

“To Seek and Save Sinners”

April 6, 2025

Luke 19:1-10

I. Introduction

The familiar story of Zacchaeus, found only here in Luke’s Gospel, is a story that illustrates Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth; the reason He was going to Jerusalem—to seek out and save lost sinners. God has to seek sinners because, as **Romans 3:11** says, **“There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.”** This *“seeking”* is seen throughout Scripture and goes back to the beginning of time. After Adam and Eve sinned and then tried to hide from God, God came into the Garden of Eden, seeking them, and in **Genesis 3:9** called to them, **“Where are you?”** **Ezekiel 34:11** (NAS) says, **“For thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.’”**

That the Son of God came into the world to save sinners was made clear throughout the New Testament as well. In **Matt. 1:21**, the angel said to Joseph, **“She, i.e., Mary, will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”** The apostle John wrote in **1 John 3:5** that Jesus **“appeared so that he might take away our sins.”** Paul wrote to Timothy in **1 Tim. 1:15**, **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst.”** The story of Zacchaeus and his conversion is one of the clearest biblical illustrations of God seeking a particular sinner. Out of a massive crowd, Zaccheus had a divine appointment with the seeking, saving Lord. Jesus found him, called him by name, and called him to salvation.

Jericho was a very wealthy and important town. It was situated in the Jordan valley 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem and about 5 miles from the Jordan River. It straddled the road from Jerusalem to the crossings of the river that gave access to the lands east of the Jordan. In the midst of the Judean desert, it had a great palm forest and world-famous balsam groves which perfumed the air for miles around. Men called it *“The City of Palms.”* Josephus called it *“a divine region,” “the fattest in Palestine.”* The Romans carried its dates and balsam to world-wide trade and fame. All this combined to make Jericho one of the greatest taxation centers in Palestine. It is here that we find the sinner Zacchaeus.

II. A Sinner is Saved

A. The Sinner, Zacchaeus Luke wrote, “Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus.” Although tax collectors were among the most hated and despised people in Israel, it was not a crime to be one since taxation was authorized in the Law of Moses. In Luke 3:12-13 when some repentant tax collectors asked John the Baptist, “Teacher, what should we do?” John replied, “Don't collect any more than you are required to.” In Luke 20:25 Jesus commanded that taxes be paid when He said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.” In Matthew 17:24-27 Jesus paid His taxes.

What God disliked was abusive or illegitimate taxes, extortion, dishonesty, and taking money from people by use of physical violence, intimidation, and cruelty as tax collectors in Jesus' day were known for doing. Such behavior of tax collectors made them rich, but at the cost of being barred from the synagogue. Because people considered them sell-outs to Rome as well as unclean, tax collectors were even cut off from social relationships. The name *Zacchaeus* means “*righteous one*,” but as a tax collector, he definitely wasn't living up to his name.

Zacchaeus was no ordinary, low-level tax collector. He was a man who had reached the top of his profession, “he was a chief tax collector.” He was the commissioner of taxes, the head of the region's tax collectors. He would employ others to do the actual collecting of the taxes, while he passed on what the Romans required. Since Jericho was a good spot for a tax man, he “was wealthy.” Though Zacchaeus was a renegade and traitor in the eyes of the Jews, and rich in his own eyes, Zacchaeus was a precious lost sinner in the eyes of Jesus.

Like many in the crowd, “he wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man, he could not.” He was curious about Jesus, but more than that, looking at his response to Jesus' message, he had a troubled heart. He knew he was alienated from God. Perhaps he was feeling guilty for his sins. So, being resourceful, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree.

In the East, it is unusual for a man to run—especially a wealthy government official. But Zacchaeus ran down the street like a little boy following a parade. And he even climbed a tree! Curiosity is certainly a

characteristic of most children, and Zacchaeus was motivated by curiosity that day. Having climbed up into the tree like a little child, he waited for Jesus, the Savior, to come along.

B. The Savior Zacchaeus may have thought he was seeking Jesus, but actually the Savior, Jesus, was seeking him. “When Jesus reached the spot” where Zacchaeus sat in the tree waiting, Jesus did and said some things that must have shocked Zacchaeus and the crowd as well. First, Jesus stopped, then He “looked up and” made eye contact with the outcast Zacchaeus and then He called him by name. Finally, and most amazing of all, Jesus commanded Zacchaeus to take Him home. Jesus said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” It was part of God’s plan for Jesus to stay with Zacchaeus that day so that Zacchaeus could repent and be saved. “So, he, i.e., Zacchaeus, came down at once and welcomed him, i.e., Jesus, gladly.” This was probably the first time any honorable, ceremonially clean, and respected person had ever come to his house. Just as the father welcomed his prodigal son back home in Luke 15:11-32, Jesus welcomed a sinning, hated agent of Rome.

