

## He Came to Seek, Save And Feed His Lost Sheep!

Ezekiel 34 (Selection of verses:1,2,4,16,22,23); Luke 19:1-10 (text)

4 August 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 a.m.

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

### Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

I was ten years old. The two-week April school holidays had just started! So, on that Friday afternoon, when school was out, my grandparents came to pick me & my brother up and took us to their farm near the Small Marico River in South Africa's North-West Province. It was mainly a citrus farm, but there were also about ten cows, a handful of pigs, a few sheep and some chickens. The farm covered an area of around 250 hectares,<sup>1</sup> and it was spread over bushy hills and a valley.

Well, about two hours before sunset that evening, the farm workers came and told my Oupa (granddad) that one cow had not come home to the choral for the night. So, my brother & I went out with a search party into the bushy hills and valley to go look for the cow. Her name was "Bontrok" (Multicoloured Dress), because, unlike the other cows, she had more than two colours.<sup>2</sup>

Well, by sunset that evening, we still had not found Bontrok. So, we walked back home and retired for the night!

I found it hard to fall asleep, for my ten-year old heart & mind went out to poor Bontrok! What if she had broken a leg or fallen into a ditch?

Well, great was our joy with sunrise the next morning when we went out and found Bontrok in the bush! Her one hindleg was entangled in a long number-eight wire whose other end was wound around a bush and fastened to an old fence post!

Needless to say, my brother & I were smiling from ear to ear! Often, during the rest of that holiday, we would retell the story of where & how we found Bontrok!

Why did I tell you this story?

Well, because this was the closest first-hand experience that I had of the same kind of emotions that would live in the heart of a shepherd who is searching for a lost sheep! And look, is this not a picture of what our Bible text is all about!? Yes, is our Bible passage not about the *Chief Shepherd* (Jesus Christ) who *comes, searches* and *saves* those who are lost?

So, dear Wainui member, are you perhaps like a lost sheep entangled in sin and the things of this world!? Well, I pray that, as you & I hear again how the Chief Shepherd comes, seeks, and saves lost Zacchaeus, (that) our hearts will be touched, and that everyone here, who may still be lost, will be found by the Chief Shepherd, the Son of God!

Our sermon has three points...

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<sup>1</sup> The farm was roughly 300 morgen.

Until the advent of metrication in the 1970s, the morgen was the legal unit of measure of land in three of the four pre-1995 South African provinces – the Cape Province, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. In November 2007 the South African Law Society published a conversion factor of 1 morgen = 0.856 532 hectares to be used "for the conversion of areas from imperial units to metric, particularly when preparing consolidated diagrams by compilation" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgen>).

<sup>2</sup> She was mostly brown, but with black & white marks.

- Lost Sheep
- Searching Shepherd
- Saving Shepherd

## Lost Sheep

Our Lord Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem where He is going to suffer and die to take away the sins of all His loved ones!

Our text tells us (in v.1) that He enters Jericho, which is, of course, the last stop before Jerusalem! And, as He is passing through Jericho, a man by the name of *Zacchaeus* climbs into a Sycamore tree along the way.

Of course, Jericho was a lush oasis in the middle of a desert! So, it is not a strange thing for a Sycamore to have grown in that town! And the kind of Sycamore tree that you find in Israel is a broad, heavy tree that can grow up to about fifteen meters high! It has large, strong branches growing out from the trunk low down on the tree. Its fruit is small and rounded, and has a fig-like texture & smell when you cut it open, but its taste is not very pleasant.<sup>3</sup> If you Google for “Jericho Sycamore Tree,” you get a very clear picture of the looks & size of this tree!<sup>4</sup> All in all (and to give you an idea), the Jericho Sycamore reminds me a lot of the big Moreton Bay Fig trees I have seen in Cornwall Park in Auckland.<sup>5</sup>

Well, here’s a question...

Why does Zacchaeus climb into that Sycamore tree?

