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Biographical

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for his life Luke 3:19

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if for you #109

Luke 19:2



Luke 19:2 ff.

ZACCHAEUS

- very human.

BY Festo-Kivengere

Found the center for his life

The joy of the NT good news is that God, as Paul puts it, became so small, and this is what we call the freedom of God, that being so almighty and so perfect can come into the limits of a human being in its imperfection without crashing him to smithereens. The fact that He cd come and live a f life that was absolutely understandable, so clear, that noone misunderstood or missed the point (other than?) God in man. That simplicity was illustrated in Christ. Therefore I am at home in sharing with you. What is the essence of God in Christ? Especially in the situations in which you are involved, and in which I am involved?

freedom of God

I am going to read to you from the report written by Dr. Luke. He gives some very interesting incidents. He has a unique way of telling you what Christ meant to all sorts of characters. It is in Luke that the accusation comes rather pointedly from the religious group and they directed it towards His attitude toward all sorts of people.

I'm going to read a simple ~~ym~~ one from Luke 19. My purpose is Christ meeting a real person in real circumstances and the change that came out. The person recorded about was a business man in the city in government business, a very well educated man and well-to-do, because Jericho at that time of the Roman Empire was a very affluent city, very well known for its balsams, for perfumes and products which went abroad - a very famous place in those days. So the society in Jericho was affluent like the society with which you have to do.

Zacchaeus
Christ in
real
life

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus..." beautiful the way it is reported - very human. We spoil the NT and rob it of its reality when we so spiritualize it that in the end it stops speaking directly to us. The report here is exactly as if it said, There was a man in Santa Barbara. And so he came through and the man named Zacchaeus, his work was a ^{chief} tax collector and he was wealthy. This was his status in society - a wealthy man and his job - a very important job in the city of Jericho, he had to do with

fine

finances. Quite an important thing, also we know he was well educated, otherwise they wouldn't have given him that ~~job~~ responsibility in such a big city like Jericho at that time. He was rich. "And he sought to see who Jesus was, but he could not on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. " He was a small man? "So he ran on ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree to see him, " a sort of -mulberry?tree, for Jesus "was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place he looked up and he said to him, 'Zac, make haste and come down for I must stay at your house today.' So he made haste and came down and received him joyfully. And when they (the crowd) the Pharisees, the scribes, the religious aristocrats of Judaism, when they saw this kind of a thing, they saw JC standing together with Z. and moving forward in front of the crowd together, without any embarrassment at all, then they began to murmur, they grumbled rather quietly and this is what they said:) "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Now of course that was quite a thing among the people at that time. This person "a sinner" meant someone with whom no respectable ^{Jew} ~~person~~ would have anything to do --- in fact it doesn't mean morality so much as status in society - it is class - so they murmured that way against the Lord and Z. stood. They are at home now at his place.

Z. stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, ^{the} half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone anything, I will restore it four times." Jesus said to him,

"Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Now let us go back to the story and try to recreate it.

There is a situation in Jericho, and we are talking about a real human being, and the name of this man is Z. And we want to look at him. He has a job, a vocation. He had status, I don't mean that everyone accepted his status, but at least he was well-known as a man with a good job and a lot of money. And at least you can say he was clever enough to make money. He was good at his job, in fact ~~xxxxx~~ he was successful, so you can't ~~xxxx~~ through ^W cold water on a man like that - he was an able man to be able to do what he did. Educated, a good job, very wealthy

in a very affluent society. And when a society is affluent, usually men who have made it are respected. There must have been certain quarters, like among the publicans and those of his class, he was respected, though as a group which respected them - the Pharisees and the scribes, the aristocrats of religion did not respect him. Some resented him because of the way he dealt with money. Some may have resented him because he was on taxes, some resented him because tax collectors used to get a lot of money in addition to the taxes which the Roman govt. had demanded. However, this man had made it in Jericho - wealthy, a good job, I believe fairly young because he could climb a tree, so I believe he was reasonably young (old men don't climb - particularly in front of a crowd -) and I don't believe he was sickly because he ran - so he must have been in good health, and in a good position in govt., and good money, what else would he want? Don't you see this man is a sort of all-round sort of fellow, he really has made it.

