

## **“The Lost is Found”**

March 7, 2021

Luke 19:1-10

### **I. Introduction**

The familiar story of Zaccheus, found only here in Luke’s Gospel, is a story that illustrates Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth—to seek out and redeem 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 tried to hide from God, God came into the Garden of Eden, seeking them, and called to them, **“Where are you?”** (**Genesis 3:9**). In **Ezekiel 34:11** (NAS) we read, **“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 even before His birth. In **Matthew 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 Timothy 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 Zaccheus and his conversion is one of the clearest biblical illustrations of God seeking a specific 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 lay in the Jordan valley 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem and about 5 miles from the Jordan River. It straddled the road to Jerusalem and the crossings of the river that gave access to the lands east of the Jordan. It had a great palm forest and world-famous balsam groves which perfumed the air for miles around. Jericho’s gardens of roses were known far and wide. 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 lost man Zaccheus.

## II. The Lost is Found.

**A. The Lost Man, Zaccheus** Luke wrote, “Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zaccheus.” Although tax collectors were among the most hated and despised people in Israel, it was not a crime to be one, since taxation was a divine institution. 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.” Jesus even paid His taxes (Matt. 7:24-27).

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. The behavior of tax collectors made them rich, but at the cost of being barred from the synagogue. Because people considered them unclean, they were even cut off from social relationships. It’s interesting that the name *Zaccheus* means “*righteous one*,” but as a supervisor of tax collectors, he definitely wasn’t living up to his name.

Zaccheus was no low-level tax collector. Zaccheus was a man who had reached the top of his profession, “he was a chief tax collector.” He was the commissioner of taxes. He was 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 Zaccheus was a renegade and traitor in the eyes of the Jews, he 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 dissatisfied heart. He knew he was alienated from God and lacked eternal life. 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 Zaccheus 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 Zaccheus 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** Zaccheus may have thought he was seeking Jesus, but actually Jesus was seeking him. “When Jesus reached the spot” where Zaccheus sat in the tree waiting, Jesus did and said some things that must have shocked Zaccheus and the crowd as well. First, Jesus stopped, then he “looked up and” made eye contact with Zaccheus and then He called him by name. Finally, and most amazing of all, Jesus commanded Zaccheus 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 Zaccheus that day so that Zaccheus could repent and be saved.

“So, he came down at once and welcomed him, i.e., Jesus, gladly.” This would have been 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 Zaccheus, but He was also staying the night. No self-respecting Jew would ever pollute himself by staying at the house of the chief administrator of Roman taxation. The people were right and wrong. Zaccheus was a sinner but he wasn’t beyond the touch of God or His call to repent. The crowd may have written Zaccheus off, but Jesus didn’t. Jesus’ visit with Zaccheus 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 may come to know the grace of God—that they repent and be saved.

**C. The Result** Luke doesn't describe Jesus' presentation of the Gospel to Zaccheus, or his exact response. But the result, the salvation of the man is evident from his changed life. "Zaccheus 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." He was aware of his sin and desired to right the wrongs he had done. Zaccheus 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 Zaccheus' 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." Zaccheus' salvation was made evident by the complete change in his behavior and attitude.

Jesus confirmed the reality of Zaccheus' salvation when He "said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.'" Physically, Zaccheus 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." Zaccheus was no longer just a son of Abraham by race, 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 gave him life and light to believe and repent and his conduct was transformed.

Jesus' closing statement 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 Zaccheus and Paul; His call to them to repent and be saved. It's good to think of His amazing love for each one of us, but sometimes we forget what this love, this coming "to seek and save the lost" cost Him. Isaiah prophesied about this—turn to Isaiah 53:4-9. Philippians 2:6-8 summarizes it this way: Jesus Christ "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!" Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), died on a cross for you. He 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.

If someone does something really nice for you, don't you want to tell others about it? Shouldn't we be just as quick to tell others of what Jesus has done for us? "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Great Commission to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20), shouldn't be a chore but a privilege.

Even before we had this so-called culture of inclusiveness, Christians were commanded to reach out to "all nations"—to all people. Jesus reached out to the outcasts like tax collectors and prostitutes, He also reached out to those on the other end of the social spectrum like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea—members of the Sanhedrin. We need to be ready to reach out to anyone God puts in our path and even go out of our way to tell them, as Peter told the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." Your life, your voice may be the one others are waiting to see and hear before they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Are you doing your part for God?