Well, our text tells us that he’s a short guy! And, *obviously*, *Zacchaeus had some interest in Jesus – some indirect knowledge of Him – if only from the buzz of rumour; hearing how the crowds are talking about this “uncanny Stranger.” So, Zacchaeus has come to see what it’s all about – yes, he’s interested enough to take his point of observation in this Sycamore tree so that he can see what Jesus is doing.*<sup>6</sup>

So, that’s one reason – Zacchaeus is short and needed some high vantage point!

But I suspect there’s also a second reason, i.e. because Zacchaeus was a *tax collector*!

And we know that the Jews despised tax collectors, for they worked for the enemy – yes, for the Roman government. What’s more, tax collectors were paid by commission, so

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<sup>3</sup> **συκομορέα, ας** f—‘sycamore-fig tree,’ a broad, heavy tree reaching a height of some fifteen meters (about fifty feet), with large, strong branches growing out from the trunk low down on the tree (the fruit has the appearance of a small fig but its taste is relatively unpleasant).

As in the case of other specific trees for which no local term in the receptor language is available, one can borrow a word such as ‘sycamore’ from a dominant language in the area and add a classifier, for example, ‘tree called sycamore,’ but in a number of languages it may be appropriate to render συκομορέα in Lk 19:4 simply as ‘a big tree’ or ‘a wild fig tree’ ( Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 28). New York: United Bible Societies).

<sup>4</sup> For Sycamore trees (ficus sycomorous) in Israel and Jericho cf.

[https://www.google.com/search?q=sycamore+tree+israel+images&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=k4z2xpsl\\_bSOSTM%253A%252Cpn8fMkASBer9tM%252C\\_&vet=1&usg=AI4\\_-kRrheIRmQ0l2qNS914SaDhDjRmprw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiXyP37\\_-LjAhXijOYKHQz6Bj0Q9QEwCHoECAMQFA#imgsrc=cCd3qygRE-8\\_8M:&vet=1](https://www.google.com/search?q=sycamore+tree+israel+images&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=k4z2xpsl_bSOSTM%253A%252Cpn8fMkASBer9tM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kRrheIRmQ0l2qNS914SaDhDjRmprw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiXyP37_-LjAhXijOYKHQz6Bj0Q9QEwCHoECAMQFA#imgsrc=cCd3qygRE-8_8M:&vet=1)

<sup>5</sup> For pictures of Cornwall Park’s Moreton Bay fig trees, cf. e.g. <http://cornwallpark.co.nz/see-and-do/the-trees> And for the scientific name of the Moreton Fig tree, cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficus\\_macrophylla](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficus_macrophylla)

<sup>6</sup> My adaptation of the words of Sproul, R.C. for which see Sproul’s audio sermon on this passage at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/guess-whos-coming-dinner/>

they tried to squeeze as much money as they possibly could out of their own people. No wonder the Jewish nation hated tax collectors! But they would have hated Zacchaeus even more, for look, Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector; no, he was a *chief* tax collector! So, Zacchaeus would have been *doubly despised* because of his sins of greed and cheating and for illegally using his position of power to enrich himself at the cost of his fellow Jews!

So, what do we see?

Something serious, i.e. that chief tax collector Zacchaeus was entangled – not just in *Roman* claws – but in *satan's* power! Yes, like my grandfather's cow, Zacchaeus was lost and entangled – not in a number-eight wire, but in *sin*! Indeed, he was one of Israel's lost sheep!

Would Israel's spiritual leaders, the Pharisees & Scribes, who were the shepherds of God's people – would they help this sheep out of his lostness?

Ha! As our Ezekiel passage said, they had no desire in *finding* God's lost sheep – let alone *feeding* them! These shepherds were just interested in one thing – i.e. feeding themselves!!<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus remained lost!

Question: Is there anyone here, this morning, who is still lost in sin – anyone who has not yet received the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, as his/her Saviour & Lord? I mean, going by statistics – and I realise that this might not be the best way – it is quite possible that, among the hundred or so members of this church, someone might still be a lost “sheep!” And only you and God will know whether you have received Jesus or not!

Well, fair to say: the second reason why Zacchaeus climbed into that Sycamore was because he knew of his sins, and he knew the crowd hated him for these. So, he felt ostracised! And so, for his own safety, it was better for him to be in that tree – to keep the distance; to be away from that crowd!