The reaction to Jesus’ choice for a host didn’t meet with popular approval. “All the people saw this and began to mutter—actually, grumble, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’” The crowd was upset at Jesus’ actions, not only did He stop to speak with Zacchaeus, but He was going to his house. No self-respecting Jew would ever dirty himself by staying at the house of the chief administrator of Roman taxation. The people were right and wrong. Zacchaeus was a sinner, but he wasn’t beyond the touch of God or His call to repent. The crowd may have written Zacchaeus off, but Jesus didn’t. Jesus’ visit with Zacchaeus showed His acceptance of the tax collector. Jesus didn’t worry about the effect this association would make on His reputation; Jesus’ priority was to associate closely enough with the lost so that they might come to know the grace of God—that they repent and be saved. This is why He came to earth. This is why He was going to Jerusalem—to seek and save sinners.

C. The Result Luke doesn’t describe Jesus’ conversation or meal with Zacchaeus, or Zacchaeus’ exact response. But the result, the salvation of the man is evident from his changed life. “Zacchaeus stood up” and acknowledged Jesus as “Lord!” He then gave proof of the change in his heart by announcing, “Here and

now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” With a changed heart, Zacchaeus was aware of his sin and desired to right the wrongs he had done. Zacchaeus wasn’t saved because he promised to do good works. He was saved because he responded by faith to Jesus’ gracious words to him. Having trusted the Savior, he then gave evidence of his faith by promising to make restitution to those he had wronged. Saving faith is more than pious words and devout feelings. In Zacchaeus’ changed heart, his love and faith in God were demonstrated by his deeds and love for others. James 2:14 says, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds.” And later in verse 26 James wrote, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” Zacchaeus’ salvation was made evident by the complete change in his behavior and attitude.

Jesus confirmed the reality of Zacchaeus’ salvation when He “said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.’” Physically, Zacchaeus had been a son of Abraham all of his life, but now he was a son of Abraham spiritually. Turn to Romans 2:28-29. Paul put it this way in Galatians 3:29, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Zacchaeus was no longer just a son of Abraham by birth, but a son of Abraham by faith. That very day he was justified by faith. The one who had been lost was saved and delivered from sin, death, and hell. Jesus had sought him, had called him by name. Zacchaeus believed and repented, and his conduct and life were transformed.

Jesus’ final words to Zacchaeus summarized His mission to the earth: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” “Son of Man” is a messianic title taken from Daniel 7:13. This was Jesus’ most common way of referring to Himself. It describes both his humanity and His deity. “Seek” and “save” are His purpose. “Lost” is the condition of everyone/anyone without God—Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But there is hope, Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

III. Conclusion

It is good to read and reread the stories of Jesus' miracles and healings, of His reaching out to sinners, like Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus; of His call to them to repent and be saved. It's good to remember His amazing love for each one of us as well. The weeks of Lent are a good time to remember what it cost Him "to seek and save the lost." Isaiah prophesied about this—turn to Isaiah 53:3-9.

Writing of Jesus, John 1:3 says, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." When He stopped to call Zacchaeus, Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe, was on His way to die on a cross for the world. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Hebrews 12:2 describes Him this way, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus willingly came and then died in your place so that you could have your sins forgiven and not suffer an eternity in hell but instead have eternal life beginning the moment Jesus becomes your Lord and your Savior. This was and is an amazing love.

As you think of Jesus' sacrifice did for you, what is your response? Paul gave the answer in Romans 12:1-2: "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will." Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from ourselves, it is the gift of God." Have you accepted God's gift? Peter said in Acts 2:21, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

If you have made Jesus your Lord and Savior (Rom. 10:9), does your life show it? Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Zacchaeus' life was changed when he met the Master, how about your life?

Communion Devotion
Mark 14:12, 16-17, 22-26

We are a very busy people and a very busy culture. When we look back at the slower lives people led—that many of us led—years ago, it's hard to understand how we got everything done back then. But really as we have gotten busier, we seem to be doing less. It seems that some things have gotten pushed out of our lives. For many, this includes taking time to slow down and doing something “just for fun”—to stop and smell the roses, so to speak. I'm afraid that some of the things that seem to have gotten lost in the hustle and bustle of life are thoughts of eternity and Jesus Christ.

Sunday mornings, and especially the Sundays when we celebrate the Lord's Table, remembering what Jesus did for us, are times we set aside to purposely slow down, to put the daily cares and concerns aside and reassess our priorities and our goals. What really is more important, *what you are going to do this afternoon or where you will spend eternity? Reading the headlines in the newspaper or on your smartphone or reading God's Word? Listening to your favorite music or talk show host or hearing Jesus say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”?* These are all rhetorical questions. The answers should be obvious. But are they? What do your actions, your thoughts say?

Jesus willingly left heaven and all its grandeur to come down to earth and die on the cross for your sins. Everyone here knows the story. So, what is your response? Is Jesus really your Lord and Savior? Are Jesus and His commands really number one in your life or are they the last thing that comes to mind? Are you quick to share His Gospel, His love with others?

As the bread and the juice are being passed, thank Jesus for His love for you. Thank Him for the promises that we expect **Him** to keep. Then look at your actions, your thoughts, **your** promises, the things we read in the church covenant—what are your priorities? If they aren't what they should be, confess that to Christ and then ask Him to give you the strength to do what you should do. In **James 4:2** we are reminded that “**you do not have, because you do not ask God.**” In **John 16:23-24** Jesus said, “**My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Ask and you shall receive.**” When you walk out of this building this morning, make sure that you are right with God; that your priorities and goals are what they should be.