But there seems to be a sort of strange restlessness about him. We read it. St. Luke doesn't say much. He is not condemning him, he doesn't even say much ^{like} as the Phar and scribes who accused him ~~with~~ when they criticized our Lord giving us that little ray of light that he was a sinner. Of course we know that in ^{that} society, tax collectors and publicans were always despised and called sinners. That we know. But we can't say that that shd have made him uncomfortable - I suppose he was not alone - and of course he had made it - why care about Pharisees and scribes. He had made it according to the Roman govt/. A man cd be happy in Jericho without caring a bit about these religious fanatics. Anyway, they were no better than he was. Our Lord had strong words to say to them which he never said to Z. You can't say that in His presence they were more comfortable than Z.

In this man ^{we} sense a kind of restlessness about him. I believe that he was not quite as happy as his wealth, good job perhaps shd have made him. You see, he was not as coordinated as he desired to be. You sense it later. I think the life he lived isolated him and made him feel a little lonely as he walked the streets of Jericho. He was criticized, and when people criticize you they can make you feel guilty. It is miserable to be conscious of the eyes of the people - eyes can strip you naked. The eyes of people are very difficult to deal with -

the looks, the way people measure you up and the expressions with which they look at you - it makes you feel a bit lonely and in the cold. Sometimes human eyes are the best guns for killing and sometimes they have done much worse than guns in a war. Z. was aware of what society thought. They knew how he got money, that was another thing that made it more difficult. The way he lived actually isolated him and made him feel he was ~~th~~ not the man he was meant to be. A man becomes aware of that no matter what you do - you feel ill at ease. He walked, fed his body, had plenty of money and yet he found there was an awareness - I am not the man I am meant to be. You sense that the urgency grew on this man, ~~xxxx~~ there was a restlessness, he was under pressure as he grew to realize that things are not as they shd be, then he became uncomfortable in society.

Then, because of the eyes of the people, because of the reactions when he walked, because of the unkind statements made - the jibes people throw at you, he increasingly becomes uncomfortable in society. He becomes really aware: I am lonely, and although he was surrounded, he began to feel the pricks, those jabs and he began to react towards it, so this he find in Z. and only a man - very rich, a lonely man, quite healthy. He should have been quite happy, but somehow strangely alone. Not only alone but uncomfortable. Then under these things, we began to realize that nothing within the reach of his home, within the realm of his money, within the circle of his education, nothing cd really restore that coordinated life. Somehow all the possessions he had accumulated failed to restore him to th3 status he wanted to come to. So he was a man who now cd no longer really find himself. He had to live with his job, but he cd no longer accept himself. He continually began to become aware, my status is not what I wd like it to be.

He began to go around in those circles. Let me use a funny illustration. Z's life was top-heavy: very rich, educated, high in the Roman society because of the job he was doing, fairly young, everything externally was quite all right - top-heavy. The base on which he stood, on which to fix his prosperity, his money his wealth, his position in society - the base was narrow. He lacked that base which could have held the whole life.

He was like a spinning top - top-heavy, and in order to

spinning top

keep moving, he had to keep running. Only a spinning top can keep up. As soon as it stops it tumbles over. There are many spinners in the world - not only Z. There are people who simply can't stop, if they stop they are sure they will topple over. Things just have to go on, and the more speed you have, the more keep up and you are scared even of stopping to think - it scares them. They're top-heavy. Everything is very beautiful on the top, but the base, the foundation, the criterion for living is so narrow that it can't support the head.

And so, we go on - even now it is like that. More speed and more speed because if we stop we are afraid we might tip over and we do. People do. This is not just an exaggeration.

Now what did Z. need, this man of Jericho? He became aware somehow - the news reached him, he heard about the man called Jesus, a young rabbi who came from Nazareth and who was moving about the country. What was the report that impressed this man? He makes all sorts of people feel at home. What? What sort of characters? particularly publicans and sinners. He had been criticized by the religious aristocrats that wherever he is, bad people feel at home. You mean he encourages them to go on as they are? No, no, they change. But he never hits them on the head. Wherever he speaks, they all flock to him and somehow he has a strange way of making them feel they are wanted. His presence somehow makes them feel they are people.

And Z. said, I must see him, I must go to hear this man. You know loneliness sometimes makes people want to seek the love of God, and some people laugh at it and say, This is escapism. It is the best escapism I have ever found. But when a man escapes and finds the reality about himself, and when he escapes he finds that which ~~maxmax~~ gives him life, that is the best escapism I can find. If escaping from my mess, I can meet another One who un-messes me, then my escape has meaning. I come back and look at the mess and say, My, I was messed up, wasn't I?

