

Text: Luke 19:1-10

Title: “Jesus, Friend of Despised Sinners”

VIDEO – JESUS, FRIEND OF SINNERS

Let’s open our Bibles today to Luke 19. Our Lord came on a rescue mission for people who were far from God. But He was often criticized and ridiculed for the way He reached out to people whom others didn’t think were worthy of being loved by God. There were hyper-religious people who criticized Jesus by calling Him a “friend of sinners.” But Jesus wore their ridicule as a badge of honor. Let’s draw near to our Lord in His word. **Read Luke 19:1-10.**

“Son of Man” was a favorite way for Jesus to refer to Himself in His mission as the Messiah. Here He is on His way to Jerusalem where He will finally accomplish His great work of redemption and forgiveness by His death on the Cross. His passion, His mission, was to seek and to save what was lost. And here on the pages of the Gospels we see exactly how the redeeming love of Jesus impacts a person’s life.

If you grew up in church the story of Zacchaeus was probably one of the first stories you learned. There’s even a song that you may have learned as a child, complete with the hand signals. I thought about singing it for you today, but I knew I couldn’t do it justice so I asked my little granddaughter Eleanor to sing it for you. **VIDEO** – “Zacchaeus was a wee little man...”

This story of a big Savior’s encounter with wee little Zacchaeus shows us what happens when the love of Jesus Christ collides with a messed up life. Here’s what I love about Jesus:

1. JESUS NOTICES PEOPLE THAT OTHERS IGNORE.

In vv.1-2 we get some of the details of Zacchaeus’ life. His name means “pure” or “righteous.” But when we first meet him he was anything but pure and righteous. Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector who lived in Jericho which happened to be one of the wealthiest cities in the region.

We saw this a few weeks ago when we were introduced to another tax collector named Levi or Matthew. Tax collectors were among the most hated people in the Jewish society. The taxation system was a mess and filled with abuse (sound familiar?). The Romans would designate how much revenue should come from a particular district, and then they would sell the right to collect that revenue to the highest bidder like Zacchaeus. So the tax collector was obligated to give that amount to the Roman government, but if he was able to collect more than that amount he could pocket the difference. Common people didn’t exactly know what the Roman tax rate was, so they were pretty much at the mercy of the tax collectors. And if you weren’t able to pay your taxes, some tax collectors would be happy to loan you the money ... of course at a high interest rate. So they were basically loan sharks as well.

So you can imagine how despised tax collectors were. And Zacchaeus was a “chief” tax collector, way up in the organization, and was very wealthy because of it. He had climbed the ladder to the top and on the way had stepped on many people.

Now Jesus was passing through Jericho where Zacchaeus lived and worked. **Read Luke 19:3-4.**

What was it that drove Zacchaeus to want to see who Jesus was? No doubt he had heard the stories about Jesus, and the rumors that He was the Messiah. In the verses preceding our text here Luke tells about another man that Jesus encountered that day on the outskirts of Jericho. This man happened to be a blind beggar sitting by the road. When he heard that Jesus was coming he shouted out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” He knew that Jesus had the power to heal him, and Jesus did. But we have no indication that Zacchaeus expected Jesus to do anything for him that day. After all, most Jews paid no attention to people like Zacchaeus. But maybe the aching loneliness and emptiness in his heart caused him to try to see who this Jesus was.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION – One of the most amazing success stories of the Rio Olympics is swimmer Michael Phelps. He’s collected 23 gold medals in five Olympic Games. But that success in the pool did not add up to peace in his life. ESPN reported that just two years ago Phelps was “struggling to figure out who he was outside the pool,” which led him to heavy drinking and wondering whether his life was worth living. Every relationship he had seemed to crumble. Michael Phelps said, “I thought the world would just be better off without me. I figured that was the best thing to do — just end my life.” Maybe Zacchaeus felt the same way. And if so, he was shocked that...

Luke 19:5a - When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him,

Jesus notices people that others ignore. He spots people in the crowd. You may wonder if God even knows you’re here today. He does, and He cares.

And if we are to be involved with Jesus as He seeks and saves those who are lost, He will cause us to notice people. Just think about the people we pass every day at work, at school, in stores, at the gym. Let’s learn to notice people that others ignore. But there’s more we need to see about Jesus...

2. JESUS ENGAGES PEOPLE THAT OTHERS REJECT.

Luke 19:5 - When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

Jesus doesn’t just *see* Zacchaeus, He *engages* him. And before they are introduced, Jesus knew Zacchaeus’ name and everything about him. Jesus knows everything about us ... even the things we want to keep a secret from others. Notice the wording carefully. “Come down

immediately. I *must* stay at your house today.” That little word “must” signals to us that Jesus was on a mission, not just into this man’s house, but into his heart.

ILLUSTRATION – When my wife Nan was a college student one year she served as a summer missionary here in Fort Worth. One of her assignments was to reach out to some women that most Christians wouldn’t think of reaching out to. In those days Camp Bowie Blvd. was not the upscale place it is today. Then there were establishments that today are called “Gentlemen’s Clubs.” Nan and some of the others on her team would go during the day to build relationships with and minister in the name of Jesus to the women who worked in those clubs. I can imagine how shocked those dancers must have been to hear that Jesus cared about them. I’m sure Zacchaeus must have felt the same way.

