

Calling to Salvation

Bible Background • LUKE 19:1–10

Printed Text • LUKE 19:1–10 | Devotional Reading • 1 CHRONICLES 16:8–13, 23–27

Aim for Change

In today's lesson we will: IDENTIFY how Zacchaeus and Jesus ignored social taboos; REPENT of sinful attitudes we may have held toward certain people; and CHALLENGE the stereotypes we have of others so we can better share Christ with them.

In Focus

Rev. Thompson, although fairly new to the area and the Olive Hill Church, was building a community center for the children in South Central Los Angeles. Zoe, a local police officer, had a reputation for being controversial and unjust when it came to the arrest of teenagers in the community. Rev. Thompson was making arrangements to visit her at the police station on behalf of community residents. One Sunday, Rev. Thompson looked out into the congregation during offering and saw Zoe in worship. Several members were displeased with her presence. After the service, he approached Zoe about setting up a meeting. Zoe was impacted by the sermon and touched by the presentation on the church's efforts to build a community center. She was open to meeting with Rev. Thompson to discuss how she could be a resource.

Zoe said to Rev. Thompson, "Look, I am not perfect in my job. I may have been unfair in how I have served. I can admit that. However, I do want to support the efforts of the community center. Here is a check of my own money that I want to give as a donation. I want to hear about the people of South Central and how we can do a better job with police accountability and safety for our youth." Sensing a genuine change in Zoe, Rev. Thompson accepted the gift. On the following Sunday, Zoe decided to join Olive Hill. Rev. Thompson told the church to rejoice as heaven rejoices.

Do we understand that people's jobs are not always attached to who they are? What do we do when our jobs challenge us to be controversial?

Keep in Mind

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. Publican telones (Gk.) — Tax collector.

B. Abide meno (Gk.) — To lodge as a guest.

Say It Correctly

Jericho. JER-ih-koh.

Restitution. res-tih-tyoo- SHuhn.

Sycamore. SIH-kuh-more.

Zacchaeus. za-KEE-uhs.

KJV

Luke 19:1 And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

2 And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

3 And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.

4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.

6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

7 And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

NIV

Luke 19:1 Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town.

2 There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich.

3 He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd.

4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

5 When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."

6 Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy.

7 But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

8 Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

9 Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham.

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

The People, Places, and Times

Jericho. Just 18 miles east of Jerusalem, Jericho was situated near a main road, so there were probably many publicans, or tax collectors, who collected the customs for the government as the people went in and out of the city. Jericho was a highly populated and ethnically diverse city important for commerce and culture on a major Roman road in the Judea province.

Zacchaeus. The chief publican in Jericho was already rich (probably through legal and illegal means). Publicans were despised by the people because they not only collected taxes for the hated Roman Empire, they also kept some of the proceeds for their own use. Since Zacchaeus was chief among the publicans, he was probably very wealthy and very despised.

Background

Luke's Gospel was written to give another historical account of Jesus' life and ministry as the Son of God, this time emphasizing that Jesus brought salvation to the Jews and Gentiles. We see in Luke's writings what Jesus taught regarding love for neighbors; His inclusion of Gentiles in the definition of a neighbor; and concern for

the weak, poor, marginalized, and outcast. The record of Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus is only found in Luke's Gospel.

The encounter with the tax collector is found soon after Jesus shares a parable with some of the religious elite in answer to those who look down on others. He compares and contrasts the prayer posture of a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). In this parable, the Pharisee is proud that he follows the Law and exalts himself in self-righteous prayer. In contrast the tax collector humbly comes before God in prayer asking for mercy. Jesus ends the parable by stressing that the one who is justified is the one who humbles himself in prayer (v. 14). We see Jesus' illustration brought to life in His meeting with Zacchaeus.

At-A-Glance

1. Counted Out (Luke 19:1–5)
2. Called In (vv. 6–10)

In Depth

1. Counted Out (Luke 19:1–5)

Jesus passes through Jericho, a notable, bustling city in biblical history with a mixed population of Jewish elitists and the unsavory. Here, Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus who got His attention as He passed by—despite the crowd's efforts to stop him (Mark 10:46–52). Luke adds a different dimension to the town of Jericho by highlighting Zacchaeus. He is chief tax collector and considered a traitor to his people and a puppet of their oppressor, the Roman government, which occupied Israel. Zacchaeus profits greatly from his position and is rich. He is also a short man, which probably is a second strike against him.

Ostracized by his people, Zacchaeus is on his own in trying to find a spot to see Jesus when he hears He is coming to town. Zacchaeus maneuvers through the crowd and climbs up a sycamore tree to capture a glimpse of Jesus as He passes by. It is in that moment that Jesus recognizes him because Jesus can read hearts and perceive when someone presses their way through a crowd to get to him (Luke 8:43–48).

