



IMITATING JESUS THE SEEKER

PASTOR DAVID SAYLOR

APRIL 28, 2024

Today we shall be in a very familiar passage: **Read Luke 19:1-10 (stand and read)**

A few weeks ago, one of our lay preachers, Scott Copeland gave a message from this very passage, and it was very good. If you missed it, you lost out.

Today I won't steal what Scott said, but I will complement it as I put the focus mainly on v. 10.

In April of 1855 there were 4 Europeans and several Africans that were camping in what is now Somalia. They just had dinner with some sailors who had gone back to their ship to make ready to leave in the morning.

The men were sleeping in their tents when suddenly they were awakened by gunfire. Awaking, they found they were being attacked by 350 natives. Not good news.

Richard Burton was the head of that camp and he went out and saw a man lunging toward him with a spear, and the spear pierced this cheek, went through and impaled the other cheek and it was lodged between his teeth. Somehow he managed to escape and he asked someone to go see if that ship was still there. It was and he made it to the ship.

Another one named John Speke was captured. He had someone who was watching him and who was told not to harm him. But as soon as everyone left, he began to try to stab him, stabbed him 11 times before he escaped.

A third man was able to escape with minor injuries, and then a fourth named William Stroyan was killed. A spear pierced his heart, his abdomen, and his legs they had been beaten by war clubs.

And those 3 escaped on the ship with some of their helpers, and one dead body.

Now, why in the world were they there? This was in the middle of nowhere. What were they up to? Well, the Royal Geographic Society had commissioned them to solve a mystery that had been around for hundreds of years. What is the source of the Nile? Where does it begin? And so they went to look.

The problem was they had barely gotten started when that attack happened, and they had to abandon it.

Three years later, despite the dangers, Burton and Speke decided to go back to look again, So in 1858 after putting forth amazing *effort*, great *intentionality*, *planning* and *persistence*, they solved the mystery that had eluded people for years.

But when you think about it, it wasn't too much later that airplane flight was becoming worldwide and the answer would have been a much simpler task as the area could be surveyed by air. But such is life.

But the thing that strikes me is how often people are willing to risk life and limb for well, "earthly goals or money" - while at the same time those of us who have

discovered the most important thing that anyone can ever know – the Gospel-love of God found in Jesus Christ – and we will often not risk even a bit of possible embarrassment and rejection, never-mind life and limb so others can come to know Jesus. It really is a contrast, isn't it?

People will pursue earthly, fleeting glory and endure all kinds of hardships for all kinds of things – our name in the history books, fame, championships - but how much will we endure to make sure people have an opportunity to hear the gospel?

Well, fortunately we serve as Savior that exemplifies all of those things, such as *incredible effort*, *intentionality*, *planning* and *perseverance* to carry out and redeem people.

And so, for that reason, because Jesus is the example to imitate, we're going to look at 5 principles related to that. We're going to look at *Imitating Jesus on Mission*.

Today, we're gonna focus all of our attention on this last verse, *The son of man came to seek and save the lost*. And through these we're going to look at 5 principles that should help us right here in Connecticut in 2024 so that we too might *seek and save the lost* now. The first principle is this.

I. WE IMITATE JESUS BECAUSE HE IS THE DIVINE KING.

We imitate Jesus because he is the divine king. Now Jesus here refers to himself by a title, *the son of man*, and he uses it a lot in the Gospels.

So the question is, what does this mean and where did it originate from? Well, we find it in **Daniel 7:13-14** (ESV)

¹³ "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

So in this we see a combination of Jesus's divinity and his humanity. This is pointing to the Messiah and notice it says *one like the son of man*. But this isn't just an *ordinary* son of man, because *every nation, all peoples and every language will bow and worship him*. Worship belongs to God alone. The *Son of Man* is God, the Divine King of the Universe.

And so we need to imitate him for two reasons.

The first is that as Divine-King-God he has Unending Authority. I mean, we think immediately of the Great Commission. And the verse that precedes it, which says *all authority in heaven and on Earth, has been given to me*, right? Why is that wonderful? Well, of course we should obey Jesus because he commands us, but we also obey him because we know that he's not sending us on a mission without support. That we have the full authority of the

Triune God with us, backing us so that we can carry this out, because we are unable to take *hearts of stone* and convert them into *hearts of flesh*.

