

## Communing with Jesus Christ

Luke 19:1-10; Matthew 21:31

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Dear ones, what would a marriage be like if a couple were only united in marriage but had no communion in marriage with one another? There may be a legal union in such a marriage, but that falls far short of what God intended a marriage to be. Likewise your union with Christ is not an end in itself, but is the foundation which leads to your communion with Christ as His bride. The sinless Son of God calls you as His bride to come to a love feast prepared by Him wherein you might be strengthened in your faith to trust Him, comforted with hope to persevere in Him, and enlarged in your love to obey Him. The wonders of Christ's mercy to you who are granted faith to come to Him could not be made clearer than in our text today. From our text, let us consider the following main points: (1) The Unworthiness of the Sinner (Luke 19:1-2); (2) The Effectual Call of God's Grace (Luke 19:3-5); (3) The Evidence of Faith (Luke 19:6-10).

### I. The Unworthiness of the Sinner (Luke 19:1-2).

A. As the Lord heads for Jerusalem for the last time before His death, He passes through the town of Jericho to draw a man by the name of Zacchaeus to Himself. Zacchaeus is a Hebrew name that means "pure." Although it may have been the prayer of his parents that Zacchaeus might have a pure heart toward God, his life was far from pure. Why? As we read in Luke 19:2, he was a publican (i.e. a tax collector), and not simply a tax collector, but was "the chief among the publicans, and he was rich".

1. There was not a more hated and despised person in all of Israel than the tax collector (and Zacchaeus was the leader among them). Tax collectors were placed alongside harlots as the epitome of wickedness in the eyes of the Jewish people (according to Matthew 21:31). Tax collectors at that time were especially despised for the following reasons.

- a. They worked for the Romans who occupied and ruled the homeland of the Jews.
- b. They were legalized thieves in overcharging the people and pocketing whatever money did not go directly to the emperor. This is how Zacchaeus had become rich.
- c. They used harsh threats and oppressive methods to harass the people who could not pay their taxes.
- d. Those Jewish tax collectors (like Zacchaeus) were even more despised for they had betrayed their own religion and their own people. Love for God and love for their neighbor had long been deserted for the greed of wealth and oppression of the people.

2. Zacchaeus (you might say) was the man whom people loved to hate. He thrived on taking advantage of people and hitting them when they were already down. His greed had left him rich, but yet miserable and despised by others. Here was a very dishonest man who had climbed the ladder to the top of his profession. Zacchaeus hardly seemed a candidate to become a trophy of God's grace.

a. But dear ones, the very reason God has included this account of Zacchaeus in Scripture is to comfort and encourage you that there is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ for even a Zacchaeus like you and me.

b. If someone like Zacchaeus was not disqualified to come in faith to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, neither will you be disqualified in spite of your sin against the Lord. Like Zacchaeus all of us have robbed God of the honor, reverence, worship, love, and obedience that is due to Him. By our resistance and rebellion against God and His holy commandments, we have robbed the Lord God. We all deserve to endure the eternal torments of hell for being a Zacchaeus toward God and toward our fellow man. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ is simply this: your sins do not disqualify you from the love and forgiveness of God, but actually qualify you to come to Christ by faith alone in order that you might have everlasting life. Jesus

came to save those who know they are sinners and need a Savior—not the self-righteous who believe they are good enough.

## II. The Effectual Call of God's Grace (Luke 19:3-5).

A. Zacchaeus had evidently heard news of Jesus. The reports of Christ's words and deeds had spread from one end of Israel to the other. After all, how could news of one like Jesus be kept a secret? He raised the dead, cast out demons from the oppressed, multiplied bread and fish to feed thousands, opened the ears of the deaf, set free the tongues of the mute, gave sight to the eyes of the blind, caused the lame to leap for joy, and most recently had healed a blind beggar on His way into Jericho—the home of Zacchaeus (Luke 18:35).

B. The curiosity of Zacchaeus was aroused to catch a glimpse of Christ as He walked by (Luke 19:3). Although Zacchaeus was great in wealth, he was small in stature and as he ran along the road parallel to where Christ walked, he could not see past the people who lined the street in front of him (Luke 19:3). Even if he had asked those in front of him to allow him to get a peek at Jesus, his request would likely have fallen upon the deaf ears of those whom he so greatly had wronged (“Let this thief step in front of me, never”).

C. Zacchaeus being the resourceful man that he was ran ahead of the crowd and found a large sycamore tree, which he climbed in order to get a birds-eye-view of Jesus as he walked below (Luke 19:4).

1. Zacchaeus did not desire to find the most conspicuous place from which to look, but rather the least conspicuous. For the sycamore tree would not only have large branches, but also would be full of leaves in order to hide him from the sight of Jesus and others.

2. Zacchaeus had no desire to meet Christ. For he did not begin calling out from the tree (as did the blind man), “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” Zacchaeus was curious, but there is no indication that he had faith in Christ or was moved out of love for Christ to climb this tree to see Him.

3. Remember, Zacchaeus “sought to see Jesus who he was” (Luke 19:3)—just a glimpse of a celebrity. The text does not say “he sought to know Jesus, believe in Jesus, or love Jesus.” This is clearly not a case of Zacchaeus seeking or reaching out to Christ in his own strength (“there is none that seeketh after God” Romans 3:11—for all men are naturally dead to God and cannot earnestly seek after God in their own strength).

