

Text: Luke 19:1-10

Title: The Joy of Finding What Was Lost / Yaeun Han

1.

Do you recall a time when you lose a valuable item and then find it? When raising sons, I often have to go to the lost and found. This is because they lose not only an article of clothing, but sometimes even their glasses or an entire bag. If you can't find the lost item, you get really upset. You might search the whole house over and over until you find it. If you do find the lost item, you feel great joy. Someone told me they went to Korea last summer and lost their wallet containing their green card. It would not have been easy to return to the U.S. without a green card, especially during such a sensitive season, but fortunately, a few days later, they received a call from the police station to come and get the wallet. How happy must that person have been when they got that wallet back? However, if what was lost was not an item but a person, it is truly frightening. When I was in China, some missionary families once went to a mall with their children. But one missionary's 5-year-old son went missing. Everyone started searching all over the mall to find him. The child's father, especially, ran around, loudly calling his son's name. I remember that we found the lost child in 15 minutes, and everyone rejoiced together. Some of you might also have memories from your childhood of getting lost and wandering alone in a place like a park, separated from your mom and dad. In today's story, Jesus introduces himself as "one who came to seek and to save what was lost." What exactly is the "lost" thing that Jesus is seeking?

2.

Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem after living three years in Galilee. There were several routes from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples chose the route that went up to Jerusalem through Jericho. Jericho was a city located near the Dead Sea, at a very low elevation. It had many springs, so it was a

good environment for trees and plants to grow. The balsam and dates grown there were good export products. Jericho prospered through trade and became the second-largest city after Jerusalem. Even back then, you had to pay taxes to trade. So, the custom house in Jericho was very large. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector, in charge of Jericho's customs. However, in Jesus' time, the people the Israelites hated the most were tax collectors. This was because tax collectors were people who tormented their own countrymen by taking their money. Rome made the people in the colonies they ruled pay a lot of taxes. Rome did not collect taxes directly but had local people do it. The tax collectors would first borrow a large sum of money to pay the taxes to Rome in advance. Then, they would extort far more money than they had borrowed from the people to fill their own pockets. So, the people could not possibly like the tax collectors. Zacchaeus was a leader among the tax collectors, so no one liked him. Furthermore, Zacchaeus was very short. It seems being short was a big handicap back then, too. Zacchaeus had a lot of money, but he must have been lonely. We can learn from Zacchaeus that money is not everything in life. Zacchaeus realized that there are valuable things that money cannot buy. What was it that Zacchaeus wanted to gain? It was a sense of belonging. He wanted to be with other people, and he wanted to be told that he, too, was a son of Abraham. Perhaps Zacchaeus longed for an ordinary life.

3.

Finally, a rumor spread in Zacchaeus's town of Jericho that Jesus was coming. Jesus had become famous in the Galilee region, so news about him had already spread to Jericho. Zacchaeus wanted to meet Jesus. No, he thought it would be good just to see Jesus' face. Because Jericho was a very large city, a great number of people gathered to see Jesus. Since Zacchaeus was short, he had no choice but to climb a tree. You can see how much Zacchaeus wanted to meet Jesus by his enthusiasm in climbing the tree. Jesus made his way through the countless people and came to the tree where Zacchaeus was. I am so moved by this part. Jesus intentionally took a detour and stopped in Jericho just to meet this one person, Zacchaeus. Out of all those people, he thought, "I must meet this one person, Zacchaeus." This was

because Zacchaeus's earnest heart had reached heaven. Jesus said to Zacchaeus, who was up in the tree, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Zacchaeus was overjoyed. It was because Jesus had recognized him, even calling him by his name. But the people of Jericho could not understand Jesus. This was because he was a bad man who tormented the people and sold out his country. Zacchaeus must have also heard the people whispering, so he decided to courageously say to Jesus what he had resolved in his heart. "Lord! I am a rich man who has amassed a great deal of money. But I will give half of my possessions to the poor. That's not all, Lord. With the other half of my possessions, I will pay back four times the amount to anyone I have cheated." Zacchaeus was sincere. He knew that repentance was necessary to believe in Jesus. Zacchaeus knew that repentance meant completely reforming his life. Zacchaeus knew that true repentance was to turn away from his wrongdoing, ask for forgiveness from those who had suffered loss because of his wrongdoing, and compensate them. That is why he is confessing to Jesus that he will do so.

