour in which He will be rejected, and crucified…

- **Pause for a moment just to see the heart of Jesus…**always working, always about His Fathers work. At a time where He would be tempted to be depressed, fearful, filled with anxiety, self-focused, He is still looking to serve and love others.

Luke 19:1-3 - He entered Jericho and was passing through. [2] And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. [3] And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.

- **He was a Chief Tax Collector:** The tax collectors were hated by the Jews. They were puppets for the Romans who taxed the Jewish people to death. He would be viewed by his own people, the

Jews, as a traitor. They often times used their position to extort and cheat the people and receive MORE than what was already required of them. We know that Z. most likely did this because in v.8 he mentions "defrauding" people. This would provide a huge obstacle for anyone who was Jewish to extend any type of relationship with Z. People did NOT associate with Z. They would not talk with him, they certainly wouldn't go into his home. This is someone you would immediately hit "delete" if he requested to friend you on facebook. This is the person you steer around that you run into at the grocery store. He wasn't considered a "child of Abraham"…rather he was considered a puppet of Rome and a slave to his own pocketbook. Indeed he was!

- **He is rich –** Being rich also provides a unique obstacle for Z. Scripture does not paint a good picture of wealth because people who are rich have a unique temptation to worship their wealth. This isn't always the case, in fact many rich people are the best at giving. But for Z. his wealth was an idol…he didn't see himself as needing anything because he "had everything"…which is sad because in the end he really had nothing. He was cut off from his own people, possibly his own family, and most likely lived a very lonely life with nothing but the money he extorted from people.
    - **The Rich Young Ruler – Luke 18:24-26 -** ***"How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! [25] For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." [26] Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" [27] But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."***
- **Zacchaeus is NOT a victim in this story!** There is a man who is about to lose his family business because he is being ripped off by this charlatan. There is a woman who can barely feed her children, she can barely lift her head above the heavy taxation of Rome…and her kids are with her, in this crowd…and they are very skinny for want of food. They're there to see Jesus too but for a different reason.
- **He was small in stature –** not only was Zacchaeus' profession despicable, but he was "small in stature" meaning he was a tiny man. What a picture…a tiny man with a tiny heart. Think Danny Devito meets Ebenezer Scrooge. Nothing loveable about this man. Nothing worth Jesus stopping and noticing him. But that's EXACTLY the point. **Do you see how the love of God is HEIGHTENED in this story?**
- **"he was seeking to see who Jesus was" –** we don't know why. Maybe he was just curious. I have a feeling like Z. has begun to feel desperate in his own life…he feels the weight of his own shame, the guilt was crushing him. Maybe he was tired of being alone…tired of a life filled with loneliness and shame. Maybe, he had heard about this man who "receives sinners and eats with them." (Lk. 15:2). We really don't know. People who are wealthy often commit suicide…why? Because if you have everything the world has to offer but come to grips with the fact that you have nothing…what's the point of living. What else is there?
    - **The crowd wouldn't let him in:** There would be no "letting him in" to see Jesus…no one would give him a better spot to see…the fact that he was short…even better! Why allow someone like him to see the famous teacher whom they had heard was doing miracles, signs, and wonders in Israel. He didn't deserve to see Him anyways.
- **Point:** ***The love of God in this story is stretched to reach those who appear to be the furthest away from God! What does it look like to receive God's love? It looks like God's love***

penetrating through the furthest, the hardest, the most unworthy, the most despicable and shameful.

- **Maybe you are here this morning and you feel a million miles away from God…you feel the weight of your own sin and shame. You too feel alone. There are no obstacles too great! Maybe you know someone who appears to be the furthest from God. He can penetrate the hardest of hearts, He can love the most unloveable, He can give grace and mercy to the most shameful, despicable people….people LIKE ME!**

Luke 19:4-7 – So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. [5] And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." [6] So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. [7] And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

- **Notice the invitation from Jesus: "I MUST stay at your house today" – I**magine the shock, not only by Z. but also by the crowd! To enter into the home of someone, in that culture, was very different than in our culture. To a Jew, this would be to approve and even be complicit of the very sinful deeds that Z. had committed. A Jew would never enter the home of a Gentile, they would certainly never enter the home of someone like Z. This invitation of Jesus to enter the home of Z. is an invitation for Z. to be loved and accepted by Jesus. To enter the home was to express love and support for the person. It was an act of brotherhood, friendship….it was an act of LOVE.
- **Notice the command and response:** "Hurry and come down" (imperative)… "so he hurried and came down"…same words in the Greek. Z. did EXACTLY what Jesus commanded. This is why we must first be loved by God BEFORE we seek to obey God. When you are gripped by the love of God…you will love Him…and when you love Him with your heart, you will love Him with your actions. Love received comes before love enjoyed and supplied. Z. "joyfully" receives Jesus into his home.
- **Hospitality and the Gospel:** One of the best ways we can show the love of God is by simply being hospitable to people. There are countless stories of people coming to faith in Jesus through someone simply inviting them into their home and loving them when others would not.
- **Notice that the crowd "grumbles":** Responses like this from the crowd are often highlighted in Luke's gospel and used to demonstrate the spiritual need on the part of the one grumbling. In Luke 15:2 - And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Everyone in that crowd was spiritually bankrupt, they too needed to be forgiven and loved by Jesus, but only Zacchaeus truly saw his need.

