

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus and Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

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Scripture

Jesus' mission was to seek and to save the lost. And he seeks and finds every lost person the Father gave him to seek and to find. Today, we will learn about Jesus seeking and finding a man who was lost.

Let's read about Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10:

¹He entered Jericho and was passing through. ²And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." ⁸And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:1-10)

Introduction

Jesus was on his final trip to Jerusalem. He would soon enter the city on Palm Sunday. He travelled to Jerusalem from Galilee, in the north. As he travelled south he was not able to pass through Samaria. So, he turned east, crossed the Jordan River, and then travelled south through Perea. When he was

opposite Jericho, he crossed the Jordan River again, this time heading west. Six miles from the Jordan River he came to the city of Jericho. As Jesus approached Jericho he encountered a blind man, whom he not only healed physically but saved spiritually as well.

Then, Jesus entered Jericho, and as he was passing through the beautiful city of Jericho, he had an encounter with another person whom he saved. This is the last record in *The Gospel of Luke* of a person saved by Jesus until the salvation of the thief on the cross.

Lesson

The analysis of Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 teaches us about Jesus' mission to seek and to save the lost.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Identity of Zacchaeus (19:1-2)
2. The Desire of Zacchaeus (19:3)
3. The Determination of Zacchaeus (19:4)
4. The Command to Zacchaeus (19:5)
5. The Response of Zacchaeus (19:6-8)
6. The Declaration to Zacchaeus (19:9-10)

I. The Identity of Zacchaeus (19:1-2)

First, let's look at the identity of Zacchaeus.

Luke said in verse 1 that Jesus **entered Jericho and was passing through. Jericho** used to be known as "the city of palm trees," and was a rich and beautiful city in Jesus' day. It was located on a very busy highway from Perea to Jerusalem, and thus was an ideal place for a toll for taxes to be collected.

In those days the Romans hired Jews to collect taxes for them. These hired Jews would charge more than the Romans required and kept the difference for themselves. That is how

they made their money. Apparently, there were many tax collectors in Jericho, who were overseen by **a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich** (19:2).

Jewish people despised tax collectors. They were seen as traitors (because they worked for the Romans), and viewed as thieves (because they made their money by overcharging Jews). Tax collectors were not allowed to go to worship at the temple, and were therefore religious outcasts. Nobody liked tax collectors. People despised and avoided them.

Are there people you don't like? Are there people that you avoid because you don't care for their morals or actions?

The names Jerry Falwell and Larry Flynt may provoke strong reactions from some people in our culture. But the following story, shared by Falwell's son Jonathan, describes a moving conversation between the Baptist pastor and the publisher of *Hustler* magazine.

Years ago, Jonathan traveled with his dad to Florida where the senior Falwell was debating Larry Flynt. Jonathan recalls:

Mr. Flynt asked my dad if we could give him a ride back to Lynchburg in my dad's private jet. Dad said yes so we traveled to the airport and boarded a beautiful black and gold Gulfstream III. As we flew to Virginia, I sat across from dad and Mr. Flynt as they had a long conversation about sports, food, politics and other ordinary topics. I was amazed and bewildered because they kept talking like old friends. After we dropped off Mr. Flynt in Lynchburg, I asked dad, "How come you could sit on that airplane and carry on a conversation with Larry Flynt as if you guys were lifelong buddies? Dad, he's the exact opposite of everything you believe in; he does all of the things you preach against; and yet you were treating him like a member of your own church. Why?"

Dad's response changed my whole outlook on ministry. "Jonathan," he said, "there's going to be a day when Larry is hurting and lonely, and he'll be looking for help and guidance.

He is going to pick up the phone and call someone who can help him. I want to earn the right to be that phone call!"¹

Zacchaeus **was a chief tax collector and was rich**. But nobody liked him, and he was despised and avoided. He may have been hurting and lonely, and he also may have been looking for help and guidance. To whom would he turn for help?

II. The Desire of Zacchaeus (19:3)

Second, notice the desire of Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus had probably heard about Jesus. After all, by this time Jesus was a national phenomenon as countless numbers of people had heard him preach and were healed by him. So, who knows how large the crowd was that accompanied Jesus as he passed through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem?

When Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, he, like so many others, **was seeking to see who Jesus was** (19:3a). However, Zacchaeus faced two obstacles. First, **on account of the crowd he could not** see Jesus, and second, **because he was small in stature** he could not see Jesus (19:3b).

III. The Determination of Zacchaeus (19:4)

Third, observe the determination of Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was not going to let his small size and the crowd's large size deter him from seeing Jesus. **So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way** (19:4).