Z. in his loneliness was under pressure to find that One about whom the reports were running around that "He accepts men and women as they are!" He thought, if I can only have a word with Him, do you think he would have a word for me? " Yes, of course He loves people like you. " Perhaps it was Matthew - you know

M. was in that group - he was a publican. ^{he} Z might have told Z. a lot about Jesus.

Z. said, I am going to meet him. The news reached him that Jesus was passing through J. and he said, Whatever happens, I am going to meet him. And so he goes into the crowd which was quite an adventure for him. For Z to go into the crowd of Jer. - he had a lot of ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ you know, a lot of nudging and kicks too. There were people who said, O here comes the fellow who became fat on our money. And so in the crowd he had a rough time. Anyone who had a grudge would push old Z. and some wd kick him in the crowd. However, the little man stuck it.

Then ~~xxxx~~Luke said, he couldn't see because he was small of stature. I am sure that crowd did their best to make it more difficult for him to see. If he tried to stick up his neck, somebody would jostle him around, poor thing, he had a rough time, but he said, Whatever they do, I must have a word with Him if I can.

He rushes through the crowd and ran like a mad man. You can see people looking round and saying, Look here, there goes old Z.! The rich man is running, we think he needs to . . . A bit funny in the head. Not only that - a rich man running, but he climbs a tree - wht can you expect? He must be completely gone. And up in the tree he sits and some of the folks were perhaps giggling and saying, This fellow has gone ~~mad~~ mad.

Anyway, the Lord Jesus comes ^{along} ~~tax~~ and stands under the tree. And that was quite a shock. Z never knew that Jesus knew him at all. As he sat in the branches looking down, he saw the crowd standing, and the Master right in the center and Z is seen - He looks up. Let me tell you, for the first time the eyes of this poor little man met the eyes of the unique person, JC. I ~~am~~ can't explain, I can't read what is not in, but I know they were eyes full of love. That I know very well. The Son of Man came to seek - I didn't come here by accident. I knew there was a man who had lost his way in life in Jericho. I knew there was a man who had never found himself, a man who was going round and round in circles and whose life had become one big empty, and I came purposely to seek and to save that man.

Not the nation ~~at the end~~, the man who has lost himself completely - we see him (~~confessing?~~) his money

And then the Lord Jesus says, Zacchaeus! I'm sure he nearly fell from the branches. Does he know me? Has anyone accused me to him? These stories that have been going around about me - is it to the extent that they told them to him? But do you know what comforted the man? The voice that said, "Zacchaeus said, " Z, come down quickly, for today I must be your guest." A guest with a ~~must~~ ^{"must"} - isn't that unusual? A guest with a "must," that isn't the language of a guest! A guest never says, 'I must be your guest today. That is an expression in full agreement with the desire of Z. He desired a confrontation with ~~Jesus~~ this unique man. Then this man says, I must come - I am bound to come I am compelled by love to go to your house, no matter how messed up it is. -- as messy as the books of the govt. of Jer are - the financial books. And Z. comes down quickly. This was an unexpected joy, and I believe this man put his hand in the hand of JC I tell you, this is a good news.

You see, Z was a man at a distance from society, he needed someone to restore him to the humanity, the personality he had, and here was a hand outstretched in love which grabbed this man's hand as he was, a publican and a sinner, despised, rejected and outcast. And the Son of God puts His hand in Z's hand. And the warmth and the ~~tem~~ of JC penetrated that poor man and his guilty heart, liberating the personality as they walked to Z's home, although Z didn't know anything about it. I am sure it was one of those shocks, and Z had no time to tell dear Mrs. Z. that the Master has coming home, and his home we don't know what it was like. Perhaps she was one of those ladies who always has her home clean, but this was an unexpected guest and the whole company - the whole lot of them - and they came and they crowded into this little man's house. And of course he was beaming with joy, and he as they walked, we don't hear Jesus preaching. They simply walked together hand in hand and that grip of love completely penetrated that fellow's life, to the extent that as they walked, he ~~said, he was sure~~ ^{was assured that} he also was a human being.

Do you know that this is what is called regeneration.

Regeneration is that ability of the Lord Jesus to restore a man to the personality he had completely lost in the running of things.