4. Dear ones, what this true account of Zacchaeus does reveal is that Christ goes out and finds the lost sinner and effectually calls him by His grace to Himself. Who was seeking whom? It was NOT an earnest Zacchaeus who was seeking a Savior, but a merciful Savior who was seeking a wicked Zacchaeus. And Christ always finds and effectually calls the lost sinner for whom He seeks (without exception).

D. When the Lord gets to the precise spot where Zacchaeus was hiding in that sycamore tree peering through the leaves and the branches, Christ stops and looks up into the tree and commands Zacchaeus to quickly come down. Why? “For today I must abide at thy house” (Luke 19:5). Here is one of the most glorious pictures of salvation that we have in all of Scripture. For the call of the gospel to Zacchaeus was not simply that Christ would enter his house, but that Christ would abide (and commune with him and his family) in his house. Here the Lord shows forth incomprehensible mercy and love for lost sinners chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Jesus not only wills to be in union with sinners (to enter the house), but also wills to be in communion with sinners (to fellowship with them in their house).

1. You will recall that the Pharisees mocked Jesus as being “the friend of publicans and sinners” in Matthew 11:19. Why? Because He sat with them at meals in order to draw them graciously unto Himself. All sinners who are given the gift of faith by God to come to Christ are united to Him by His Spirit, but salvation does not stop with your union with Christ. He sups with you and you with Him in precious fellowship

and communion as a loving husband with his beloved bride (“He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner of me was love” Song of Solomon 2:4).

2. As glorious as is the forgiveness of all sin in Christ, and His accounting you righteous through faith in Christ, that blessing which all other blessings prepare you to enjoy is your communion with Jesus Christ. The greatest gift and blessing God gives to unworthy Zacchaeus like you and me is Himself (“I will dwell in them, and walk with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” 2 Corinthians 6:16).

a. Dear ones, it is a great display of love for a husband to say to his wife, “I want to spend time with you. I long for you to share your burdens with me. I love you and desire you to enjoy me as I enjoy you.” The very Christ we have spurned many times by making excuses as to why we cannot spend time with Him in communion and prayer or commit the entire Lord’s Day to Him (because we have more important things to do) is the very same one that prepares this table of love and fellowship for you that you may be assured through this sacrament of His everlasting love for you, His bride.

b. This meal is a foretaste of your eternal communion with Jesus in heaven. Dear ones, how can you earnestly long for eternal communion with Christ in heaven, and not sincerely desire temporal communion with Christ here on earth (in your secret worship, family worship, Sabbath worship, and the Lord’s Supper)?

3. Beloved, communion with Christ is not optional in the life of the Christian, for the Lord tells Zacchaeus, “**I must** abide at thy house” (Luke 19:5). Literally, “**It is necessary** that I abide at thy house.” There are no Christians who enjoy only union with Christ, but not communion with Christ. Union with Christ brings pardon. Communion with Christ reveals a loving relationship between Jesus Christ and the Christian. Just as you will certainly die if you do not receive physical food and drink on a regular basis, so you will die if you do not receive spiritual food and drink on a regular basis. Jesus, having perfectly kept the law of God for His elect bride, suffered in His body the infinite wrath of God and died in shedding His blood to remove from that unworthy bride the guilt and condemnation of her sin forever. When you sit at the Lord’s Table, Christ is as much present to you by faith as the bread which you eat and the wine which you drink. He is spiritually with you. Christ is the host at this holy meal, and He gives to you Himself and all His benefits that you might be refreshed with a renewed faith in His promises, in His faithfulness, in His love, in His truthfulness, in His mercy, in His righteousness, and in His power to save.

4. The Lord’s Supper is not a magical meal wherein the physical body and blood of the Lord are literally eaten with your mouth (as taught by the Roman Catholic Church), but rather it is a sacramental meal wherein by these symbols of bread and wine, Christ and every benefit purchased by Christ for His bride is signed, sealed and delivered to you who trust Him, and you receive these blessings in faith as you eat the bread and drink the cup. The preaching of the gospel is the laying out of the promises of God to guilty, unworthy sinners. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is the signature of Christ to those promises that they all freely belong to you who believe. As truly as the bread and the wine are ingested by faith, so truly is the Bread of Heaven yours by faith alone.

5. The Lord effectually called Zacchaeus to forgive him, but also to have communion with him, to love him, and to bless him.

### III. The Evidence of Faith (Luke 19:6-10).

A. There are two evidences of the faith of Zacchaeus mentioned in our text.

1. **His joy in the Lord (Luke 19:6).** When Christ is your life, even death is gain. Although you come to the Lord’s Supper with great reverence because it points to the sacrifice of Christ for your sins, nevertheless you also come with great joy for Jesus desires to commune with you.

2. **His loving obedience (Luke 19:8).** He voluntarily made restitution to all those he had

robbed. Faith without works is dead.

B. Beloved, Christ did not come to call the righteous to salvation, but rather the wicked. God does not justify the godly, but the ungodly. Saving grace is not needed by those who are sinless, but by those who are sinners (1 Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:10). There is only way to the Father and that is through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The Lord's Supper is the visible gospel of Jesus Christ that reveals what Jesus was willing to endure (the wrath of God for the sin of those who trust Him) and what He was willing to suffer that you who trust in Him might enjoy His love, forgiveness, holiness, and life forever with Him in the glories of heaven.

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