So we imitate Jesus because he has the authority both to command us to go and to empower us to go.

But secondly, and it revolves around the fact that the *son of man* is human. He is a divine-human king that also that *suffered for* and *served* sinners - people that wanted to have nothing to do with God himself. And yet Jesus was willing to suffer for them.

Think about **Mark 10:45**. *The son of man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.*

Now I want to say that when we think of evangelism, we don't want to think of it in terms of suffering. But when you look at the history of missions, very often the people who go and spread the Word have to suffer to get it accomplished – like Jesus did.

Sometimes they are mistreated. Sometimes they are even killed.

A year or so ago we had a couple from India, Ana and Azad, who have been exiled under penalty of jail or worse. Why? Because people turned to Jesus in an area where the culture said, “we don't want that? It's illegal to do that.”

Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, most of us display little tolerance for others unlike us and are unwilling to be patient with others, or face ridicule and rejection so that eventually, possibly some might come to know Jesus Christ.

And so, Jesus, both modeled for us how we should live, and he calls us to do the same - that if we want to reach our world, we can't just stand at a distance, to tell the gospel and say *I hope that you believe it*. Beyond that we have to go to them and serve them, and we have to be willing to suffer for them. That's the first thing we imitate, Jesus, because he's the Divine-Human King.

II. SECONDLY, WE IMITATE JESUS BY LEAVING OUR COMFORT ZONES.

This corresponds to the word “*came.*” *The son of man came.* Where did he come from? He left the comfort of heaven to take on human flesh and to enter a fallen world. He left beauty for brokenness, prosperity for poverty, holiness for hellishness. He left all of that.

Do you think any of that was comfortable? Do you think Jesus looked forward to being hungry and tired and sweating and exhausted? **But he was willing to leave that which was comfortable in order to redeem us.** We need to be willing to do the same thing. We need to be willing to follow his example.

Hudson Taylor is the founder of what became the China Inland Mission. That was in 1865 and during that era missionaries typically kept culturally aloof from those they went to. In these beginning years of the modern mission movement, mistakenly the Gospel message was meshed in

with Western culture and missionaries often tried to westernize their converts in the process of bringing them Jesus. This is a justified criticism given to Christian Missionary activity and is often portrayed in movies of that era.

But Hudson Taylor, himself an Englishman, saw through all of that. In spite of criticism, when in China he began to dress like the Chinese did, grow his hair like they did and live in the same manner they did. The result was that many came to know and love Jesus. They did not have to become “British” to do it.

As God blessed and the mission grew, and more missionaries came to work with Hudson, he would train them. In one such gathering he took the idea of the incarnation of Jesus and applied it to their context. And he said this

“The incarnation shows us that, provided we keep from sin, we cannot go too far in meeting this people and in getting to know them and getting to be one with them and getting into sympathy with them.

There is a wonderful instruction in the way in which the Lord Jesus wrought his works of mercy. He touched the leper and the blind when he healed them. The woman felt that if she could only touch the hem of his garment, she would be sure to be healed, and the savior felt that virtue as it went out of him.

If we keep so far from the people that they cannot even touch the hem of our garment, how will virtue go out of us? Sometimes they are not clean and we are tempted to draw our skirts together. But I believe there is no blessing when this is the case. The Lord Jesus became a curse for us and in that way, delivered us from the curse. There is power in drawing near to people.”

As we think about reaching people, we can't stand in arm's distance - we've got to be willing to go to them.

Now let's keep thinking about the incarnation from this perspective. Think of all the **intentionality and planning** that God made to redeem the world, and then think that maybe we need to take a little bit of our brain power and think about how we can reach out to people around us - so we make sure that we're not so busy living life and enjoying life and in fellowshiping with one another that we don't stop to think about how we can reach the people around us.

Of course, we invite them to church, but the world did not get to this place in terms of the number of believers because people just stayed in church.

If we want to see people saved, it's not just about sending people to the mission people field. *It's sending into our own mission field in our neighborhoods.*

So, if God was intentional, we should be too. *The longer we are believers, the fewer relationships we tend to have with unbelievers.* There are, however, ways to get to them.

