



## *Sinners?*

Acceptance awaits those who seek Jesus in repentance.

### **LUKE 19:1-10**

Many of us have a list of people we would like to meet—perhaps a celebrity, an author, or an athlete who plays for our favorite team. We think that if we can get close to them they might respond kindly to our request for a selfie or an autograph. We certainly wouldn't expect them to invite us to lunch or to visit our home. Yet that is what happened to a tax collector when he climbed a tree just to get a glimpse of Jesus. That tax collector found acceptance and forgiveness, which is what Jesus offers us as well.

**Name someone you want to meet. What is it about that person that draws you to them?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE **CONTEXT**

## **LUKE 18:31–19:26**

As Jesus neared Jerusalem, He remained focused on His mission to seek and to save the lost. On this journey, we are introduced to a tax collector named Zacchaeus. As we have seen before in the Gospel of Luke, tax collectors were loathed because of their perceived greed and relationship to Rome. For this reason, they occupied a low place in Jewish society. The Jews viewed the Romans, who invaded their land, as the enemy. Paying Roman taxes was a painful reminder of the enemies' occupation. Since tax collectors worked for Rome, in the eyes of the Jewish people, they were God's enemies.

One of the recurring themes of Luke's account is that Jesus brings salvation to outcasts. Jesus welcomed outcasts into the kingdom of God. Even before the account of Zacchaeus, we saw Jesus' welcoming posture toward a leper (Luke 5:12-16), a paralytic (5:17-26), Levi the tax collector (5:27-32), a sinful woman (7:36-50), the demoniac (8:26-39), and the lost son (15:11-32). The grace Jesus extended toward outsiders was not received well by the Jewish religious leaders. Even the crowds had difficulty with Jesus' posture toward Zacchaeus the tax collector. For Jesus, the mission was more controlling than social conventions. Moreover, Jesus' attitude toward outsiders gives comfort to anyone who might doubt whether God could accept them on account of their past.

**As you read Luke 19:1-10, look for expressions of acceptance by Jesus. How does Jesus' acceptance of sinners move us to respond to Him in repentance?**

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# EXPLORE THE **TEXT**

## **DESPERATE** (LUKE 19:1-4)

**<sup>1</sup> He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.**

<sup>3</sup> He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man. <sup>4</sup> So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since he was about to pass that way.

## VERSES 1-4

Zacchaeus was **a chief tax collector** and was **rich**. The Roman government contracted with individuals in different regions to collect taxes. Because of the nature of the work, those who collected taxes charged interest and kept the profits for themselves. The title *chief tax collector* does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. Zacchaeus probably employed others who went out on his behalf to collect taxes. Obviously, his business had done well since **Jericho** was a substantial import and export post. This wealthy business owner was curious about Jesus.

As Jesus passed through town, Zacchaeus tried to see Him but was unable because a large **crowd** had gathered. Luke also noted that Zacchaeus was **a short man**, adding to the difficulty of seeing Jesus. Luke does not tell us why this tax collector wanted to see Jesus.

To see Jesus, Zacchaeus would need to be resourceful. He ran ahead and found **a sycamore tree** that would enable him to see Jesus when He passed through. Zacchaeus's resolve to see Jesus is reminiscent of the group of friends who climbed onto a roof to lower their friend before Jesus (5:17-26).

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### DID YOU KNOW?

Sycamore trees (Luke 19:4), also called the fig-mulberries or sycamore figs (*figus sycomorus*), were a type of fig tree and have no relation to the American sycamore tree. They have short trunks and wide branches that spread out in all directions with a diameter of 60-80 feet, making them easy to climb.

Perhaps Zacchaeus was curious and wanted a glimpse of this newly-famed religious teacher. Maybe, he had heard that Jesus warmly welcomed the company of sinners and tax collectors (5:27-32; 15:1-2). Everyone, even tax collectors, desires to be welcomed and accepted

by others. Regardless of Zacchaeus's reasons for wanting to see Jesus, many people in the Scriptures were rightly desperate to see Jesus. When we reflect on the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, His presence always benefited those who were needy or ostracized. This should challenge our understanding of Christ-like action, shouldn't it? More often than not, we seek to help people who are like us—or are just a few degrees “different” than us, but not too much. Not so with Jesus.

**What brings people to a place where they become desperate in looking for fulfillment, peace, meaning? How do our longings drive us to seek God?**

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## **FRIENDED (LUKE 19:5-7)**

**<sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house.” <sup>6</sup> So he quickly came down and welcomed him joyfully. <sup>7</sup> All who saw it began to complain, “He’s gone to stay with a sinful man.”**

## **VERSES 5-6**

We assume from the text that Zacchaeus had not previously met Jesus. He was seeking to learn who Jesus was, and perhaps catch a glimpse of Him as He passed through town. The text does not indicate how Jesus knew his name. But it's very clear that He knew who Zacchaeus was. Jesus called him by name. He looked past the crowd and gave this man His singular attention. Jesus looked past his reputation and offered him friendship. The story isn't focused primarily on Zacchaeus but on Jesus, who sought Zacchaeus out.

Note the wording of Jesus' command. Jesus didn't ask permission but rather informed Zacchaeus that it was **necessary** for Him to stay in his home. Zacchaeus didn't invite Jesus; Jesus invited Himself. This may strike us as odd at first, but the purpose of Jesus' visit becomes explicit in verse 10, He came to seek and to save the lost. Zacchaeus was a recipient of Jesus' mission. Perhaps Zacchaeus wouldn't have even thought to invite Jesus to his house, assuming Jesus wouldn't stay with a man like him. Yet Jesus took the initiative and reached out to him.

