

# to **Seek** and **Save** the **Lost**

Luke 19:1-10

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Pastor Jim Rademaker

His name is Jim, and he spent most of his adult life swindling people out of money. He worked in 30 fraudulent business operations over a ten-year period, pitching everything from gold coins, to timeshares, to oil and gas leases, and other "business opportunities." His scams took in millions of dollars. For example, with his gold and silver scams, he would sell gold coins at a 300 to 500 percent markup. The victims would pay \$25,000 for a bunch of coins. Years later, they would take them to a coin shop and learn they were worth only a few thousand dollars. All those years Jim was ripping people off, he knew it was wrong. "But", he said, "I was making so much money, I didn't care." (Reader's Digest 11/13)

Jesus, accompanied by his followers, was in Jericho on his way from Galilee to the Passover festival (and his death) in Jerusalem. Messianic fever ran high among the excited crowds who greeted him as he traveled to the holy city, attracted by his preaching and miracles. Could this be the Messiah, they wondered, come to deliver them from their Roman oppressors?

A prosperous commercial and agricultural town in Jesus' day, Jericho is located near the end of the Jordan Valley, not far from the Dead Sea. Jericho was a city of richness in both history and wealth. Jericho was the first city of conquest in the days of Joshua. That incredible story of how God provided the miraculous victory by marching and shouting, and the walls "came tumbling down", as the song goes. From Jericho, the road begins its steep climb to Jerusalem. Jesus came to Jericho, where He had an appointment to keep. He was on his way to meet someone. Like us, this person was lost. And Jesus was coming to find Him. *Seeking and saving the lost.* That's why He came.

The person Jesus was looking for that day was named Zacchaeus. And like Jim, who took advantage of people and cheated them through his gold coin scam, Zacchaeus was considered by many as about as bad as they come. Not only was he a tax collector, (tax collectors were known to have their own little scam of collecting excess taxes and pocketing the difference) he was a "chief" tax collector. As "chief tax collector" Zacchaeus supervised his own sub-contractors for his area. Not only a part of the local tax mob, but the godfather, the head of the mafia. In the eyes of many, he was like the local drug lord.

Luke's description of him is simple. He was "a chief tax collector and he was rich". That was the best way of describing him. And everyone knew how he had gotten so rich – from stealing their hard earned money. And so, when people saw Zacchaeus they saw a thief. A crime boss. The lowest of the low. The worst of the worse.

Jesus saw all of this as well. But Jesus saw more. He saw a man who was lost. Lost in his sin. Lost in regards to God. If the crowds had their way they would have sought to kill Zacchaeus. Jesus sought to save him. Not to give him what he deserved, but to take what Zacchaeus deserved on Himself – as He was heading to Jerusalem and Palm Sunday and the cross. Jesus sought to love the unlovable, to forgive the sinner. To pay his price. To save him by being condemned for him.

The Son of God came to seek and to save the lost. As Jesus had an appointment with Zacchaeus, He has an appointment with you, to seek and save you. You deserve God's punishment for all you've done and failed to do, for a heart that so easily turns away from God. But Jesus comes today to pay the price for your sin. To be condemned in your place. Jesus comes to seek and to save *you*.

As Jesus entered the town, Zacchaeus was eager to catch a glimpse of him. However, since he wasn't a tall man, he couldn't see over the heads of the crowd. So Zacchaeus runs ahead along Jesus' route and climbs a tree so he could get a good view of the teacher with a reputation for such amazing deeds.

Zacchaeus, it seems, didn't worry that day about how undignified he looked, nor did he care about what anyone else thought of him. Clearly, his sole concern was to see Jesus. But we wonder what in particular motivated that desire. Was it idle curiosity to get a look at a miracle worker? Or was Zacchaeus moved by a longing for something worth far more than anything his money could buy? (Jeanne Kun)

Perched upon his lookout tower, he watches and waits. Sure enough, here comes Jesus, just like he planned. But then what happened next he hadn't planned on at all. He was up on the tree. Jesus was walking by. Everyone's eyes were on Jesus. Nobody probably takes note of him. Yet Jesus reached the spot and stopped. He looked up to Zacchaeus and called him by name!

Was Zacchaeus looking for Jesus or was it Jesus who found Zacchaeus? It was Jesus who stopped under that tree. It was Jesus who looked up. And it was Jesus who called him... by his name! Jesus knew his name! "*Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.*" (Edward Markquart)

The crowd is stunned! They can't believe what they're hearing. Zacchaeus! The head of the notorious *Zacchaeus Crime Family!* To his house! Had Jesus gone mad! No good religious person in his right mind would ever step foot in Zacchaeus' home, dine with him, spend the night as his guest!!! [As they said about the woman wetting Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair and anointed them with the oil, "*If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.*" (Lk 7) ]

What was Jesus thinking! He was thinking of the lost soul he had come to find. When Jesus found this strange little man sitting up in a tree, he was like a shepherd searching for his lost sheep. Just a short time before, Jesus had told this parable to the Pharisees who objected to his association with tax collectors and sinners.