We should be encouraged that Zacchaeus' efforts pay off and Jesus spots him because when we seek Jesus with our heart, He will find us (Jeremiah 29:12–14). Of all the people in the crowd, of all the houses available to Him in Jericho, Jesus purposefully calls out Zacchaeus—the short tax collector perched in the sycamore tree—and asks to dine at his house. This account shows us that no one is counted out.

2. Called In (vv. 6–10)

Zacchaeus quickly comes down from the tree. The surrounding people murmur about Jesus going to the home of this notorious sinner, but Zacchaeus receives Jesus into his home with joy. Jesus' act of inclusion, mercy, and grace compel Zacchaeus to make an astounding and heartfelt gesture. He submits to Jesus as Lord and pledges to give half of what he owns to the poor; and he will repay those he has extorted four times as much as he has taken. Only a true encounter with Jesus from a heart ready to receive Him can make such a declaration.

Compare Zacchaeus' response to that of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18–23) whom Jesus tells to sell all he has, give it to the poor, and follow Him. The rich young ruler leaves sad because, although he follows the Law and believes the Law, he is unable to trust Jesus to let go of all and follow Him. Zacchaeus, unprompted, volunteers from the heart to give what he has in response to the mercy received.

Jesus responds that Zacchaeus, as a son of Abraham, and his household have received salvation. The Son of Man, God incarnate in the earth to repair the breach, has come to seek out and save that which was lost through

sin. Jesus emphasizes that Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham to restore his position as an heir of salvation—joint heir with Him by faith not by his works (Romans 8:17; Ephesians 2:8–9).

Zacchaeus' money and works did not bring salvation to him or his household; he was called in because of his repentant and humbled heart.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was the significance of Zacchaeus making the effort to see Jesus?
2. How did Jesus see Zacchaeus in the midst of the crowd? How did the crowd respond?
3. Why did Zacchaeus receive salvation as a son of Abraham?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do Zacchaeus and Jesus ignore the social taboos? How does their boldness lead to a new life for Zacchaeus?
2. In what ways have people stereotyped you for being passionate about the Gospel of Jesus? Stereotyped you because of your career? How would that feel? Now, given that feeling, how can one move past social and cultural stereotypes to embrace people who are different from ourselves?

Liberating Lesson

Jesus ignored the taboos surrounding association with tax collectors. He was purposeful in reading Zacchaeus' heart from a sycamore tree; and from this look of mercy, salvation was given and received. What would happen in our culture if we moved beyond stereotypes and biases to truly see each other as God intended? Jesus saw Zacchaeus' heart and restored him as a son of Abraham. As the body of Christ, we are instruments in bringing restoration and healing to our broken world.

Application for Activation

In response to this lesson, examine stereotypes and biases of any kind. Search your heart and pray for God to unearth any values or beliefs that do not align with His Word. God has shown great mercy. Discuss as a class how to actively be an extension of mercy in your spheres of influence. Make the effort to go outside your comfort zone to seek out someone in need of God's love expressed through you.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 19:1–10

Luke's account of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus in this passage comes at the end of the long section that details Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–19:27). We find in the passage hints about various themes in the book, such as Jesus' journeying to Jerusalem (19:1, 4), concern for the poor (19:8), and the coming of the eschatological salvation (God's kingdom) into history (19:5, 9). However, the main focus of the incident involves the coming of salvation and God's kingdom to the outcasts and the proper use of money. Jesus' parabolic teaching concerning the coming of salvation to the outcasts receives concrete expression here, just as with Bartimaeus (18:35–43), in the life of Zacchaeus, who is also an outcast.

The story of Zacchaeus is in sharp contrast to that of the rich ruler (18:18–23). Both are powerful and wealthy. The rich ruler keeps the commandments and could be considered religious, but he cannot do the one thing remaining, which is hand his life to Jesus and signal his surrender by selling his possessions and giving them to the poor. On the other hand, Zacchaeus is considered a "sinner" because of his profession.

1 And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. 2 And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

Jericho was a rich, prosperous, and very important city. It lay in the Jordan valley on both the approach to Jerusalem and the crossings of the river, which gave access to the lands east of the Jordan. It had a great palm forest and world-famous balsam groves that perfumed the air for miles around. Its gardens of roses were known far and wide. It was known as "The City of Palms." Josephus, the Jewish historian, called it "a divine region," "the fattest in Palestine." The Romans carried its dates and balsam to worldwide trade and fame. There must have been at Jericho one of the principal custom houses because of the export of balm that grew in that oasis and was sold far and wide, and because of the considerable traffic that took place on the road. A toll was collected from travelers and traders here. Zacchaeus was head of the office.