This image has been immortalized in the popular children's song, "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he

¹ Jon Greggo, "Conversations That Changed Me," *Outreach Magazine*, (2010 Outreach 100 Special Issue), 82.

wanted to see.” Do you remember this song?

IV. The Command to Zacchaeus (19:5)

Fourth, look at the command to Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was in the tree waiting for Jesus to pass by. **And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today”** (19:5). Again, the children’s song says, “And as the Savior passed that way, he looked up in the tree, ‘Zacchaeus you come down, for I’m going to your house today, for I’m going to your house today.’ ”

I want you to note two things about this verse. First, Luke did not say how Jesus knew **Zacchaeus**. Perhaps he knew it by divine enablement but, more likely, he heard people in the crowd calling him **Zacchaeus**.

And second, note that Jesus not only invited himself to stay at Zacchaeus’ house but says that it was imperative that he do so, **“For I must stay at your house today.”** The Greek word for **must** (*dei*) is often used in *The Gospel of Luke* “to denote divine necessity.”² Jesus had to stay at Zacchaeus’ home in order to underscore his mission, which was “to seek and to save the lost,” as he said in verse 10. Jesus had to stay at Zacchaeus’ house because Zacchaeus was lost and needed to know how to enter into the kingdom of God and inherit eternal life.

V. The Response of Zacchaeus (19:6-8)

Fifth, notice the response of Zacchaeus.

Now, remember that Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and was rich. Nobody liked him; he was despised and avoided. So, imagine his surprise – and delight! – when Jesus said that

² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1518.

he must stay at Zacchaeus' house that day! Of all the people in Jericho, Jesus picked Zacchaeus as the one with whom he would stay! **So he hurried and came down and received Jesus joyfully** (19:6). Commentator Darrell Bock says, "Zacchaeus' immediate response and excitement recalls the shepherds' reaction to the announcement of Jesus' birth (2:10, 16) and the call of Levi with its note of reception (5:29)."³ Levi, by the way, was also a tax collector who was saved by Jesus.

So, Zacchaeus took Jesus to his home. Not surprisingly, the crowd disapproved. **And when they saw that Jesus had gone to the home of Zacchaeus, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner"** (19:7). The crowd loved to hear Jesus preach. They loved to see his miracles. They loved to be the recipients of his miracles, such as when Jesus fed the five thousand. But they did not care for the people with whom Jesus associated. They believed that Zacchaeus was **a sinner** who did not deserve their attention.

Let us not cocoon ourselves from people, especially from people we think do not deserve our attention because we think they are sinners. Of course they are sinners! So are we! We are all sinners! Of all people who should reach out to others, it should be us who know the good news of God's amazing grace.

I would love to know what Jesus and Zacchaeus talked about. However, it is not hard to speculate that Jesus was telling Zacchaeus about God's love, grace, and mercy to sinners, about the kingdom of God, and about how to inherit eternal life. Clearly **Zacchaeus** responded to Jesus' message of the gospel because he **stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold"** (19:8).

There is no question that at this point in the narrative Zacchaeus is now a converted man. He immediately demonstrated his repentance by generosity and restitution, unlike the

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, 1518.

rich ruler (in Luke 18:18-30) who would not part with his finances as a demonstration of his repentance.

By the time of my conversion at the age of nineteen, I had committed many sins. However, the Lord seemed to lay upon my conscience two particular sins for which I needed to make restitution. I had no doubt that *all* my sins were forgiven, but it seemed God wanted me to make restitution for these *two* sins. One was for stealing candy from my high school tuck shop. I sent the headmaster a letter and at least double the money I had stolen. He wrote back thanking me for the money, and also forgave me.

The other sin also involved stealing candy, this time from a convenience store after I had left high school. More than a year passed before I was in that city again where I had stolen the candy. I thought that perhaps over time I would forget the matter. But the Lord seemed to burden my conscience about it. Finally, I passed the store and went in to make restitution. I told the owner that more than a year earlier I had stolen a few candy bars, and that I had since become a Christian. I had repented of my sin and wanted to make restitution for the candy I had stolen. The candy bars cost only about \$2, and I offered the owner \$10. To my amazement, he would not take my money! We stood there for a few moments debating whether he should take the money! Finally, I suppose he could see that I was serious, and so he said he would take half the money! I gladly agreed because that was still more than the candy I had stolen!

My point is that generosity and restitution are marks of repentance. Zacchaeus was generous, as **the half of his goods** he gave **to the poor**, and he also made restitution, as he was willing to restore **fourfold** that which he had defrauded.

VI. The Declaration to Zacchaeus (19:9-10)

Finally, look at the declaration to Zacchaeus.

