

☒ LIFE OF JESUS

October 17, 2021 | Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

- Why did Jesus come into the world?
- Read Luke 19:1–10.
- Pray for God to help you understand and join Jesus’s mission.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus’s mission is to seek and save the lost.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

If you are not a sinner, you cannot participate in Jesus’s mission.

☒ MEDITATE

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage’s main point to your own life.

❓: *Why do many people not appreciate Jesus as Savior?*

❓: *What is one thing you must recognize before you can confess Jesus as Savior?*

Imagine you were shopping at your local grocery store. It is a typical shopping trip until an employee runs up to you shouting, “Follow me! I know the way out!” Odd behavior, for sure. You’ve been to this store a thousand times. The way out is through the front store, the same way you came in. Furthermore, you are not done with your shopping yet. Why would you want to leave? Then the employee shares a key piece of information. The front of the store is on fire. You cannot get out that way, but you must get out. You are, in fact, in grave danger even though you were unaware of it. The employee is trying to save your life, but you did not think you needed to be saved. If you do not think you need to be saved, you will not appreciate it when someone tries to save you.

Such is also the case concerning our response to Jesus and His mission on earth. As we will see in this passage, many people are interested in Jesus but not in being saved by Him. They may espouse him as a good moral teacher, an example of counter-cultural living, or someone willing to stand against authority, but they do not see Him as their Savior because, in their minds, they have no need for a Savior. They are trapped in a burning building with no idea they need someone to show them the way out.

❓: *In what ways can Christians inadvertently undermine the faith they proclaim by obscuring the gospel?*

❓: *Do you ever move beyond your need for Jesus to save you?*

APPLICATION POINT – One of the hardest things to recognize is inconsistency within ourselves. We go through life, doing what we’ve always done, often without realizing we are a walking heap of self-contradiction, and we are good at making excuses for ourselves. For many aspects of life, it hardly matters. Who cares if you say you do not enjoy social media but cannot stop uploading your entire life onto the web? Who cares if you say you eat healthy but pig out on chocolate cake three times a week? But when it concerns our faith in Jesus Christ, this kind of inconsistency can bring our growth in Him to a halt. This lesson will identify some ways we can avoid

contradicting our faith in Christ with our actions and/or attitudes. As you begin, consider how you might be contradicting your faith.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Luke 19:1–10 is the story of Zacchaeus. For many of us, this may be one of the earliest Bible stories we encountered. As is often the case with stories we are familiar with, there is much more to the story than what we remember.

1. SEEKING JESUS

2. KEEPING OTHERS FROM SEEING JESUS

3. IGNORING OBSTACLES

4. TWO VIEWS OF GRACE

5. AUTHENTIC REPENTANCE

GOING DEEPER

+This section will examine Luke 19:1–10 in further detail by exploring the five points listed above.

1. SEEKING JESUS

■ LUKE 19:1–3

🔍: *What was Zacchaeus's occupation?*

🔍: *What was the implication of Zacchaeus's wealth?*

Luke tells us two things about Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector and he was rich. They were essentially agents of a foreign oppressor, so they were seen as traitors among their own countrymen. To make matters worse, tax-collectors supported themselves by collecting extra taxes from the people. They passed on the amount required to the governors and kept the excess for themselves. This frequently led to abuse, as in the case of Zacchaeus. But

such behavior is accompanied by guilt. So, tax collectors are often viewed sympathetically within the Gospels and by Jesus. When we see tax-collectors in the Gospels, we see individuals who knew they were sinners and were ready to repent.

We also know Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus. Jesus was well-known within Israel by this time and drew enormous crowds wherever He went. He was quite the spectacle. Zacchaeus, however, was not interested in Jesus because of the spectacle surrounding Him. Somehow, Zacchaeus knew he must change, and he recognized Jesus as the key he needed to transform his heart.

🔍: *Why are you interested in Jesus?*

🔍: *Why should you be interested in Jesus?*

APPLICATION POINT – There are a lot of reasons you could be seeking Jesus. Many people feign interest in Jesus because those around them do. They just happened to fall into a group of Christian friends at work or buy a house between to neighboring believers. Some people are interested in Jesus’s ability to heal. Others merely recognize that He draws a crowd and are curious about the spectacle. No matter the reason you are seeking Jesus, this parable shows that Jesus is also seeking you. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, including you! The only question is whether you understand your need of Him as Savior. If you are seeking Jesus for any other reason, reflect on why you need a Savior and be prepared to embrace Him as your Lord and Savior.