Here this man, Dr. Luke says, He received him with joy. And they went to Z's home and immediately the people began to

murmur, "Look at him! He is going to become the guest of a rotten character, a sinner!" No word from the Master and no word from Z, he had no room for that. He was so excited he didn't care whether you murmured, whether you complained, it was too good to be true and it was true.

So the Son of God and the little man walked home. What a beautiful picture. You know Z ^{nearly} ~~almost~~ made a mistake which we all ~~a~~ make, we who go to church. You see, Z had chosen a vantage place in the tree. He could see. If you gave him a camera, he cd get a very nice neat photo of JC. Had he been an artist, he cd have given you a very good sketch of who J is. But that's not what J came to do. A distant Christ is utterly irrelevant for Z's life. If Z is going to be blessed and changed and filled and completely liberated, a distant C is no good for him. That's why J said, Come down. I must be with you at home. Today I'm going to sit with you at home. What a beautiful picture. And don't we sometimes do that? We find people, Episcopalians, Baptists, Pres, Catholics all hanging in their beautiful branches and J is over there. They are singing about him of course, and they are reading about him in the Bible, and they are sitting right over there, they are still quarreling, you know, at loggerheads. They talk about peace of course, oh yes, peace of God the ministers like Rev. __ everytime the peace of God which passes understanding and even though they don't know anything about it. Why? Because He, the Prince of Peace, hasn't come past. And because He hasn't come home, peace cannot come alone. Peace comes only in the trail of the Prince of Peace. It is when he is there that peace is there. It is when he is there victory is there, but as long as I am still looking at him through my branches - what ever the branches may be, he is a distant Saviour who is utterly irrelevant for my need.

However, he went home, and when they were murmuring, Luke says, as they were murmuring, ^Z began to speak. He stood up no one asked ~~him~~ him to stand - he stood up. ^{Why!} You see the love of Christ had entered that ^{self} face - it liberated him to such an extent you couldn't hold him down.

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The ~~strings?~~ ^{strings?} which had become weak are now vibrating with vitality - the strange music of response had begun to come in that cold once paralysed heart. The corroding forces of selfishness had been removed and the man is being made whole again, and he can't help standing up. And he stood up with a beaming eye and said, Master, if I have cheated or defrauded anyone, treated anyone *unfairly* I am willing to pay them not only according to the law - once or two times if I did it and it's going to be restored. I'm going to do more, I'm going to pay ^{back} four times. Now according to the Jewish law, if you were not arrested and you came with a confession, you only restored that which you took. Here is a man confessing and saying, I will restore it four times. Love has liberated this man. ~~Mix~~ He is no longer a victim of his money. Values have changed. Look at ~~at~~ his fat pockets - the essence of life - how he says, No, no, these things are no longer the essence of ^{my} life and I am willing to restore things I took in the wrong way four times!

And then of course this made every one, the authorities and scribes are fidgeting and everyone is restless. They couldn't speak. They had never heard that before. Such strange talk! Can this be the tax collector, the man who sits in Jericho, the sinning man and blast, blast, blast. ~~&~~ Oh! he says he is going to restore everything four times. They had hardly recovered their breath in surprise when he came with a second confession. "And whatever is left with me in possession, I am willing to share it with the poor of Jericho." MY! What a day! Can you believe your ears? Is this the little man of Jericho? You mean now, Zac, that you are going to empty your bank account? ~~R~~ Yes, empty pockets, a full heart! Full pockets but a very empty heart ~~he~~ had had.

"now you see," ladies and gentlemen," Jesus says, "you see this man? *Salvation* Salvation has come to his rescue. Rescue has come to this man. You see he was a victim of circumstances. He was a victim of his own desires. He was a complete slave of money. Rescue, salvation has come to this fellow - to this house. It's a new house now! And then you see Zac, he is all over the place. And I don't know if there were some kids, they were all over the place and servants are gaping because Z is calling them and saying, I really treated you badly, my dear

servant. Here's your money.

Things are happening, the home is warm. This life is no longer empty and top-heavy, it is balanced by the love of God. The base has come and the base is Jesus, and blessing on that life ~~is~~ ~~beginning to stand~~ that man is beginning to stand. He is no longer falling this way or that way and he doesn't have to spin, He can now walk ~~again~~ steadily. Life is fresh. You know what happened?