Zacchaeus responded to Jesus' command *quickly* and *joyfully*. Many Bible scholars note that the motif of rejoicing in this passage also is used elsewhere as the proper response of the lost being found (15:5-10). As readers, we celebrate this. However, the actual crowd was not as welcoming of these transpiring events.

**How does the conversation between Jesus and Zacchaeus relate to Jesus' mission? How did Jesus demonstrate that He came to provide salvation for all who trust Him in the way He approached Zacchaeus?**

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## VERSE 7

The crowd began to grumble as they observed this exchange between Jesus and Zacchaeus, just as the religious leaders previously had done at Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners (5:30; 15:2). Perhaps the people expected Jesus to share their disdain for tax collectors. As He headed to the home of Zacchaeus, Jesus turned everyone's expectations upside down. Why would He associate with such a sinful man?

In ancient societies, entering into someone's home and sharing a meal was a ceremonial act of friendship and intimacy. Some have described homes as "boundary markers." That is, they provide boundaries for acceptance. When you enter into someone's home, friendship is nurtured. By being a guest, you are saying, "I value you as a person and desire to nurture a relationship with you, regardless of what others think."

***Spending time with "outcasts" could be one of our most powerful demonstrations of the gospel.***

This text reminds us that Jesus is available to all people, regardless of their pasts. He provides us an example of spending time with sinners. Too often we separate from sinners rather than helping those far from Christ come near to Him. As Christians, spending time with "outcasts" could be one of our most powerful demonstrations of

the gospel. The good news of the gospel is that all people—regardless of their social class, economic status, or heritage—are welcomed into the family of God through faith in Christ. When the church exhibits gospel diversity in its fellowship, the mission looks a lot like Jesus’ did.

**What barriers and perceptions did Jesus face when talking to Zacchaeus? How might those same barriers and perceptions be faced by people today who are seeking Jesus?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *Review multiple Scripture passages to understand a key word.*

Use a Bible concordance to identify ways Luke used the word “Lord” in his Gospel. Along with “Son of Man,” the title “Lord” is one of Luke’s favorite references for Jesus. *Lord* translates the Greek word *kyrios*. In what different ways did Luke employ the use of the word *Lord*? What does Jesus’ lordship mean to you?

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## **REPENTANT** (LUKE 19:8-10)

**<sup>8</sup> But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, I’ll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I’ll pay back four times as much.” <sup>9</sup> “Today salvation has come to this house,” Jesus told him, “because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”**



## VERSE 8

Zacchaeus's immediate resolve to give to others in response to Jesus' kindness is heartening. The verbs **give** and **pay back** are in the present tense, marking a distinct break from Zacchaeus's past. True repentance begins with sincere regret, leads to verbal confession, and requires that guilty behavior stop (a change of direction). When money is involved, true repentance often leads to repayment or restitution. All of these elements are present in this narrative. This change in Zacchaeus is drastic.

Zacchaeus seemed to be aware of the reason behind the crowd's complaints. The crowd's antagonism toward him was the result of his dishonest business practices, gouging them for tax money. In offering to give **half** of his **possessions** to the **poor** and to **pay back four times as much** to anyone he **extorted**, he confessed his wrongdoing.

Zacchaeus's response indicated a changed heart. In fact, his response exceeded minimal the demands of the Old Testament law.

Giving away half of your possessions was a radical response. In Exodus 22:1, the penalty for the theft of an animal required a four- or five-fold repayment of the value of the animal. Zacchaeus accepted for himself the extent of the law imposed on thieves; he now viewed his wealth as ill-gotten gain.

This marks a decisive change in direction in Zacchaeus's life. From here on out, he would be attending to the needs of the poor rather than stockpiling wealth for himself. One might ask: Why did Zacchaeus intend to keep half of his wealth? It stands to reason that by retaining half of his wealth, he could make good on his word to restore those he swindled.

**How does generosity to the poor demonstrate a heart that has been changed by God? What other actions might demonstrate repentance and faith in Jesus?**

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## VERSES 9-10

Jesus announced that **salvation** had come to Zacchaeus that day, indicating once again the dramatic change that had taken place.

Jesus declared that He came **to seek and to save** the lost, and He did just that with Zacchaeus. Jesus' acceptance of Zacchaeus is notable compared to the condemnation the tax collector received from the crowd.

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation***

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

Zacchaeus's generosity and humility demonstrate that he was truly **a son of Abraham**, that is, he desired to be obedient to the law. It's important to note that Zacchaeus's actions were a response to Jesus' initiation of their relationship, not actions that were intended to earn a relationship with Him. His actions were a demonstration of his already changed heart. Thus, Zacchaeus qualified as *a son of Abraham* because he bore fruit befitting his repentance. First, Jesus opened up His heart to Zacchaeus, then Zacchaeus opened up his heart to the poor. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone—true salvation is demonstrated in good works, which are the fruit of faith.

***Zacchaeus's actions were a response to Jesus' initiation of their relationship, not actions that were intended to earn a relationship with Him.***

Our salvation comes through faith in Jesus and not through works to earn God's favor. God comes to us when we are without hope and without ability to please Him.

**How does the encounter with Zacchaeus demonstrate Jesus' mission and purpose? How should this encounter shape how we approach others about Jesus?**

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- Some people are rightly desperate to see Jesus.
- Jesus is available to all people regardless of their past.
- Salvation is available to all who come to Jesus in repentance and faith.

**As a group, discuss the types of inner turmoil or external circumstances that might provoke someone to seek Jesus. How can you help people with this inner turmoil to see Jesus?**

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**Who in your life do you consider to be least likely to come to faith in Jesus Christ? How can you begin to pray and take action to introduce them to Jesus?**

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**Reflect on your salvation and how you first encountered Jesus. How does your encounter with Jesus compare to Zacchaeus's encounter? Thank God for accepting you and for His forgiveness.**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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