

“The Savior of Big Sinners!”

Luke 19:1–10

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July 23, 2023 • Sunday Morning Sermon

I'm here to bring Christ to the people so that's what I hope to do as we look at Luke 19. This is a remarkable story of the Gospel of Jesus. This is the inspired, inerrant, sufficient, authoritative Word of God. Luke 19:1-10 says [1] *He entered Jericho and was passing through.* [2] *And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.* [3] *And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.* [4] *So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for he was about to pass that way.* [5] *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.”* [6] *So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.* [7] *And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”* [8] *And 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.”* [9] *And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.* [10] *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

As a very amateur military historian, I am enamored by the Second World War. The justness of the Allied mission in Europe and the historic figures who led those allied troops make it an inspiring and an educational study. The self-sacrificing heroism of the allied mission was never more on display than June 6, 1944, which we refer to as D-Day. Now, a number of years ago, Hollywood gave us an indelible picture of that mission in the film Saving Private Ryan. It was based on a true story. A small platoon of men put their lives on the line to rescue the last remaining brother of a family whose lost all of their sons so far in the allied cause. So the mission is extraordinary, the platoon is heroic, and the object of their mission private Ryan, is one of their own. He's one of the good guys who good men might lay down their life to rescue.

The movie is the stirring stuff that great movies and great missions are made up, but I want to ask a question. What if their mission had been to rescue a Nazi soldier? What if the object of their mission was the commander of a Nazi division who had oppressed villages in Normandy? What if the entire mission had been for those good men to risk giving up their lives for one of their enemies? That's actually the kind of mission that Jesus was on when He came to Earth, when He walked through Jericho. Jesus was on a self-sacrificing mission, not for righteous people that we might think deserve saving. He was on a mission to seek and save sinners. Sinners who, because they rebel against the rule of God, because they break the commands of God, are God's enemies. God sent His Son Jesus on mission to proclaim and provide life and liberty to guilty, broken, blind and bound sinners.

Luke 19:1-10 gives us the story of how Jesus sought to save and seek one of those sinners. In this great Gospel story, there are three main characters. First of all, we're going to see the man, then the mob and then the Messiah. Those three characters in this great story show us that Jesus came to seek and to save really big sinners.

Let's first look at the man. His name is Zacchaeus and he was a lying, thieving, self-serving, oppressive, corrupt little kingdom builder who was loathed by his neighbors. If Zacchaeus was around today, he would be the focus of a hashtag Chief tax collector Social Media Shame campaign. In that culture, tax collectors were seen as lowlife because they worked

the corrupted tax system that oppressed their own people. Tax collectors were local people who allied themselves with the Roman oppressors to work a system where they would skim off the profits for themselves, often using the muscle of a Roman centurion to enforce the system. Think of a Ukrainian neighbor who has allied himself with the Russian troops, and he goes around the neighborhood taking protection money from his own people and keeping a percentage for himself. That's what tax collectors were like. One writer has said that tax collectors were in the class of society with adulterers, pimps, yes-men and informers.

So imagine what a chief tax collector was like and imagine how they were seen. That's what Luke 19:2 tells us. It tells us that Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector which meant that he was at the top of the organization running the other tax collectors underneath him who were scamming the common folks. Zacchaeus has made a boatload of money through fraudulent, unjust, oppressive schemes to take money from his fellow Israelites. Luke does not waste words in his Gospel for we see in Luke 19:2 it says, ...and he (Zacchaeus) was rich.

Why do I give you that background? If you've been around the church for very long, you might be familiar with the Sunday school song that we use to teach children the story. It started out, 'Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man, was he.' I won't give the whole song and it's a fine story to teach the story to the children, but what it can cause us to do is to see Zacchaeus as this cute little fella that surely gentle Jesus would have to save. Yet Zacchaeus is more like an organized crime boss sitting behind the table with a Roman thug at his shoulder, making his down line dealers pony up. He's not just a tax collector. He's a chief tax collector. He's not just a sinner. He's a really big sinner but with the arrival of Jesus, Zacchaeus' story is about to transition for eternity. When Luke tells us about Jesus appointments with sinners, there's almost always that eternity altering transition.