We know that Zacchaeus was saved because **Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham”** (19:9). Yes, Zacchaeus was a physical descendent of Abraham but, now, because of his repentance and faith, he became a spiritual **son of Abraham**.

Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham, as is every Christian, because, as Jesus himself said, **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”** (19:10). That is the mission of Jesus: **to seek and to save the lost**. He is unrelenting and always successful. He never loses a single soul that the Father intends for him to seek and to find.

In his love for us Jesus acts like a hound-dog, intense and focused as he pursues the hunt. That image comes from Francis Thompson, a 19th century British poet who wrote “The Hound of Heaven.” Although Thompson was a follower of Christ, he struggled with poverty, poor health, and an addiction to opium (which in those days was sold as an “over-the-counter” medication).

In the depths of his despair, Thompson described his flight from God: “I fled him, down the nights and down the days; I fled him, down the arches of the years; I fled him, down the labyrinthine ways, of my own mind; and in the midst of tears I hid from him, and under running laughter. Up vistaed hopes I sped . . . from those strong feet that followed, followed after [me].”

But Thompson also knew the unrelenting love of Jesus, the hound of heaven. In the poem Jesus pursues Thompson with “unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, and majestic instancy [or urgency].”

In a recent biography of John Stott, Stott refers to Thompson’s poem. According to Stott, he owes his faith in Christ not to his parents or teachers or even his own decision, but to Jesus, “the hound of heaven.” Stott writes:

[My faith is] due to Jesus Christ himself, who pursued me relentlessly even when I was running away from him in order to go my own way. And if it were not for the gracious pursuit of the hound of heaven I would today be on the scrap-heap of wasted and discarded lives.⁴

Zacchaeus was sought and saved by Jesus. John Stott was sought and saved by Jesus. I was sought and saved by Jesus. Have you been sought and saved by Jesus?

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10, we should examine our relationship to Jesus.

Gregory Boyle retells the story of a 15-year-old gang member named Rigo. Rigo was getting ready for a special worship service for incarcerated youth when Boyle casually asked if Rigo's father would be coming. The following is a summary of their conversation.

"No," he said, "He's a heroin addict and never been in my life. Used to always beat me."

Then something snapped inside Rigo as he recalled an image from his childhood.

"I think I was in fourth grade," he began, "I came home. Sent home in the middle of the day. . . . [When I got home] my dad says, 'Why did they send you home?' And cuz my dad always beat me, I said, 'If I tell you, promise you won't hit me?' He just said, 'I'm your father. Course I'm not gonna hit you.' So I told him."

Rigo began to cry, and in a moment he started wailing and rocking back and forth. Boyle put his arm around him until he slowly calmed down. When Rigo could finally speak again, he

⁴ Roger Steer, *Basic Christian: The Inside Story of John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 262-263.

spoke quietly, still in a state of shock: “He beat me with a pipe . . . with . . . a pipe.”

After Rigo composed himself, Boyle asked about his mom. Rigo pointed to a small woman and said, “That’s her over there. . . . There’s no one like her.”

Then Rigo paused and said, “I’ve been locked up for a year and half. She comes to see me every Sunday. You know how many buses she takes every Sunday [to see me]?”

Rigo started sobbing with the same ferocity as before. After catching his breath, he gasped through the sobs, “Seven buses. She takes . . . seven . . . buses. Imagine.”

Jesus loves his own like Rigo’s mother loves her son – with commitment, steadfastness, and sacrifice. Jesus is a Savior who “takes seven buses, just to arrive at us.” All throughout Jesus’ ministry – his birth in Bethlehem, his life in Israel, his preaching the good news of the gospel, his healing of the sick, his meals with sinners, his rejection by the crowd, his death on the cross for the elect – he has shown us his love and how much he has done to seek and to save the lost.⁵

If you are not a Christian, believe that Jesus loves you and is seeking and saving the lost. Turn to him in repentance and faith today.

And if you are a Christian, will you join Jesus to seek and to save the lost? Make a commitment to be used by Jesus every day to seek and to save the lost. Amen.

⁵ Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010), 26-27.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for Jesus and Zacchaeus. What a wonderful example of Jesus seeking and saving the lost.

O Father, if there is anyone here today who feels himself or herself on the outside, will you assure that person Jesus has indeed come to seek and to save the lost? Will you grant that person faith in Jesus Christ and repentance of sin?

And Father, will you also motivate us who are already Christians to join Jesus in his mission of seeking and saving the lost. We can do so in so many ways. We did it with our recent Vacation Bible School. But we can also do it by showing love to others, sharing meals with friends, helping those in need, with the goal of telling them the good news of the gospel.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!