So, that was a second reason why Zacchaeus climbed into that tree!

But here's a third (and most superior) reason why he climbed that tree, i.e. he wanted to see Jesus!!

Yes, *He wanted to see Jesus!!*

Dear Wainui member, what's the reason why you & I are here in church, this morning? Is it because we wanted to see Jesus? Or is it by compulsion? Were you dragged here this morning by your wife/husband?

Children, why have you come to church this morning? Was it to see Jesus? Or did you come just because you had to, or because you wanted people to see your new clothes or new hairstyle?

Did we come to church merely out of habit?

Well, Zacchaeus, lost “sheep” of Israel that he was, climbed into that Sycamore tree *so that he could see Jesus!*

But, is that really so?

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. Ezek 4:1-4, The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? <sup>3</sup>You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. <sup>4</sup>The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.”

Well, on strong Biblical grounds (as you will shortly see), I put it to you that Zacchaeus (lost sheep as he was) did not climb that tree so that *he* could see *Jesus*, but so that *Jesus* could see *him*!!

And that brings us to our second sermon point...

### Searching Shepherd

My brother & sister, Zacchaeus climbed that tree by God's eternal decree!

Why?

Well, so that Jesus, whom God in Ezekiel (34:23) had called "One Shepherd, My Servant David,"<sup>8</sup> could see Zacchaeus; indeed, so that this lost sheep, Zacchaeus, would be lined up for the Chief Shepherd's searching eye!

And look, it is Jesus (the Good Shepherd) who starts the conversation with this lost & despised sheep! Yes, it is Jesus who talks first to this sinner!

And the crowd doesn't like that! They grumble (v.7)!

Is the Searching Shepherd scared of the crowd's grumbling?

No, for He's not like human *under*-shepherds! He's on a divine mission by the authority of Almighty God! Yes, driven by divine decree and love, Jesus now calls out Zacchaeus' name!

How did Jesus even know Zacchaeus' name?

Well, according to Jesus' divine nature, He certainly knew Zacchaeus already from before the creation of the world – just as Jesus also once called Nathaniel by name before He even physically met him!<sup>9</sup>

So? What does Searching Shepherd, Jesus, now say to Zacchaeus?

Does He say, "Zacchaeus, I'm tired & hungry and need dinner and a bed for the night, so, according to the Law of God,<sup>10</sup> come down from that tree & fulfil your hospitality duties to me, a stranger!"? Is that what the Chief Shepherd says?

No!

He says, "**Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.**"

"I must!" It is *necessary*, by *Divine appointment*! "I *must*!"

Why?

Well, is it not true that, only by the decree of Him who steers everything according to His will,<sup>11</sup> Zacchaeus climbed into that tree!?

How come?

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<sup>8</sup> Ezek 34:22-23 (especially v. 23), *I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. <sup>23</sup> And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd* (Emphasis mine).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jn 1:47-51 *When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."*

<sup>48</sup> *"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.*

*Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."*

<sup>49</sup> *Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."*

<sup>50</sup> *Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." <sup>51</sup> He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. Isa. 58:7; Ezek. 18:7, 16;

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Eph 1:11-12a, *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup>so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

Well, do you remember what our Lord Jesus once said about those who come to Him!? This was what He said (in Jn 6:37 & 44), “**All that the Father gives me will come to me...**” and “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...**”<sup>12</sup> Who will come to Jesus?

All that the Father gives (draws to) Him!

So, *obviously*, when Jesus saw Zacchaeus in that tree, He knew that he was one whom the Father had given to Him! And so, He interrupts this trip into Jericho as He sees Zacchaeus perched in that tree. And He looked at him and He recognised him and He spoke to him and He said, “Zacchaeus, get down out of that tree, because (by divine decree) I must come to your house today!”<sup>13</sup>

And how did Zacchaeus react?

Well, v.6 gives us all the reason to believe that this lost sheep, Zacchaeus, recognised the Shepherd’s voice,<sup>14</sup> because it says, “...**he hurried and came down and received him (Jesus) joyfully!**”

Dear Wainui member (Dear children), at this very moment (and in this auditorium) you are hearing the Gospel of the Good Shepherd! Are you His “sheep” who listens to His voice? Are your ears tuned-in to His voice!? Will you receive Him joyfully?