You connect with others through *hobbies, interests, and activities*. You can join a gym, a Garden Club, a softball team, a dance team, or a book club or a senior center. You can participate in events like cycling trips, nature hikes or

car shows, community trash pickup days, cultural festivals. I'm just going to tell you it takes effort to reach out to people. It does.

III. THE THIRD PRINCIPLE IS THIS. WE IMITATE JESUS BY SEEKING FOR LOST PEOPLE.

Notice the word *seek*? It's used 117 times in the New Testament. It refers to trying to find something that you possessed and lost.

It's interesting - when you look here at the story of Zacchaeus and Jesus, it starts out with the focus on *Zacchaeus trying to find Jesus*. He's looking for Jesus.

When you get to the end of the story, you realize the whole story is really about *Jesus looking for Zacchaeus!* The whole the point of the story is that Jesus is pursuing Zacchaeus, and he didn't even know it. And Jesus in **verse 10** sums up his whole ministry. *The son of man came to seek and to save the lost* - that all the initiative was on the side of Jesus, looking for lost people. (he's looking for you too...)

Here is something that you may find helpful.

There are some people that you get a chance to share the Gospel to that you *may never see them again*. You just share the Gospel. Then you pray that God will use it.

Then there are the people near you that you can have a growing or ongoing relationship with. You have *multiple opportunities to impact them*.

- And among those there are some people that may be intimidated about having a spiritual conversation - *but you can invite them for COFFEE* and they're not so intimidated about that because it's a public space. It's a short commitment. They get up and leave if they want to.
- after you've done that a while, maybe you move on to **DINNER** because it's longer. dinners take tend to take longer, and sometimes the space is more intimate.
 - This is a way to be intentional like Jesus, thinking about people you know and how to move that relationship so that they feel safe.
- This can then help them get to the place where you can talk about ultimate issues. Talk about the **GOSPEL**.

And so, what I want you to do is to think about some real people in your life and to plug them in next to either *Coffee*, *Dinner* or the *Gospel*? Where's the next step for you? Do you need to take him to coffee? Do you need to take him to dinner? Is it time to share the Gospel?

So that's something for you to think about. In other words, if we're going to seek lost people, that means having some intentionality and time invested. *"Let's get together. Let's get together."* And for some of them, you'll create trust and a chance to share.

IV. NUMBER FOUR, WE IMITATE JESUS BY HAVING GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS.

You see the word *save* there.

Jesus is the Savior, and he came to *save*. In terms of imitation, we know that *we can't save anybody*. Right? That's good theology. We can't save people. But sometimes good theology blinds us to some of the ways that the Bible speaks. Some of the nuances that it speaks about.

Let me show you...

The first one is

1 Corinthians 9:19, 22-23 (ESV)

¹⁹ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul didn't shrink from saying that, like we would never say that, right? We're worried that someone will misunderstand what we mean. Paul wasn't worried at all. So maybe we ought to pause a minute and figure out what he means.

Romans 11:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴ in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.

James 5:20 (ESV)

²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

So what do these verses mean? **They mean this. That God is the one who saves souls, but he uses us as instruments.** We're tools.

It's much like if you had an artist and he's working on a statue and he's got some knife or tool.

That knife does not know where to cut.

That knife doesn't have a vision of what this is supposed to look like.

That knife can do nothing on its own, **but in the hand of the artist, it can produce something beautiful.** *It has, but to submit to the artist.*

In the same way, God wants to use us to make something beautiful, but we have to submit to Him. We have to obey him. We have to trust Him.

One of the things I want to remind you is that God wants to use **you**. That devil's always telling us how sinful you are and how incapable we are. *(I don't have the gift of evangelism. I don't know what to say. I'm not good with talking, I'm too nervous to speak.)*

But then we jump to the conclusion that He does not want to use us, or that he's not willing to use us, or HE CAN'T USE US, that couldn't be any farther from the truth. You are a part of God's divine plan to reach out.

We have but to believe him and to step out in obedience.

If you think of someone and you want to take them from

coffee to dinner to the Gospel, one thing that might help you is to understand this about How Conversations Work:

- As you're getting to know people that on the outer layer, people will talk about interest because they tend to not be controversial or explosive.
- Then as you get to know them better, it moves to their values. What do they value?
- And the innermost part is their worldview. Their understanding of: is there a God? Is there life after death, and so on, and so. When you get to that part, it's time for Gospel Conversations.