2. KEEPING OTHERS FROM SEEING JESUS

📖 LUKE 19:3

🔍: *Why couldn't Zacchaeus see Jesus?*

🔍: *Why wouldn't other people in the crowd help him see Jesus?*

Zacchaeus could not see Jesus because he was short. The crowds surrounding Jesus were simply too big for him to catch a glimpse of Jesus. His peers were too busy clamoring for their own view of Jesus to worry about Zacchaeus. They kept him from seeing the Savior he needed.

Unfortunately, Zacchaeus was not alone in being prohibited from seeing Jesus by the world around him. But for others, it was not because of their short stature but because they were exploited by those around them. One example that comes to mind occurs in Acts 16. Paul was proclaiming the gospel in Philippi, but he was being accosted by a slave girl who was possessed by a spirit that allowed her to see the future. Her owners profited by exploiting her “talent.” They were unconcerned with her spiritual welfare, and when Paul ordered the spirit to leave her, they had Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into prison. She was kept from Jesus by her masters.

🗨️: *In what ways could you be preventing someone from encountering Jesus?*

🗨️: *How can you help someone who has been prevented from encountering Jesus?*

APPLICATION POINT – Although not every situation is as extraordinary as the one Paul encountered, people are still kept from encountering Jesus because of those around them or because of their place within society. Single mothers, for example, often feel trapped in an endless cycle of work and managing their homes. They do not have time to stop and reflect on their relationship with Jesus. If they stop, they will find themselves falling behind on another payment. And there is always a child waiting for them. The few minutes they have away from work and children are typically spent recuperating, only to begin the cycle again the next day. Life’s demands can keep single mothers from seeking Jesus.

There may be other examples within your church. Every week, there are countless people who give up attending church because they do not feel welcomed among the people of God. You may argue that is not the point of attending church or that they should try to become more involved. You may be right, but this is a rather empty victory. There was still someone within the walls of your church building who failed to encounter Christ, and it is possible that you could have done something about it. How might you be hindering someone from encountering Jesus? Consider how you can help someone who has found themselves at a place where it feels impossible to seek Jesus.

3. IGNORING OBSTACLES

❏ LUKE 19:4

Q: *What was Zacchaeus's solution to seeing over the crowds?*

Q: *How does this show his commitment to seeking Jesus?*

Zacchaeus refused to allow his short stature to keep him from seeing Jesus. If he could not see through the crowd, he would climb a tree to look over them. Nothing would keep Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus. If the tree failed, he would have looked for the next way.

Q: *How do you see this Zacchaeus mentality within your church?*

Q: *What excuses do you frequently encounter for why someone cannot attend church?*

APPLICATION POINT – There are families in my church who give our pastor a bulletin from the church they attended if they had to be out of town on a Sunday. They do not want him or anyone else to question their faithfulness to attend church. I find their thinking a bit rigid, but I must admit I admire their commitment to be among God's people on Sunday morning. It is much more common for me to encounter the opposite mindset. I know many people who think any excuse to stay home on Sunday morning is good enough. They were out too late the night before, they have company coming, they have other plans, or they were just very tired. If you find yourself constantly making excuses to not attend worship, you need to realize that this shows the lack of value you place on worship. You might not like this conclusion, but it is difficult to avoid. If you were truly interested in encountering Jesus, you would follow Zacchaeus's example. You would fight your way through every obstacle in order to catch a glimpse of Him. Fight to protect your worship times.

4. TWO VIEWS ON GRACE

LUKE 19:5-7

Q: *What did Jesus demand of Zacchaeus?*

Q: *What was Zacchaeus's response?*

Zacchaeus was a sinner. He used his position as a tax collector to exploit others and become rich. He cared more about gaining wealth than he did about his integrity or the well-being of others. His sin was visible for all the world to see, even himself. There was no use in denying his sinfulness, yet Zacchaeus could not fix himself. He could only watch as his guilt grew. And of all the people in the crowd that day, Jesus chose to invest in Zacchaeus, and Zacchaeus responded with joy. When sinners acknowledge the reality of their sin, grace becomes more precious to them than anything else.