So far re point 2 “Searching Shepherd.”

Here is the last point...

### **Saving Shepherd**

My brother & sister, hear what Zacchaeus now says, “**Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.**”<sup>15</sup>

At what stage did Zacchaeus say that?

- Did he say these words right at the beginning of Jesus’ visit as he and Jesus were still on their way to his house? Did he say these words out of fear and defense?
- Did Zacchaeus say these words to impress Jesus; to boast how he (Zacchaeus) will now be doing his best action in an effort to *earn* salvation for himself?
- No!

So, why then did Zacchaeus say these words?

Because, he (this lost sheep) was clearly *moved* by the words & presence of the Chief Shepherd!

*Repentance came into his heart!* He now just wants to make good; to restore!

Look, is that not what everyone does who has really met the Chief Shepherd – and who is cut to the heart!?

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<sup>12</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 6:44). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>13</sup> Well-said words of Sproul (ibid)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jn 10:4 & 16, “**When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice... And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice...**”

<sup>15</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Lk 19:8). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Is that not what you & I will do when we're absolutely in awe of Jesus – Jesus from whom you can hide nothing; Jesus who sees right through you? “Lord, I will go make right with person so & so whom I have wronged & hurt!”

Says Zacchaeus, “***Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.***”<sup>16</sup>

How does Jesus respond to Zacchaeus’ words?

Does He say, “Today, the *Saviour* has come into this house?”

No!

Why not?

Well, because, while He was on earth, the *Saviour* entered many a house – even houses of Pharisees – but, not every house He entered received Him in a saving way!

So, how does Jesus respond to Zacchaeus’ heartfelt promise?

Well, He says, “***Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.***”<sup>17</sup>

How beautiful!! Only *now*, Zacchaeus is living up to his name! In Hebrew it’s *Zacchai* (meaning “pure one; cleansed one”).<sup>18</sup>

*Now*, Zacchaeus is a rich man who, by God’s grace, came through the eye of a needle!

Indeed, as v.10 says, “... ***the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost***” – Yes, He is the fulfilment of Ezekiel 34:16, 22-23, “***I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.... I will feed***

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<sup>16</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Lk 19:8). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>17</sup> Dear Wainui member (Dear visitor), who are all sons/children of Abraham?

Well, God’s Word says, “Those who have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, they are children of Abraham!” Cf. Rm 4:11-18 & Gal 3:9, 29.

Rm 4:11-18 ***And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.*** <sup>12</sup> ***And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.***

<sup>13</sup> ***It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*** <sup>14</sup> ***For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,*** <sup>15</sup> ***because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.***

<sup>16</sup> ***Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.*** <sup>17</sup> ***As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.*** <sup>18</sup> ***Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”***

Gal 3:9, 29 ***So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith... If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.***

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ezra 2:9 for a man called *Zacchai* (צַחִי) head of a family of returned exiles, צַחִי Ezr 2:9 (Θ Ζακχου, ΘL Ζακχαίου) = Ne 7:14 (Θ Ζαθου, Α Ζακχουρ, ΘL Ζακχαίου); perhaps = צַחִי Ne 3:20 q.v.; Θ Ζαβ(ρ)ου, ΘL Παββα... (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 269). Oxford: Clarendon Press). Also cf. צַחִי Clear, guiltless, righteous, deserving, worthy (corresponding to Biblical Hebrew *tsaddiq* (צַדִּיק) Righteous (cf. Jastrow, M. 1950. A dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature. Vol I. New York : Pardes Publishing House, Inc. p.397).

***them in justice... I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. <sup>23</sup> And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.***"

Dear Wainui member (Dear visitor), has salvation come to your house?

*If it hasn't – and if it does – don't let it go until you're found by Him!*<sup>19</sup>

You know? He who not only searches and saves His sheep, is also the One who *feeds* them; and the One who will do so again in a few minutes as we sit at His table!

AMEN (2364 words excluding footnotes)

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<sup>19</sup> Words borrowed from Sproul (ibid)