

Jesus Came to Seek and to Save the Lost

Luke 19:1-10

Nov. 2, 2025 (Pen. 21-C)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

But 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."

Jesus said to him, "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 the lost." (Luke 19:1-10 NIV)

Dear fellow recipients of God's grace in Jesus our Savior:

A pedophile. A child molester. A rich person who made his profit by scamming and cheating. A cold-blooded murderer. Those are the kinds of people we would think of if we were asked who's the most despised person, and who would be considered a "lost cause."

Zacchaeus was the most despised man in Jericho. This valley city was a trade center due to all the palm trees and balsam plants in the area. Naturally, the Roman government brought to Jericho a number of tax collectors to bring in revenue from customs and trade as well as peoples' incomes. The people despised these tax collectors because they were pawns of the hated Roman government, and because they generally skimmed profits and cheated people out of their money to gain for themselves. And Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector—he was a *chief* tax collector in charge of the operation and became wealthy through it. No wonder people hated him.

And yet Zacchaeus, and the people of Jericho, would discover an amazing truth, a truth for us to treasure today: **Jesus Came to Seek and to Save the Lost.**

It happened that Jesus was passing through Jericho, with the usual crowds following him and listening to what he said. Zacchaeus thought, "I've got to see this man and find out who Jesus is," having heard much about him. But there was a problem. Zacchaeus was a short man, so short he couldn't see over the crowd. So he ran ahead to where Jesus was going and climbed up a sycamore-fig tree, more like a mulberry tree with wide, sturdy branches, to get to see Jesus.

But even more importantly, Jesus got to see Zacchaeus. He saw this man, a man who was a despicable sinner, a lost man, a man who needed a Savior. So Jesus called out to him, "Zacchaeus, come down from that tree right away! I must stay at your house today." Just imagine! Of all the people in Jericho that he could have stayed with—the priests, the care-givers, the outwardly good people—he chose to spend the night at this tax collector's home, this despised sinner!

As the crowd heard Jesus say this, and when they saw him walking with Zacchaeus to his house, they all started to grumble. They muttered under their breath, “This man has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” What was Jesus thinking? Didn’t he know this man was a despicable human being, a man who didn’t deserve any pity, mercy or favor? But Jesus reminded the crowd why he had left heaven and had come to this world: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Lost sinners like Zacchaeus. Lost sinners like you and me.

You see, when we think of the worst sinners among us, we should think of ourselves in terms of the apostle Paul’s words, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Tim. 1:15b). The worst sinner isn’t the pedophile, the mass murderer, or even the cheating tax collector. The worst sinner is me. God knows my thoughts, how often I felt bitterness, or lust, or envy or coveting. God sees my sinful actions and hears the sinful words I say. He sees how lost I am. And that’s why Jesus came—to save sinners like me. Paul went on to say, “But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life” (1 Tim. 1:16).

This is Jesus’ purpose in coming: Not to pat the good people on the back and say what a nice job they’re doing—for there is no one good, not even one—but to seek and to save the lost. He comes to you and me, by grace, his undeserved love, and invites himself to stay with us. And when he comes, he will say to us as he did to Zacchaeus: “Salvation has come to this house.” We’re saved by grace! For Jesus came to die for our sins too! What love he shows to us!

So how do we respond? Look at how Zacchaeus responded. He shinnied down that tree as fast as he could, led Jesus to his house, welcomed him gladly. Zacchaeus also came clean with his sins, admitting how he had cheated people in his line of work. But Zacchaeus showed that he was now a changed man. He pledged, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor.” And whatever he had cheated from people, he would pay back four times the amount. The Old Testament law for the Israelites demanded restitution by giving back the amount plus 20%. Zacchaeus gave back above and beyond what the law required.

Zacchaeus responded with repentance, faith and good works. We should understand how they relate to each other. Repentance is a change of heart, which God’s Word works in us, a turning from our sin and a turning to our Lord in faith. Faith is worked in us by that same Word. Notice how Zacchaeus did not decide to believe, but it was a response to Jesus’ gracious invitation. So faith likewise isn’t a “work” we come up with, but it holds onto Jesus, welcomes him as Zacchaeus did. And then, faith immediately leads to those good works, “here and now” as Zacchaeus said. Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone. Faith brings about a changed life. Where we had been selfish, we become selfless and generous. Where we had been full of spite and bitterness, we become forgiving and loving. Where we had been envious, we become grateful.

May the news that Jesus comes to seek and to save the lost fill us with joy, because we would be lost indeed without Jesus! But Jesus came to seek and save sinners—even sinners like you and me! O dearest Jesus, stay at my house, today and every day! Amen.