If you're in their world reading this story for the first time, the surprise starts in Luke 19:3 when you hear this corrupt little kingdom builder (Zacchaeus) was seeking to see who Jesus was. The way that phrase is put together in the original, it tells us that Zacchaeus was seeking to see Jesus for some time. Maybe Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus from one of his downline tax collectors. Jesus hung out with a lot of tax collectors. Early in this Gospel, there's the story of Levi, who is a tax collector who becomes one of Jesus' disciples. Can you imagine the conversation? Perhaps Zacchaeus says, "Levi, you're a little light on your take this month." And Levi says, 'Well, boss, I met this rabbi named Jesus, and everything has changed.' We don't know how Zacchaeus has been drawn to seek Jesus but it's interesting to note that he is determined to get to Jesus no matter what other people think of him.

That's actually the reason that Luke gives us the almost comical description of the wee little man running to climb up the sycamore tree. It's a picture of self-forgetful, humble, I-don't-care-about the social awkwardness, desperation to get to Jesus. If you and I were studying the Gospel of Luke together, we would have seen this again and again and again in Luke's Gospel and Jesus' friendship with sinners – self-forgetful, humble, I don't care about the social awkwardness, desperation to get to Jesus.

There is a story in Luke 5 of a paralyzed man and his friends who dug a hole in a roof in a house to let him down into the middle of the Bible study that Jesus is leading – not the usual tidy Presbyterian Bible study. It is socially awkward and unconventional, to say the least. They were desperate to get the paralyzed man to Jesus. Then there's that beautiful story in Luke 7 of the woman of the city whose name is never given but we just know that she's notorious for her sin, and she breaks with all acceptable social custom, and she makes this affectionate, glorious mess in the midst of a party of scholars and sophisticates. Her hair is undone in humility and

brokenness. She weeps so uncontrollably that she wets Jesus' feet with her tears and has to wipe his feet with her hair. If that wasn't socially unsettling enough at the party, she's kissing Jesus' feet and finally she takes ointment that is worth about a year's wages and she breaks the flask and pours it on Jesus' feet. What is that? It is self-forgetting, humble, I don't care about social awkwardness, I need to get to Jesus.

Again and again and again that's what happens in the Gospel when guilty, blind, broken and bound sinners. See who this Jesus is and what this Jesus can do for sinners. They don't care what other people think about them. They humble themselves and they run to get to Jesus no matter what. So why do you think a man who has spent his life building an empire of social status runs which men never did and runs like a little boy and climbs up a tree? It is humble, self-forgetting, I don't care what the crowd thinks, desperation to get to Jesus. That's how compelling Jesus is when you start to see who Jesus really is for sinners.

The good news gets even better because the key to the transition to life and liberty is not only desperately humble but it's also receptive and repentant. Then there's this delightful and dynamic little picture in Luke 19:6 that says *[6] So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.* After Jesus speaks to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus receives him with joy and that's a theme that runs right through the Gospel of Luke, through the stories that Jesus told about Heaven's pursuit of sinners – the joy of salvation. When this sinner knows that he's been received by Jesus, his heart overflows with delighted joy. The picture in this verse is an urgent response to Jesus' invitation and this joyful response is the overflow of the heart that Jesus has changed. That's the fruit of faith in Jesus – joyfully receiving Jesus who has seen you and determined to command you to come into fellowship with Him. What a delight it must have been in heaven to see this wicked little self-made emperor happily scurrying down the tree to the call of the Lord Jesus.

The God given grace that worked change in Zacchaeus is put beyond all question by his confession of faith and repentance. Look at what happens in Luke 19:8 which says *[8] And 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."* He now knows who Jesus is. He says 'I give up my corruption. I give up what I've earned from my corruption. I restore what I have unjustly gained four fold.' There is perhaps no more vivid picture of a Christ changed heart in the whole Bible. What's going on? Zacchaeus is repenting.

