

The Influence of One

Luke 19:10

Johnny was a bagger. He worked at a grocery store. I'm not sure which one. It could have been a Meijer's or Kroger's or VG's or any number of grocery chains. He was an average grocery bagger. He came to work on time and set about doing his responsibilities without any trouble.

One day he attended a training event put on by his company. It was led by a woman named Barbara Glanz. She was talking to 3,000 frontline workers of the grocery chain Johnny worked for. They were baggers, truck drivers, shelf stockers and cashiers. Barbara's topic was on how people can make a difference. She described how every interaction with another person is an opportunity to make a memory, to bless someone's life. She encouraged those in attendance to look for those occasions. As she spoke she placed on the walls large posters with motivational sayings. She laced her speech with stories about how others had left an impact on people through seizing those opportunities to invest even a little bit into the life of another. In concluding her comments for the day she left her phone number and invited those in attendance to call if they wanted to talk about something she said. Her speech ended and she went home.

About a month later she received a call from one of those in attendance that day. It was a 19 year old bagger named Johnny. He proudly informed her that he had Down's syndrome and then proceeded to tell his story.

He told her that he liked what he heard that day, but wasn't sure there was anything he could do that was special for customers. After all, he said, I'm just a bagger. Then he told her of an idea he had. He decided that every night when he came home from work he would find a thought for the day for his next shift. It would be something positive, some reminder of how good it was to be alive, or how

much people matter, or how many gifts we are surrounded by. If he couldn't find one, he would make one up.

Every night his Dad would help him enter the sayings six times on the computer page; then he would print out 50 pages. Carefully he would cut out 300 strips with the sayings and sign each one. The next day during his shift as he finished bagging the groceries of each customer he would put one strip of paper with that saying in the top of the bag. Then he would stop what he was doing, look the customer in the eye and say, *"I've put a great saying in your bag. I hope it helps you have a great day. Thanks for coming here."*

A month later the store manager called Barbara. He went on to explain what amazing things were happening at the store. As he was making rounds one day he noticed that the checkout line where Johnny was stationed was three times as long as the other lines going all the way down to the frozen food aisle. He got on the loud speaker and encouraged customer's to move to a shorter line, but no one wanted to move. They told him they were willing to wait. They wanted to be in Johnny's line. One customer told how she used to shop there only once a week, but now every time she drives by she stops to get one of Johnny's thoughts for the day. The manager explained to Barbara that Johnny wasn't just filling bags with groceries, he was giving people hope.

A few months later, the manager called Barbara again to tell how Johnny was transforming the whole store. He told her that when the floral department had a broken flower or unused corsage, they used to throw them away. Now they go out into the aisles, find an elderly woman or a little girl and pin it on them. The butchers started putting ribbons on the cuts of meat they wrapped for customers. The people who made their shopping carts were trying to make them with wheels that actually worked. **Isn't it amazing how someone**

who considered himself insignificant in the grand scheme of things could make a lasting impact on the lives of so many? One person can have a lasting influence.

When we consider through the corridors of time people who have had some influence on others the Johnny's of the world aren't on the list. We tend to think of those who have made some contribution on society. Things that they achieved or positions they stood for have touched others through generations. It might be for good or evil. People like Alexander the Great, Bonaparte, Stalin, Hitler, Lincoln, Churchill, Einstein, Edison, Ford and our list could go on and on. Each had a mission that they felt compelled to accomplish and their pursuits have left a lasting legacy on people through history.

Maybe you think that you have no mission; that you can't be a person of influence, that there isn't anything you might do that could have an impact on others that will be positive, that will create change. We have the ability to influence others in some way

Our passage today is about someone who understood what His mission was. In obedience He came at the request of another in order to make an impact on the eternal destiny of many. It is this time of year that we remember the birth of One who came in an inconspicuous manner, clothed in the most fragile garment of a new born baby. This child would grow to influence many and challenge the long established religious traditions.