*What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost."* (Lk 15)

Jesus called out to Zacchaeus by name, as a shepherd "calling his own sheep by name." (John 10) And Zacchaeus' heart is stirred. A longing begins to grow in his heart. A light begins to shine. Touched by Jesus' graciousness, the little tax collector acts quickly and decisively: *So he hurried and came down* (no holding back on his part or wasting time) *"and received him joyfully."* (Lk 19:6) (Kun)

Something was happening in the heart of Zacchaeus. He was being drawn by the call of the Good Shepherd. John 6 *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ... Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me ... The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." ... Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life ..."* Zacchaeus was being drawn by the call of the Good Shepherd. And so are you. "Come, be forgiven. Be saved. Follow Me."

And Zacchaeus was deeply moved by the words and the presence of the Lord in his home. Something radically changed that day. Not only does Zacchaeus publicly admit his wrongdoing, but he takes concrete steps to make amends. He spontaneously announces that he will share half of his possessions with the poor, and repay generously all those whom he had defrauded.

Something had happened to Zacchaeus. He was no longer the same man. Jesus had been drawing him to Himself and that had changed everything. Jesus' lost sheep had been found! And that sheep was never the same again. He had spent so long taking, getting, turning inward upon himself. And now, his heart was open. Open to receive Jesus' love and forgiveness and open to give, as he had been given. The rich young ruler had earlier been exhorted to sell all his possessions and give the money received to the poor. But he loved his possessions too much. No one asked Zacchaeus to give away a penny. He was excited to do so! And you couldn't have stopped him had you tried.

When a wealthy man gives money away, when an extortionist makes confession, and restitution, something's happened. Where did that come from! From a new love for Jesus. For coming to belief in Jesus, he had become a true child of Abraham. A child by faith. A child who trusted in Jesus as his Savior from sin, death, and the devil. (Geoff Thomas)

As one person wrote: "I remember walking into the Bible study. I had a knot in my stomach. In my mind, only weirdoes and zealots went to Bible studies. I don't remember what was said that day. All I know is that when I left, everything had changed. I'll never forget standing outside that apartment on the Upper East Side and saying to myself, 'It's true. It's completely true.' The world looked entirely different, like a veil had been lifted off it. I had not an iota of doubt. I was filled with indescribable joy. (Kirsten Powers is now a writer for Christianity Today. But you might know her best as a commentator who recently joined CNN.)

It's probably the most famous hymn in history. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see." Though some today wonder if the word "wretch" is a bit dramatic, John Newton, the song's author, didn't think so.

*"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

Nathanael Szobody shared about being on the mission field in Africa. His biggest concern? Health. Seeing their children get sick. Is it worth the risk? "What's not worth the risk?" he said. "The Gospel? Seeing lives transformed? Seeing my children transformed as they witness the power of the Gospel in another place, among another people? It's not worth *refusing* the call."

Jesus' answer to the murmurers who complained about the company He was keeping? Yesterday this man was as lost and condemned as could be. Today he is saved. Salvation was outside his house yesterday, but today it has arrived and is everywhere in his home - even to that which had been nearest and dearest to him - in his pocket and in his wallet and in his bank balance.

This man has salvation written over everything that had been nearest and dearest to him. Why? Because one day, Jesus determined to go to Jericho and meet with him, to seek and to save one who was lost. The lost coin has been found! The lost son has returned and the fatted calf is killed. And there is great rejoicing! (Lk 15) Great joy in heaven over this one sinner who has repented!

When he awoke that morning, Zacchaeus could not have expected that he would entertain such an unusual guest in his home and joyfully relinquish half of his wealth before the day was over! And for years afterward, Zacchaeus, and all of Jericho with him, must have often recalled that memorable day when Jesus came to town. (Kun)

The biggest immoral scoundrel in town, the worst of all possible sinners, is invited by Jesus to join him for a meal. Like Zacchaeus, Jesus invites you to his table. Lost. Lost in lies. Lost in cover-ups. Lost in anger. Lost in unforgiveness. Lost in busyness and distractions. Lost in yourself. Lost in sin.

Seeking. Searching. Scouring the hills. Actively intent on finding! And upon finding, breaking out in unrestrained joy! The joy of finding a lost sheep, the joy of finding a lost coin, the joy of a lost son being found - all picture God's yearning to find you and bring you back to Himself. The salvation that took place in Jericho that day happened days before Palm Sunday and Jesus being nailed to the cross - accomplishing his goal, to suffer and die in the place of sinners. In your place. Lost in yourself, found in Christ.

How do people meet Jesus today? Jesus had a "go out and find them", a seeking and saving approach to ministry. Too often, we have a what? A "come to us" approach. "Come to church and worship with us." Jesus went to people and met them where they were at. Matthew at his tax collector's office. Peter washing his nets down by the lake. A woman out by the well. Paul on the road to Damascus. Zacchaeus in a tree.

*"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"* (Rom 10:15) God will send people your way. Be aware of those He is sending. But more likely, He's sending you to people where they're at, that salvation might come to them as well. Jesus is coming to your town, to your home, with a purpose in mind. To seek and to save the lost, changing the world one person at a time. God's been doing this throughout all of human history, throughout all the Bible. *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*