Jesus says in Luke 5:32, *[32] I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.* Zacchaeus is Exhibit A of what Jesus is calling sinners to. He's calling them to repentance. Here's what that means. To repent means that you turn from and you turn to. It means you turn away from your sin and you turn to God. Repentance means that God, by His grace, has given you a sense of your sin and of His wrath, and that He's shown you that in Jesus He's merciful to sinners. And because you trust what He says about His mercy in Jesus, you believe Him. You turn from your sin and you turn to God. Repentance is believing in Jesus as you turn from sin to God and through faith in Jesus, you begin to walk in a new obedience.

Ephesians 2:10 says *[10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* We begin to walk those out because we believe in Jesus who has changed our heart and the fruit of a changed heart is now we walk in a new obedience. That's what happened to Zacchaeus. How do I know that? I'm glad you asked. The evidence of the changed heart is this; Zacchaeus says, 'I give up my corrupted little kingdom and I restore what I've taken. Half of my riches I give to the poor and once I've done that, whatever I have ripped off, I'll return it four fold.' That's not going to leave Zacchaeus much, if anything. It's evidence that God has worked in his heart. It's evidence that

he's done with the pursuit of the corrupted kingdom he was building with the life of sin that had made him who he thought he was.

We have to be crystal clear on this. Those deeds didn't earn Zacchaeus forgiveness with Jesus. They evidenced that he had received forgiveness from Jesus. His deeds did not merit forgiveness. They manifested that he had already, by grace, been forgiven. I hope you can see this in the text. The beauty of the Gospel story is that Jesus is the friend of even chief sinners and even chief sinners receive Jesus and repent. God draws even big sinners to humble honesty about their sin, and He shows them Jesus the Savior so that they can joyfully receive Him and repent. Isn't that Good News? But not everyone is rejoicing in what Jesus does.

In this episode we move from a detailed look at the man to more briefly seeing the mob. Luke 19:7 says [7] *And when they (the mob of people) saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."* The mob is not on the mission of Jesus. Now, Luke's Gospel has described grumbling before – the self-righteous leaders who saw it that their conformity to the code earned them God's favor. They grumbled at Jesus' friendliness with sinners. This is not a new problem. The Pharisees and the Scribes always grumbled at Jesus' acceptance of sinners in His presence. The new thing here is the *all* for it's not just the self-righteous code makers, it's the crowd that's watching Jesus accept sinners into His presence. The mob disapproves of Jesus so freely, dispensing His grace.

This actually echoes an indictment that Jesus gives to the whole culture over in Luke 7. Here Jesus looks at the entire generation that He is seeking to minister to, and He basically describes them as spiritual brats. Here's what Jesus says in Luke 7:31-35, [31] *"To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? [32] They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.' [33] For John the Baptist has come eating and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' [34] The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' [35] Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."*

The basic problem with the whole culture was they couldn't get God's preachers, particularly Jesus, to dance to their tune and to play by their rules. Their rules were this; 'keeping our man-made cultural code gets you accepted with God and by the way, with us at once, you've been marked out as a transgressor of our manmade code. We shame you and we shun you.' Jesus wouldn't dance to their tune. So, the mob mutters, and the mob complains about how scandalous Jesus is being with sinners, forgiving sinners when they believe and repent. The mob who are so worried about their cultural code that they're bothered with sinners get grace, is not on the mission of Jesus.