As we again turn our attention to Christmas and the celebration of Christ's birth, let's remember not just that He came, but let's remember why He came. Secondly, I would like us to remember that His desire is for us to also become people of influence, to be His heralds. Turn then with me in your Bibles to the book of **Luke chapter 19 and verse 10.**

As we turn to this passage let's be reminded of the significance of the event we celebrate at Christmas

by noting **John 3:16**. Say it with me.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Think about that for a moment. It was a voluntary act on the part of both the Father in sending and the Son in coming. He gave. It wasn't by our demands or even at our request. As a matter of fact we're reminded by the Apostle Paul, that God's sending was at a time when we considered ourselves His enemies (**Romans 5:8**). We wanted nothing to do with Him, yet He understood that we needed this gift, so in spite of our feelings toward Him, God still gave. It was a gift to us, a gift that we did not yet realize we needed and Paul reminds that it was out of God's love for us even though we didn't want anything to do with Him. Paul would tell the Ephesians that this gift was by His grace (**Ephesians 2:8**).

So we need to remember that this infant, this new born babe wrapped in strips of cloth, born in the humble confines of a stable to a poor family was His gift to us; a gift that would grow in stature and favor with God and man. He would influence many for eternity. Because He came, He would make a difference in the lives of countless numbers of people. Of all the people in history who have or will make some difference in the world, there is no one as significant as this One who came some 2,000 years ago to a small town in Judea. The difference He made then is still an influence in the lives of people today and will for eternity. No one else can make that claim.

So it is we come to this passage in **Luke 19:10**. Read it with me. **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."**

Here is a simple verse made of 14 single syllable words, yet filled with significance. They are words that provide hope to the hopeless, encouragement to the discouraged, peace to the anxious, and comfort

to the weary. They are not just words for the here and now, even though they are, they are words with eternal perspective. They provide eternal hope, eternal encouragement, eternal peace, eternal comfort.

Consider with me in this verse these thoughts.

The Person God Sent

The Plan God Revealed

The Purpose and Promise God Gave

All of this is wrapped up in the person who came as a new born baby.

I. THE PERSON GOD SENT

This person whom God sent is described in our verse as the **Son of Man**. **What's in a name?** That was a question posed by Juliet to her love Romeo. They fell in love before they knew they were from rival families. Romeo was a Montague and Juliet a Capulet. Juliet was willing to deny her own name for the sake of her love for Romeo.

“Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo?

Deny thy father and refuse thy name.

Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,

And I'll no longer be a Capulet.”

A few lines later she would state:

“What's in a name?

That which we call a rose,

By any other name would smell so sweet.”

In cultures past, the name bore significance. It was the crest on which the family stood in honor or in disgrace. In the case of Jesus, His name is the only name given among men whereby we can be saved.

(Acts 2:21)

There is a name I love to hear,

I love to sing its worth;

It sounds like music in my ear,

The sweetest name on earth.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

There's just something about that name!

Master, Savior, Jesus!

Like the fragrance after the rain.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

Let all heaven and earth proclaim:

Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,

But there's something about that name!

Jesus, name above all names,

Beautiful Savior, glorious Lord.

Emanuel, God is with us,

Blessed Redeemer, Living Word.

Jesus is the sweetest name I know,

And He's just the same as His lovely name,

And that's the reason why I love Him so;

O Jesus is the sweetest name I know.

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There was only one person whom God the Father could send to buy us back from the slave market of sin. That was His Son, Jesus – the Son of God, the Son of Man. This Son of Man is the One sent to save.

There are many names given to this one, but noted here for us is a title that is used over 80 times in the New Testament. 80 of them are used by Jesus as a description of Himself. It is a name that He chooses to use as representative of man. Numerous passages in Scripture remind us that the Son of God became man; that He who was God also took on flesh so that He could represent man on behalf of man before the Judge of all mankind, God Himself. He accomplished as a man what every other man in history could not, living a perfect, sinless life. But maybe you would say, yea, He could do that because He was God. To that I say yes He was God, but would be quick to add that He was also very much just as you and I are – man. He experienced the same things we experience.

Hebrews 4:15 reminds us that He was a high priest who could sympathize with our infirmities and weaknesses not because He gave in to the same things, but because He had encountered them as well, yet He did not sin. He was just like us in

every respect yet He was without sin. Therefore He could be our representative before God and He could claim the title Son of Man.