Q: *When was the last time you were broken over your sin?*

Q: *What keeps you from understanding the joy of Jesus's forgiveness?*

APPLICATION POINT – The more deeply you are aware of your sin, the more you recognize your own need for grace. Our problem is that we hate acknowledging our sin. It is counterintuitive. Instead of acknowledging our sinfulness, we prefer to justify our sins or deny the sinfulness of our actions. We will not succeed in deceiving God, however. Let Zacchaeus show you a better way. Instead of refusing to acknowledge your sin, embrace the joy that comes from the forgiveness Jesus offers.

Q: *What was the crowd's reaction to the grace Jesus showed Zacchaeus?*

Q: *Why did they react this way?*

Zacchaeus was not a popular person. You can almost see the astonishment on the faces of crowd as they watched Jesus engage with such an egregious sinner. Their astonishment turned to discontent once they recognized that He would be gracious to a sinner of Zacchaeus's caliber. In their minds, it was best to avoid sinners, but Jesus attempted to befriend them. Their problem, of course, was their willingness to see Zacchaeus's sin but not their own. If they saw their own sin, they would see their need for forgiveness from Jesus and rejoice when they saw grace.

Luke created a clear contrast between how Zacchaeus and the crowd responded to grace. Zacchaeus responded with joy. He was forgiven. He did not have to persist in sin anymore. The crowd grumbled. When you do not understand your own need for forgiveness, you resent when forgiveness is offered to others.

Q: *In what ways do you resent God's grace?*

Q: *Why is it dangerous to resent God's grace?*

APPLICATION – God's grace is an act of His will, and He freely gives it to us. No one has earned God's grace. This truth is central to the gospel, but when we resent His grace when it is shown to others, we treat it as if it were something that could be earned. We essentially are saying, "I know I'm not perfect, but I've earned the right to receive God's grace anyway." The resentment of grace is a misunderstanding of the gospel at every point. No one needs to clean themselves up before seeking the grace of God shown in Jesus Christ. If you find yourself falling into this line of thought, again, let Zacchaeus show you a better way. Zacchaeus knew he had to seek Jesus as he was. If he waited for his sin to subside, grace would never have come.

5. AUTHENTIC REPENTANCE

LUKE 19:8-10

Q: *How did Zacchaeus demonstrate his repentance?*

Q: *What is a son of Abraham?*

In response to his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus repented of his life of swindling and exploitation. He pledged to repay anyone from whom he inappropriately gained, and he gave away half his goods to those in need. This is authentic repentance. Zacchaeus did not just try really hard to not do wrong again. His heart was changed. He sought reconciliation with others. Where he once exploited others, he now sought to exploit himself. Zacchaeus clearly had a new master. Before, he was a servant of money and possessions. Now he was a servant of Jesus and was free to give away money and possessions.

Q: *Do you still struggle with the same sins you did before accepting Jesus as your Savior?*

Q: *What does repentance cost you?*

APPLICATION – Some new Christians are disappointed to learn that sin has a tighter grip on them than they thought. Although they have confessed their sins and repented of them, they frequently find themselves prey to the same temptations and sins they did before they accepted Jesus. The problem is often cheap repentance. Again, consider Zacchaeus's example. He was not content just to try really hard to no longer exploit others through his position. Instead, he took action to assure himself and everyone else that he had a new master. If you continue to struggle with sin, perhaps you have not taken the steps needed to assure yourself and others that you have a new master now. When we exchange one master for another, we can find the transformation that leads to authentic repentance.

NEXT STEPS

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Once we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, we join Him in seeking the lost and confronting them with the realities of the gospel. Share the story of Zacchaeus with someone you know who is not a believer. Be ready to lead them through the main points of Zacchaeus's story. Pray that God would help you share your faith through the power of His Word.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Jesus, thank you for seeking me when I needed you most.

Father, help me never to keep others from seeking you.

Lord Jesus, help me to face the reality of my sin and my need for you.

God, keep me committed to worshipping you in the presence of other believers.