This reminds me of a statement by a professor of theology many years ago at the institution that I get to serve at, his name is Professor John Murray. John Murray made this powerful statement in one of his sermons; "The greatest enemy of the Gospel is not human unrighteousness, but human righteousness." Now, to be sure, it's our unrighteousness that renders us guilty before God and puts us under the judgment of God as His enemies. What John Murray was saying was that the great obstacle that we raise against God's remedy is our own man-made code of righteousness. Secular and religious people do this. Secular people form their code of righteousness by being on the right side of the new social code or cause. Secular people form their standard of righteousness by obeying the law of the new morality that is dogmatized by the dominant culture. Where I live in the Northeast you can tell what the code of righteousness is as you walk along and see the placards on people's lawns. Those placards are

basically the creed of the new social movement. That's their standard of righteousness by which they insulate themselves from God's searing standard of righteousness and inoculate their conscience from the conviction of the Holy Spirit and by which they judge everybody else.

Religious people do the same thing. Religious people form their sense of righteousness based on their scrupulous observance of manmade superstitions and manmade spiritual traditions, or perhaps even on their scrupulous observance of God's law, as though obeying the commands of God is what gets us made righteous with God, either our own law or God's law. When we're looking at our own efforts, we are holding up our own manmade righteousness. The reason that we do it is to hide ourselves from God's searing righteousness and inoculate our conscience from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Secular or religious human beings create standards of righteousness by which we try to insulate ourselves from God. Whether your mob is secular or religious, when your self made code causes you to miss Jesus, the only righteousness from God and when your self made code causes you to grumble rather than rejoice at Jesus offers salvation to big sinners, we're missing the plot of the gospel. At some level, we're not on Jesus' mission.

So, rather than looking at our own righteousness, we need to now see the third and the main character in the story. We've seen the man. We've seen the mob. Now I want you to see the Messiah. Here in the story we are in Zacchaeus' house. Zacchaeus is stood and given his confession of faith and repentance, and Jesus says to him in Luke 19:9-10, *[9] And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. [10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

The One that they are grumbling against identified Himself at the end of the episode by His favorite title for Himself in the Gospel, The Son of Man. Nobody else calls Jesus that, but that's Jesus' favorite title to attribute to Himself in the Gospel. Son of Man meant not only that Jesus fully possesses a human nature, which He does, but it meant also that He was from the Old Testament, God's promised end time Ruler who would have God's authority to redeem God's people and restore God's rule over His creation. This comes from Psalm 8.

Psalm 8:3-6 says *[3] When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, [4] what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*

*[5] Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. [6] You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.*

The Son of Man was the One who was promised by God to be God's ruling, royal representative with God's authority to redeem God's people and rule in God's name over creation. That's what the first man was supposed to do, and that's what he failed to do. When he failed through sin, he plunged all of us into guilt, misery and corruption. So God promised that He would send His eternal Son to take on a human nature and be the Man who would redeem God's people and restore what Adam had failed to protect. That's who Jesus is saying He is. He is that God given hope in the Scriptures for the end time, redeeming ruling Man, the Son of Man.

When Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, He's saying, 'I'm Him. I'm the One that the Psalmist pointed to. I'm the One that Daniel pointed to. I am the divine and royal Son with God's authority to restore order and life. I am the One God has sent to rule, whom He's given a Kingdom that will never end, that I'll establish in the hearts of My people, and I will redeem My people.'

In this appointment with Zacchaeus, we see that Jesus is the Son of Man with sovereign authority dispensing His saving mercy. Did you notice it? The sovereign authority with which He called Zacchaeus which is seen in Luke 19:5 that says [5] *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."* Did you notice that Zacchaeus had not even said a word? Jesus speaks to Zacchaeus before he ever says a word. It's Jesus who speaks to Zacchaeus. It's Jesus who calls Zacchaeus. It's Jesus who commands Zacchaeus and Jesus who sets the agenda for the entire encounter. Jesus took the initiative to which Zacchaeus responds with urgency and authority.