4.

In Matthew 19, there is a story of a young man similar to Zacchaeus. He was a young man, and it seems he was rich. He came to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus told him to keep various commandments, the young man said he had kept them all. Then Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor." He said that he would then inherit a greater treasure in heaven. But the young man did not want to do that, so he went away sad (v. 22). Then Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (vv. 23-24). The power of money is so strong that people cannot help but kneel before it. One of my sons also wants to earn a lot of money. Then I always ask him, "What will you do once you've earned a lot of money?" He doesn't say he will be a good son to his mom and dad. Jesus says that if you become rich, it is not easy to follow him. Jesus did not simply condemn money itself. He is saying

that money must not become the goal. Money must be a means. If money becomes the goal, from that moment on, you become a slave to money. When our hearts are bound by money, our hearts are not free. That is why Jesus said you cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24). However, Zacchaeus, the richest man in Jericho, decided to give up all the security that money gave him. This was because he knew that being with Jesus was far happier. Zacchaeus had possessed a lot of money, but he had learned that it did not make his life happy. Because Zacchaeus realized this, he decided to gain Jesus, even if it meant giving up not only half of his wealth but even more. Zacchaeus, who gave up his money, looks like a fool, but he is the wisest man in the world.

5.

To Zacchaeus, who had thus truly repented, Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham." The words, "this man, too, is a son of Abraham," have a deep meaning. In Jesus' time, the salvation people thought of was becoming a son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of their faith. They thought that the descendants of Abraham automatically inherited the community of eternal life given by their ancestors. However, those who were excluded from being descendants of Abraham could not inherit eternal life. Jesus was telling him that Zacchaeus had been lost, but was now found, and had entered into the community of eternal life that the sons of Abraham enjoy. Zacchaeus was now able to enjoy the sense of belonging he had so longed for.

Since he was young, Zacchaeus had struggled to climb to the highest place in Jericho's society. He tried to reach the top of that society by any means necessary. However, when he reached the top, his life was empty. He wanted to live a truly satisfying life. Then he met Jesus, and Jesus told him to come down from that high place. Jesus wanted to show him that there is happiness in low places, too. He wanted to show him that one can be happy by sharing and giving to people in low places. Our lives do not become happy just because we have a high social status.

Our lives feel happiness when we are with people and have a sense of belonging. As you live your life, do not lose the things that are more precious than money.

6.

In today's scripture, Jesus looks like a shepherd who set out to find one lost sheep. The good shepherd left the 99 sheep and went out to find the one lost sheep. Jesus understands the times Zacchaeus endured in anguish. By welcoming him in front of many people, he publicly lifted Zacchaeus's burden. Jesus tells Zacchaeus to come down from the tree. If you think about it deeply, Jesus will be the one to climb the tree in Zacchaeus's place. 'Zacchaeus, I will climb the tree that you climbed. I will take the heavy burden of sin that you carried and be hung on that tree. I will die on the tree carrying your burden, so I hope you will find true freedom.' Isn't that the meaning with which Jesus told Zacchaeus to come down from the tree? Jesus is our good shepherd. Jesus is the Son of God who came to this earth for each one of you. He is the Jesus who came to this earth to find you again, God's lost children. Jesus is extending his hand to you, saying, "Today I want to stay with you." This is because Jesus' greatest joy is to be with you. The most precious person to Jesus is you. What kind of person is Jesus to you? Is he someone valuable enough to follow, even if it means giving up all your possessions? If you have lost or let go of this precious Jesus in your life, I hope you will find him again. I bless you in the name of the Lord that the love for Jesus that was lost may be restored to all of us.