19:8-10 – "And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." [9] And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

- **Setting:** There are different views as to where they are at this point in the story. But its very possible that they are still there at the sycamore tree with the crowd surrounding. When Jesus

says, “salvation has come to this house” a house was often identified with the person who lived there…it doesn’t necessarily mean he is in Zacchaeus’ home here.

- **The invitation is the point:** But the curious thing in this text is there is no preaching by Jesus, no miracle, no question that Zacchaeus asks. Just an invitation. There may have been dialogue that we don’t know about…but the Holy Spirit and Luke choose to not include it. Why? BECAUSE THE INVITATION IS THE POINT. All it took was an invitation to enter his home…and Zacchaeus is broken! With the power of a single act of love – an invitation – all of the obstacles between Zacchaeus and God are removed.
    - **Matthew the tax collector: have you ever wondered at the choice of Matthew to leave everything and follow Jesus: *[27] After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” [28] And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. – Luke 5:27-28***
    - **All Jesus did was invite Matthew to follow him…that’s all it took for these two men who for years were filled with shame and guilt and cut off from their people…and Jesus in a moment of Transforming Love…invites them to fellowship with Him**
    - **Grinch: it’s like the moment when the Grinch’s heart that was small grew at the sound of the Who’s singing.**
    - **When the love of God is received, it changes you from the inside out.**
- **Notice his repentance: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” –** He is going above and beyond…because He knows God’s love has gone above and beyond for him! He who has been forgiven much loves much!
- **Notice Jesus’ response: “Today salvation has come to this house” –** when lavish love is received, it is displayed by lavish deeds of repentance and grace towards others. ***“We receive, we enjoy, and we supply the love of God in Christ unto the glory of God”***
- **Notice he is welcomed back into the family of God: “he also is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”**
    - The man who has been cut off from his people for so long is now welcomed back by the God of Abraham. He will never be alone again.
    - The theme of seeking and saving the lost is a major theme in Luke. There is a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost prodigal son, and here we have a lost taxcollector. But Jesus has found him. The Love of God is a Transforming power, where God seeks out the worst of sinners, and loves them, and forgives them, and brings them into His family.

What are some lessons we learn from this lavish display of love received:

- **The love of God can melt the hardest heart of stone**: What is impossible for us to do, God does for His glory. If anyone had a hard heart it was Zacchaeus, and yet God is able to break it. The love of God is a powerful force that can shatter into pieces the heart of those who appear to be the furthest from God. Don’t give up praying for that family member, that co-worker, that friend, that neighbor.

- **God always takes the initiative:** This story is NOT PRIMARILY about the faith of Zacchaeus, we definitely see his faith demonstrated by his repentance and the change that God brings in his heart. But the focus in this story is on Jesus…who passed through Jericho and took the time to visit a wretched, sinful, puny little man named Zacchaeus and change him from the inside out.

- **God doesn't choose the ones who have it all together:** God doesn't choose the mighty, the heroic, the wise, the ones who have it all together. He chooses people like Zacchaeus! He chooses the weak, the foolish, the sinful, the ones who need a doctor…not the ones who are healthy.
    - **Luke 5:31-32 - [31] And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."**
    - **Paul at the end of his ministry told Timothy, "I am the chief of sinners",**
    - **1 Corinthians 1:27-29 - But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.** Do you feel foolish at times? Do you feel weak? You're in good company here in this church…and you're in good company with God! God loves to choose the sinful, the low, the despised…so that "no human being might boast in the presence of God"…. He does it so that we may boast in the Lord! "We receive, we enjoy, and we supply the love of God in Christ UNTO THE GLORY OF GOD."

Invitation: If you're here this morning and you don't yet know this love, I'm telling you there is a God who loves those who do not deserve to be loved. Jesus came to die on the cross for sinners to pay their penalty, because God is a loving God but He is also a just God who will one day punish our sins unless we receive the invitation, the payment that Jesus paid on the cross. Jesus died for the weak, the sinful, the foolish, and He receives you…NOT TO LEAVE you in your sin…you must repent and follow Him. This morning you can surrender to Him and find yourself loved like never before.

I want to help you in that…I want to pray a simple prayer and you can listen and pray along with me in your heart and it's just an opportunity to surrender your life to Jesus. Jesus surrendered His life for you…it's time now for you to surrender your life to Him.

"Let's pray": God I confess to you that I am like Zacchaeus, needy, afraid, unloveable…but I see this morning that you are a God who receives sinners, and that you died for my sin, and that gives me hope too. I choose this morning to lay down my sin at your feet. I surrender my life to you and like Matthew the tax collector I choose to follow you this morning. I turn away from my sin, and I receive your forgiveness for my sin. And I choose now to follow you all the days of my life. In Jesus name, amen.