I would like to have visited Zacch. the following day in his office. You go with me there. He is now in his office you see, Zacchaeus is very excited in the office and people are being called. "Call so and so." They didn't have telephones of course so they sent messengers. And people were coming in. Whenever they come in they catch a glimpse of him. They are trembling for fear he is going to ask them for ~~some~~ some more money. But,

"Look here, do you remember, ~~you~~ you could have paid fifty and I ~~made~~ you pay ~~sixty~~ sixty. The ten was my own and I'm going to give you, not only the ten but ^{four times} ~~forty~~." "What!" "Yes, this is your money." "What happened?" "I've never seen this before."

"Jesus came home yesterday and I am no longer stealing, you see, I have discovered myself. In finding Jesus who came to me, I have found myself. And not only have I found myself, I have found you too. Before, I was a case, a publican, not a person. People said, 'There goes a case - a publican-' Today the Lord Jesus said, 'He too is a son of Abraham.' He has restored my status and he has restored my state. I am no longer a case. Now I am a person - a son of Abraham. And my status is no longer a lost man, not at all, I am a rescued person, and not only that this vertical relationship with JC has affected my whole life. Now when I look at you, ^{you are} ~~I am~~ no longer a case to be exploited, I am no longer using you as a means to my ends, as a ladder on which to climb and get what I want, and when I get what I want I get rid of the ladder."

Do you think the church is alone in this business? Isn't our world exactly like Zac. Aren't men using men as ladders to climb on? Don't we treat each other as cases, "sinner," "the poor" - we don't think of them as human beings, we just think of the badness of that man, that woman, that husband. Don't we say that? Isn't that we ~~we~~ are like the shadows in that cave in the story of Plato?

Shadows, flickering shadows -- we don't see each other properly. Do you see that Z in Jer is like a little shadow of which others are scared. What does he see in other people? They are scared and they pass him. But now everything has been ~~x~~ restored and we go to the office and we see him paying b_ack and people leave the office talking about what has happened. They say, You know the little man, he's completely changed, he gave me \$40 back! And you can see more people coming to get their money back. ~~Re~~

Do you realize that my uncle did that? My uncle did that - he was a Chief in my country and he was an Anglican respected man, a respectable gentleman. And he loved religion as long as it did not interrupt and interfere with his affairs. And then one day Jesus came to this big Zacchaeus who was much taller than the man I was talking about - my uncle was 6'5",- and yet Jesus came to this gentleman, very sweetly with love, and it was quite a shaking, and my uncle when he was by this live, after much resistance, something happened exactly like this. He wrote letters to many chiefs telling them what he was like. He called people he had actually misjudged, judged wrongly, people he had cheated because he was the boss, and you know there was a whole line of people coming and receiving money, receiving property, receiving cattle which he had taken from them. So you see I am not just telling you only a NT story which happened ~~x~~ years ago. It is happening today. And it also happened to me. Because this is a human experience in the life of JC. This is the liberation which we need. And as soon as my uncle discovered who he was in the life of JC, then he began to look at human beings around him and instead of being cases and ladders to help him to get higher and then to get rid of them when he no longer needed them, they became very precious human beings.

Only when Jesus finds you do you find yourself. And only when you find yourself in JC do you find society, do you find America, do you find Africa. Human beings cease being faces and they become wonderful people - personalities. You may not like them. That does not matter, and some of them don't like you either, that doesn't matter either. What matters is that you are confronted with people whom God put in your way, and you discover them in ~~Jesus and~~ ^{Jesus and} ~~discussing~~ accept ~~them~~ their challenge? as they are. My, it is the

excitement of living.

That little man of Jer was full of excitement. They were all talking about Zac. I suppose if he were in America they would call him "Zack!" Everybody was talking about this result. Do you know what he is doing? All people and then the poor you know, as he walked from the office, and having withdrawn some money from the bank, and he no longer passed the poor. With them he was gentle as his friends, and then he began to share some of the money with them. The poor looked at him - What has happened? He never did this before! Oh, Jesus came home yesterday, and when he came home, I am no longer possessed by my possessions. When He ~~xxx~~ came he liberated me in such a way that I am now beginning to possess my possessions. I can dispose of them as I feel because they belong to me. Before yesterday I belonged to them.

How many people belong to what they have instead of what they have belonging to them? I believe this is the clue to what you are dealing with in your profession. ^{as doctors} You are dealing with people who need to find a base, who are looking for a center. People you keep advising to find themselves and here they go round in circles and they are lost until they know who they are in the light of the love of God who gave them the gift of humanity.

longer
base for us