If you're a Christian reading this today, that's how it happened with you. Jesus sees sinners. Jesus calls sinners. Jesus speaks through His Word to sinners, and He gives them life and calls them from the dead. That's the way He saved me. I was reflecting recently with friends on the story of how God brought me to Himself when I was a young teenager in northern Canada. In the frozen winters, my family had been blown apart and was completely disintegrating. I remember one cold winter night standing out on the sidewalk as a young teenager trying to call a cab to get my family home. As I was standing there, it went off in my heart, 'I'm done. That's it. I'm going to church tomorrow morning.' At church the next morning, I heard the Gospel presented from a missionary and at the end there was an invitation to believe in Jesus. I could not, not respond to Christ. God saves sinners by Jesus seeking them, Jesus seeing them, Jesus speaking to them and when they hear and see the Savior, their heart is changed, their eyes are opened, they see Christ, they believe in Christ, they turn to Christ and they're given new life in Christ. That's what Jesus did with Zacchaeus.

The Son of Man also shows us His authority by pronouncing that salvation had come to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus receives Jesus. He repents, and notice that Jesus doesn't say this to him, "In a few weeks after you have jumped enough religious hurdles and you have proved to all of the religious people around you that you are satisfactory, I'll tell you, you're forgiven sinner." When you have followed enough of the culture code and the code of the canceled culture, you have satisfied the new dogma of the community that the morality has put on you and you've convinced enough people that you really are changed and you've really got rid of your past, then I'll pronounce you forgiven. That is not what Jesus says. Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house." Jesus, not the mob, has the authority to pronounce people forgiven. All Jesus says is 'Believe and repent.' Trust Him. Turn. When you believe in Jesus Christ, He says, "Today you're my child. Today you are forgiven." Jesus has sovereign authority and saving mercy as the Son of Man.

Finally, I want you to notice and see with me that this is not the end of the story. The story doesn't end with Zacchaeus because Jesus doesn't just proclaim salvation, Jesus provided salvation. The Son of Man didn't just come to preach salvation. The Son of Man, the Son of God came and obeyed all of God's righteous law for every one of His people who would believe in Him. Jesus obeyed the law of God, where Adam failed, where we fail. Where His people fail Jesus obeyed the law of God impeccably and perfectly so that He is their righteousness and His righteousness is now imputed to all who believe but Jesus didn't just come to obey the law. Jesus went all the way to the cross and the Son of Man was lifted up upon the cross where He bore the righteous wrath of God for every sin, small and big, for every person who would ever repent and believe on Him.

Jesus did not just go to the cross. The Son of Man went to the grave and was raised three days later to give life to every person who would believe in Him. He didn't just rise from the grave, He rose to the right hand of the Father where He now rules, and by His Spirit rules in the

heart of all of His people who have repented, believe and follow Him. He poured out His Holy Spirit from the right hand of the Father so that He could shed His love abroad in our hearts, so that today we can say 'Abba Father.'

Where is your heart with Jesus today? Maybe you're saying, "I'm just too big of a sinner to come to Christ. You've no idea what I've done." Maybe there's people in your life who you think are just too big of sinners for you to be able to get Christ to them and get them to Christ. Perhaps you believe in Jesus, you have repented and turned to Jesus, but you just struggle to know that there's no condemnation, that His acceptance of you is not based on your righteousness, but His righteousness alone. The answer to all three of those heart conditions is the same – self forgetting, humble, I don't care what the mob thinks, I need to get to Jesus. If you're reading this today, there is a Savior who is bigger than your biggest sins. Would you turn from sin? Would you trust Jesus and would you run to Jesus? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Our Father in heaven we thank You for that wonderful, famous verse for God so loved the world that He sent His Son, that whoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life. O Lord, we thank You for the wisdom, the love, the grace, the power, the authority of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord. I pray that if there would be one person today reading this who has as yet not put aside their pride, put aside their fear of others and run to Jesus, Oh, would you call them by Your Word today? Lord, I pray for all of Your children in this church and who been reading this message, would You assure them that Christ is their righteousness, that He has poured out His Spirit to conform them to His righteousness? Lord, would You allow us to enjoy the blessing of Christ's sovereign saving mercy? In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.