In that title there is a threefold meaning. First, it speaks prophetically of the Old Testament's claim that a Messiah would come. Listen to Daniel's description of the vision he had.

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14) This scene is yet to come.

Jesus would describe His coming again in this fashion: **“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man.” (Matthew 24:27)**

The term not only speaks of Him as the coming Messiah who will establish an everlasting kingdom at His second coming, it also refers to His suffering and death.

“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priest and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:31)

He would represent man for all their sins before God who will judge those sins.

Finally, the term Son of Man also refers to His earthly ministry of teaching and healing. **“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” He said to the paralytic, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’” (Mark 2:10-11)**

The term includes all aspects of His person and His work and causes the hearers to pay attention to this One whom others asked candidly who is the Son of Man. As we see throughout the Gospel accounts the Son of Man is God's person, sent to earth to become our representative before God. As the Son of Man, His actions would influence many.

They would influence the blind to seek Him out to restore their vision.

They would influence lepers to seek Him out to restore their health.

His influence would change the lives of 11 ordinary men.

He would influence a man bent on destroying what He had started in the church to become its greatest defender and ardent Apostle.

Throughout history men and women of all ages and races and social status would risk their very lives because of Him. Movements like the Reformation and the Great Awakening would stem from the influence of this single man – the Son of Man.

What influence has this Son of Man had on your life? Because of that influence what affect have you had on the lives of others?

Why was it then necessary for God to send His Son as a new born baby? We see that also in this verse. Note with me the plan God revealed.

II. THE PLAN GOD REVEALED

Back to our verse in Luke we read **“for the Son of Man is come to seek...the lost.”**

It is a word that simply means to look for with intense or earnest desire. It implies that this pursuit avoids other distractions. Johnny the bagger sought to bring a sense of hope and encouragement to others through his sayings of the day.

We get a glimpse into what intense desire looks like in a couple of stories that Jesus told. A shepherd

had 100 sheep. As any good shepherd is prone to do he dutifully cared for those sheep. They were his own. It was not a chore or obligation but a joy to tend to their needs. During the day he would provide them with good places to graze and cool streams with which to quench their thirst. He would comb through their wool looking for parasites or infection from cuts. At the end of the day he would lead them to the fold where they would be kept from harm by poachers or wild animals looking for an easy meal. As they would pass into the corral he would count them and maybe make a comment about how thick their wool felt or how a lamb was growing up. 96...97...98...99. One was missing. That one was important to him. Maybe it was the prize of the herd or maybe the runt of the litter, it didn't matter, that one was missing. I don't think he hesitated or questioned the fact that he had 99 and he was sure that there would be a good bunch of new lambs come spring that would replace this missing one. Besides that sheep was notorious for being rebellious, always wandering off, always getting into mischief, always stirring up trouble with the other sheep. *As the saying goes good riddance to bad rubbish.* But the shepherd didn't have that attitude at all. He diligently sought after that sheep until he found it. But he wasn't content just to put that sheep in the pen with the others, he threw a big party for his friends. Maybe he gave some extra feed to the sheep as well because he was happy he found his one missing sheep who was lost.

The other story is about a woman who had 10 coins. Each coin was, in those days, worth a day's wages, so the coin was of great value to the woman. It represented a day of work for her. She may have needed it to pay a doctor bill or buy groceries. She needed to find it. She searched everywhere. If it were today she probably looked in all the kitchen drawers and cupboards, under the toaster or microwave. Moving to the living room she would have removed all the cushions on the sofa and easy chair and then reached down inside the sofa where all the spare change tends to collect along with the

stale popcorn kernels and missing socks. Next would be the laundry room in either the washer or dryer. She would move to the bedroom and search dresser drawers and pants pockets and nightstands and jewelry boxes. The house was thoroughly cleaned and searched until the lost coin was found.