Luke 19:6 - So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

This was more than Zacchaeus had hoped for, so he jumps out of the tree literally “rejoicing.” But not everyone was happy.

Luke 19:7 - All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’ ”

Murmurs began to ripple through the crowd. We’ve pointed this out in the series, but notice that the word “sinner” is in quotation marks. This was a class of people who were completely disregarded, despised and rejected by others. And tax collectors like Zacchaeus were always on this list.

There are people here today who wonder, “What would these people think of me if they knew all that I have done?” Church, let’s make sure that everyone knows that we are here in the presence of a Savior who notices people that others ignore and embraces people that others reject. That’s who Jesus is and that’s who we are. That’s what it means to gather in His Name.

Now there’s one more thing about Jesus you need to see.

3. JESUS CHANGES PEOPLE THAT OTHERS GIVE UP ON (vv.8-10).

Jesus doesn’t just seek them ... notice them and engage them. He saves them and changes them. He loves us just as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us as we are. Just look at the change that happens to Zacchaeus. Presumably they are at Zacchaeus’ house when...

Luke 19:8 - Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Want to know what Zacchaeus is doing here? He is repenting. That word is not used, but that’s exactly what Zacchaeus is doing. “I cheated and stole from people. I was selfish. I was going

the wrong way in my life, and now I'm going a different direction. I'm making things right." Incidentally, Zacchaeus went way beyond what the Jewish Law required for restitution. He's a changed man! Our faith is evidenced by repentance. I trust Jesus Christ enough to turn away from my old way of life and turn to Him.

And Zacchaeus does all of this publicly. He stands up and makes this announcement to everyone in the house. Jesus never calls secret disciples. He always calls them to go public with their faith. And the NT shows us that the way we go public with our faith is to confess Christ through believers' baptism.

What a radical turn-around!

ILLUSTRATION – Let me go back to the story of Michael Phelps. At the lowest point in his life he entered a treatment center and there he was introduced to a book that you may have read ... Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*. Later Phelps said, "I don't know if (I was) afraid of just letting go and showing who I am or what it was. And, and I finally was just, like, 'You know what? ... I'm not hiding behind anything anymore. I am who I am ... I'm happy to turn the page to the next chapter.'" I don't know where Michael Phelps is with Jesus. But this is exactly what Jesus is after.

ILLUSTRATION – Two weekends ago I was at a wedding and I met a couple with an amazing story. In fact, Sherman Aten told me their story. The husband and wife had been married for many years when he had an affair with a woman at his office. This resulted in his marriage being destroyed and he and his wife were divorced. The man married the woman with whom he had the affair, but the marriage didn't last. The man, with his life in shambles, picked up a Bible one day and began to read, and miraculously came under conviction of his sin and put his trust in Christ. But the story doesn't end there. After years of being divorced from his first wife the man knew he needed to make things right with her. Another miracle occurred as they were reconciled and remarried, and today they travel around the country with Sherman and Tammy helping other couples build stronger marriages.

Well Jesus validates this miracle in Zacchaeus' life.

Luke 19:9 – Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham."

That day something happened to Zacchaeus. You don't just ease into Jesus. It's a growing relationship, but it starts at a point in time when one puts their trust in Jesus. On this day Zacchaeus was saved. Not because he gave all that money away. No, Jesus says, "He is a son of Abraham." Every Jew knew the story of Abraham and how he trusted God. And the way you can be saved is by trusting Jesus Christ.

And it doesn't matter how unworthy you feel. In fact, in the preceding chapter in Luke Jesus told a story about two men who came to the temple (to church) one day. One of them was a

Pharisee, like the people who were disgusted when Jesus went into the home of a “sinner” like Zacchaeus. This Pharisee was confident in his own righteousness and looked down on everybody else. The other guy was a tax collector, like Zacchaeus. Can you see them?

Luke 18:11 - The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.

And he went on to tell all the great things he did for God.

Luke 18:13 - “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

Now which one do you think connected with God that day? The really religious man or the really broken sinner? Jesus said...

Luke 18:14 - “I tell you that this man (the broken tax collector), rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Now which one of these people are you like?

- **Are you like the Pharisee** ... confident in your own righteousness and looking down on everyone else? Do we see how disgusted Jesus is with that kind of attitude in us? Jesus said, “Be careful. Everyone like this who exalts themselves will be humbled.” I need to see the Pharisee in me.
- **Are you like the tax collector** ... feeling totally unworthy to approach God and totally aware of how much you need mercy? Listen, if that’s where you are you are closer to God than you think. Jesus said, “He who humbles himself will be exalted.” That’s exactly what has to happen before you will trust in Christ for forgiveness.
- **Are you like Jesus?** Back to our text. Jesus said, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Now Jesus alone did the heavy lifting here. He died and rose again to make salvation possible for those who trust in Him. But He includes His followers in this. Your loved ones and friends without Christ are lost. Has it occurred to you, follower of Jesus, that Jesus just wants to climb inside your body and do His work through you every day. He is living in you by His Spirit, and He intends to make Himself at home in your body and to help Himself to your life today to accomplish His purposes to seek and to save those who are lost.