This is helpful to me. It helps me be a little bit more intentional. So I just want to encourage you to think about that and where you are in relationship to some people that you might know who are lost. And how you can take that conversation a step forward.

V. AND THEN #5 WE IMITATE JESUS. BY SPENDING TIME WITH SINNERS,

And this corresponds with *the lost*. Now let me explain something to you about Zacchaeus who was a tax collector. Tax collectors would bid for contracts to collect taxes for the Roman government. And then all you had to do was pay them a certain amount. And anything you collected above that was for yourself, you could just keep it. Naturally, there were all kinds of opportunities for you to be greedy and take advantage of people, right?

And so, for that reason, and the fact that they were in business with the Roman government, the Jews despised them.

And so when Jesus shows up and said, *hey, I must eat at your house today*, the people were in shock. *“Hey, does Jesus even know who this guy is? He's a tax collector. He's a bad person. He takes advantage of people. He's unclean. Why would you go eat with this sinner?”*

But this isn't the first time that it happened. In Luke 15, where there's three parables, ending with the most famous – the Prodigal son. Why does he tell these three parables?

At the very beginning it tells us that *the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law grumbled, “this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”*

Now the Gospels uses the word *sinners* in a way that's different than you'll find in the epistles, like Romans. There it's a theological term, where we're all sinners. In the gospels, *sinners* tends to be a social term. It describes a class of people. And so *sinners* were those Jews who, in the eyes of others, had consciously abandoned the law and willfully refusing to follow it. Looked down on as social and religious outcasts. Scum.

So I want you to think about this - when Jesus chooses to share a meal with a tax collector, He's saying God's mercy is available for absolutely everyone. Absolutely everyone.

Are they going to the synagogue? Do they offer sacrifices? Are they even trying to find God? *Doesn't matter. His mercy is available to all*. He invites all to repent and believe.

Now I want to ask you some questions and some of these I suspect might make you uncomfortable.

- Would you have coffee with a Sinner? A social outcast sinner?
- Would you have coffee with an atheist?
- Would you have coffee with a Muslim?
- Would you have coffee with an illegal immigrant?
- Would you have coffee with an ex-convict?
- Would you have coffee with a gay person?
- Would you have coffee with a transgender person?

Would Jesus? Yes, Jesus would.

And let me just say this. *We cannot expect to distance ourselves away from people whose lifestyle and beliefs are contrary to our lifestyle and beliefs and reach them.*

We're not going to outsource reaching them to e-mails or posts on social media.

Jesus was a scandal to others because of who he was seeking to reach. They were not outside of God's mercy.

And if we say *“I will not have coffee with you,”* we're saying, you know what? *“You're outside God's mercy because I'm not willing to go there.”*

Now I know some of you have felt this because I have myself and I don't know why. But sometimes we worry that *“If I do that, then I'm tacitly approving their behavior.”*

Let me just say we're totally inconsistent on that. There's people we will have coffee with all the time that we don't necessarily buy into their way of living. Does it mean we endorse every one of their actions, beliefs or decisions?

And I just want to say that we who are part of God's church, *if we don't get to the place where we can spend time with people whose lifestyles are utterly outside of a God-directed life, then how are they ever gonna be won?*

And I just want to encourage us, I know that might be challenging.

I just want you to think about it that Jesus spent time with *tax collectors and sinners*. Jesus is not holding people at a distance. If there was anyone he was holding at a distance, it was a self-righteous religious people.

CONCLUSION

So we've talked about 5 principles.

- We imitate Jesus because he's the Divine King.
- We imitate Jesus by leaving our Comfort Zones.
- We imitate Jesus by searching for Lost People.
- We imitate Jesus by having Gospel Conversations
- And we imitate Jesus by spending time with Sinners.

That comes from the Word of God.

GOSPEL

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. If you don't know Him, he's seeking you more than your seeking him, because He loves you.

Our sin will keep us from God forever, but Jesus came to fix that by taking our punishment on Him on the Cross. Receive Him and be FOUND.

Dear Jesus. I know I am a sinner. I know you are the Savior. Right now I turn from my sin and I turn to you in faith. Forgive me and make me Yours. Be my Savior and my Lord forever. Amen.