The point of these two illustrations serves to illustrate what Jesus is saying about Himself that He has come to thoroughly seek out those who are lost. The sheep probably didn't know it was lost and I'm sure the coin didn't know it was lost, but to their respective owners they knew of the lost items. Likewise, God knows we are lost and so He came to seek us out in the person of the Son. Being lost implies that it was once owned and therefore sought after by the rightful owner because it is His.

God's plan was to seek us out because we were lost, because He loves us and He wants us to be restored to Him. *The two passages in **Luke 15** further illustrate the joy that is the owners when those who are lost to Him are found by Him.* There is great rejoicing in heaven when that happens.

Understand this as well, that when it speaks of the lost, the word is not suggesting that in some way the owner was negligent in the care of what belonged to Him. The term means that we are lost because of our own actions. We are responsible for this lost condition, not God. Man wanders around at his own peril. Every one of us regardless of social status, or gender or age or race are lost. The prophet Isaiah notes that we are all like sheep who have taken our own path, gone wherever we wanted (**Isaiah 53:6**). Paul adds that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's standard (**Romans 6:23**). In this lost condition God has sent His Son to seek us out, to show us that we don't have to remain lost.

So, how does He do that? Finally in this verse we see that God gave us His purpose and His promise.

III. THE PURPOSE AND PROMISE GOD GAVE

“For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Once found He doesn't leave us in that lost condition. His desire, His purpose is to save us. He has done His part to do just that.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness; by whose stripes we are healed.” (I Peter 2:24)

In our lost condition we are bent on destruction. That's what the word lost literally means – to destroy completely. **John 3:16** stresses that God loved us so much He gave His one and only Son. His part is that He gave. Our part is that we must believe on Him so that we will not perish but have everlasting life. The word perish there is the same word used in **Luke 19:10**. By Jesus coming at this time we celebrate as Christmas He pursued His mission of seeking and saving the lost from destruction. *He has done His part. Our part is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and we will be saved. That's His purpose: to save us. That's His promise: to save us.* Salvation is a permanent thing. His pardon for our sins is eternal. He won't ever change His mind about you. He considers you of greater value than lost sheep or lost coins. He values you so much He died on the cross for you. He came to seek you out and He died to save you. It implies deliverance, safety, and preservation.

Our verse concludes a narrative about a trip Jesus was taking with His disciples. Jesus was on His way somewhere and was just passing through the town of Jericho. He had no intention of staying, but He had every intention of passing through. Why you ask? There was someone there who was lost who needed to be sought out and saved. His name was Zacchaeus. He was curious about Jesus and was willing to consider Him from a distance. He was content to watch Him hidden among the branches of a Sycamore tree. But Jesus wasn't content to leave Him there. He sought out and

found this little man and saw him not as others saw him, a cheat and a swindler, but someone whom He loved and would one day die for. Jesus, the Messiah, the new born king came to seek out all the Zacchaeus's and women at the well and the religious like Nicodemus and the betrayers like Judas and the deniers like Peter. He came to seek and save them. We're reminded from **II Peter 3:9** that He isn't willing that any should perish (remain lost) but that they repent and call on the name of the Son of Man who died for them. But not all will take the steps necessary to find peace with God through faith in the Son of Man.

Jesus has come and has made a difference in the lives of many who believed that He came to seek for them and to save them. We are among that group who has been influenced by Him. He seeks those who are lost, and when found none will be lost again (**John 6:39**). All who call on Him will be saved. If you have the Son you have life. What wonderful words of promise, a promise found in His purpose.

Jesus is no longer physically among us. He has left us with the responsibility of going out to make an impact on the lives of those who are in the world who are lost, to seek them out and point them to the only one who can save. There is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved. He's asking us to be like Johnny the bagger, to give people a message of hope and encouragement, He wants us to live in such a way that people stand in line because we're different, because we make a difference by the one who came to make a difference in us, the One who came to seek and save.

This Christmas season will you look beyond the One who came and consider why He came? His purpose was to seek and to save the lost, and in our belief in Him it comes with the promise of being saved, of gaining eternal life, becoming a part in His forever family and, oh, telling others that the Son of Man is seeking for them to save them. The influence of the One who came to seek and to save has made an eternal impact on many.