The name Zacchaeus (ultimately from Heb. zakak, zaw-KAK) means "pure" or "innocent." But given his profession, Zacchaeus is considered anything but pure. However, as the story unfolds, he will live up to his name in this encounter with Jesus.

He is a chief among the publicans (Gk. architelones, ar-khee-teh-LOW-nace), suggesting that Zacchaeus is no ordinary tax collector but probably a commissioner over the district of Jericho, a position which he may have lobbied for or purchased from the Roman authorities. Because the local Jews hate and ostracize those who worked for Rome, Zacchaeus must have been a lonely and despised person.

Despite his wealth, Zacchaeus occupies a marginal social position. Although "he was rich," and a man of great means, he is not happy. Thus he seems to be a perfect example of a rich man's difficulty of getting into heaven (Luke 18:24–27). As an administrator for the Roman government's tax office, Zacchaeus has amassed great wealth by overtaxing the Jewish people and taking a cut from the taxes gathered by other tax collectors whose work he administers. His wealth, however, cannot provide the one thing he wants more than anything else.

3 And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. 4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

Zacchaeus wanted to set his eyes on Jesus and so he sought after Him. Perhaps Zacchaeus had heard that Jesus accepted people like him. He longed to see this remarkable Jesus for himself. For all his wealth and privileges, Zacchaeus recognized his own deep spiritual needs, which only Jesus could satisfy. But Zacchaeus ran into two

problems. First, was the crowd that pressed on Jesus. Second, was his physical stature. His natural state gave him a disadvantage in seeking after Jesus.

Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree. This is a highly unusual act for a person of great wealth and eminent position. Because he sought Jesus so intensely, Zacchaeus threw caution to the winds and did something that many would have considered beneath the dignity of a grown, wealthy man—he climbed up a tree. The sycamore fig tree of the area was a large tree with low branches, which made it easy to climb. There was no room for pride at this point. He did not mind humiliation as the price to see Jesus up close.

Such undignified behavior indicates that more than curiosity is at play here.

5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. 6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

Jesus “looked up, and saw him.” Jesus sees him in the sense of knowing about his need and reaching out to meet that need. What a great lesson we can learn from this episode. Jesus sees every person, no matter where he or she is: in the dark places of one’s sin and shame, and in one’s home and work and play as one seeks to know the truth. Jesus knows and sees everything about every person; but there is one person in particular whom he sees. He sees the one who is seeking Him. Zacchaeus is an example. He is desperate to see Jesus, so he struggles against the odds and finds a place where he can. The place he chooses means humiliating himself and exposing himself to people who are bitterly opposed to him, but he is willing to suffer whatever it takes to get a look at the Savior. Because Zacchaeus seeks Jesus so diligently, Jesus sees him.

Jesus knew and called Zacchaeus by name. This was bound to strike Zacchaeus and be very meaningful to him. When anyone, especially a stranger, calls us by name, our ears perk up and our senses become more alert. Jesus knows every person’s name. He says He calls His sheep by name (John 10:3). Jesus knew the importance of a person’s name. He desires to address every one of us by name, but we must let Him. We have to do as Zacchaeus did: seek to find the place and vantage point where we can see Jesus, then Jesus will see us and call us by name.

Jesus told Zacchaeus to hurry and to come down because He “must abide at [his] house” that day. The word “abide” in Greek, *meno* (MEE-no), can mean “to lodge” as a guest. Jesus wasn’t physically asking to move in with Zacchaeus. But He may be implying He would move in spiritually. Jesus was interested in having a real relationship with him, beginning with a meal and time spent together.

In some cultures, sharing a meal is one of the symbols of reconciliation and the end of hostilities between warring factions. To show the importance of the matter, Jesus used the word *dei* (Gk. DAY), translated “must,” which has the force of compulsion or divine necessity. Jesus had a divine appointment with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus’ response is no less important. He quickly climbed down and received Jesus joyfully.

7 And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

The reaction of the bystanders was in complete contrast to that of Zacchaeus. Instead of rejoicing with a sinner coming to the Savior, they murmured. The word “murmured” in Greek is *diagogguzo* (dee-ah-gon-GOO-zoo), also used in Exodus 16:2, 7-8, and is reminiscent of the ungrateful, murmuring Hebrews in the wilderness who didn’t yet understand the nature of God. It was an unheard-of thing or taboo for a Jewish rabbi or any other religious leader to bring himself so low as to stay in the house of a publican. Moreover, the Jews felt that Jesus’ fellowship with sinners made Him ceremonially unclean and theologically suspect. Therefore they were greatly offended at the notion of Jesus allowing Himself to be entertained in the house of Zacchaeus, a prominent member of the despised and outcasts.

8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

A mighty revolution has taken place in Zacchaeus' life as a result of his acquaintance with Jesus. He declares openly that he has decided as a spontaneous act of repentance, gratitude, and love to give half of his goods to the poor and in every case restore fourfold whatever he has taken in the past by his callous and heartless extortions when he was collecting customs. He was using the Old Testament standard as restitution for a violent robbery (Exodus 22:1; 2 Samuel 12:6). This was a much larger sum than later Levitical Law (Leviticus 6:5; Numbers 5:7), where only an added onefifth was required as restitution. Zacchaeus' restitution was proof of a changed heart, not a means to it. This statement, combined with the previous promise, meant he was not a wealthy man anymore.

This is his public statement of confession, repentance, and restitution—a sign that a brand new relationship of love and forgiveness had been established with God through this encounter with Jesus, the Messiah. In receiving Jesus and spending just a little time with Him, Zacchaeus knew he had to repent and make restitution. First he just sought after Jesus; but in seeking Jesus he also came to seek repentance. The story of Zacchaeus is that of a transformed life, a life that literally fulfills 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT). “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” There was some evidence of life-change immediately. How true it is that we come to Jesus as we are; but when we do so we do not remain as we are.

9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

Jesus' pronouncement shows that Zacchaeus is indeed a lost sinner, guilty and in need of redemption. The contrast of salvation coming to Zacchaeus' house with the grumbling of the critical multitude is noticeable and significant. A new relationship with God is evidenced by this man's changed attitude and actions, which impacts his household, that is, the whole family (cf. Acts 10:2; 11:14; 16:15, 31–33; 18:8).

Zacchaeus has received salvation, “forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham,” that is “because he is also a Jew” despite his occupation as a tax collector. This is a reminder to self-righteous Jews that Zacchaeus is also a descendant of Abraham. He is not cut off from Israel and the blessing that is coming from Jesus. Although he is already a racial Jew, now through faith in Jesus, he has become a true descendant of Abraham by faith (cf. Romans 2:28–29; 4:12; Galatians 6:16). Jesus' words are also an announcement that Zacchaeus has now, in a new and living way, become a son of Abraham, the father of the faithful. Through the new birth he is now a spiritual son of Abraham, and a member of the new Israel (i.e., the church). His lineage does not bring salvation, but his faith—evidenced by his public confession and restitution—surely does.

This salvation was a present reality (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:2), as well as a future consummation. Moreover, it is important to note that salvation from Jesus, although it has in view the individual man in the first instance (v. 5), is extended to Zacchaeus' house. The phrase “to this house” implies that the other members of the family and servants would be affected by Zacchaeus' conversion.

Household evangelism is seen several times in Acts (cf. 10:2; 11:14; 16:15, 31–34; 18:8). This is in contrast with Western individualism. There is clear evidence from the apostles' missionary efforts in Acts and even Jesus' ministry that the bonds of family membership provide means and ways of the faith that saves (Luke 10:5; John 4:53).

10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Here we have Jesus' own statement of His major purpose in coming into the world. The truth of this universal statement is grounds for the assurance given to Zacchaeus in verse 9. A miracle of grace of such magnitude

could take place in Zacchaeus because Jesus came precisely for that purpose: seeking and saving that which was lost. This may be an allusion to the Septuagint translation of Ezekiel 34:16, where there is an anticipation of God Himself and a messianic David coming to the rescue of the house of Israel. It certainly relates to Mary's song foretelling Jesus' mission even before His birth (Luke 1:68–79). It is similar to the emphasis of the parables in Luke 15, as well as the central summary statement of the Gospel of Mark (Mark 10:45) and Paul's affirmation to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:15). God's central message bears repeating: He came to redeem lost and hopeless humanity.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Laws of Confession and Restitution
(Exodus 22:1–3; Numbers 5:5–7)

TUESDAY

Israel's Salvation and Commitment to God
(Deuteronomy 26:16–19)

WEDNESDAY

I Must Proclaim the Good News!
(Luke 4:38–43)

THURSDAY

Let the Children Come to Me
(Luke 18:15–17)

FRIDAY

Entering the Kingdom of God
(Luke 18:18–30)

SATURDAY

Blind Man Receives Sight and Salvation
(Luke 18:35–43)

SUNDAY

Receiving Salvation, Correcting Injustice
(Luke 19:1–10)