

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“TO SEEK AND TO SAVE”**

Luke 19:1-10

■ {Lk 19:10} **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”**

Do we believe this? Our inclination is probably to answer, without a moment’s hesitation, ‘*Of course we believe it!*’ But let’s pause a moment and reflect.

? *Do I really believe “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”?*

*Do I believe this in regard to other people?*

It is easy to accept that Messiah came to save my family, friends, and likeable acquaintances. And it is not at all hard to believe this for strangers who appear to be reasonably decent, or whom I imagine to be relatable.

But what about those whose worldview or actions I find abhorrent? Did Jesus come for violent racists, child abusers, and serial killers? Is the Son of Man passionately seeking to save my enemies who are set on harming me?

*Do I believe this in regard to myself?*

Some believe it absolutely: very young children who take everything on faith; also those of us who are acutely aware of our lostness apart from Christ and have drunk deeply of God’s mercy and know in our bones that Jesus seeks and saves us in spite of our fault and frailty.

Some disbelieve it: the self-righteous who take it for granted that Christ does seek them out (after all, they are “his kind of people”) but who fail to see their desperate

need for salvation; and the defeated, who believe that Jesus seeks and saves others but not them – because, they think, ‘I am too guilty, too depraved, too far gone.’

Do we believe that **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”**?

□ Please turn to Luke 19:1-10. It is a familiar narrative. Yet there is more here than meets the eye!

✍ First, Zacchaeus is well and truly lost.

■ What is the first thing that comes to mind about Zacchaeus? **“Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he,”** right? The Sunday school song makes him sound comical, and cute enough that you want to pinch his cheek. But he is not.

■ In verse 2 we learn that Zacchaeus is a tax collector. Actually, it identifies him as the **“chief tax collector”** in Jericho.

Zacchaeus is responsible for every other tax collector in the district. He assigns them their posts, and he takes delivery of the money they gather and personally hands it over to the governor of Judea.

Mark Twain posed this riddle: **“What’s the difference between a taxidermist and a tax collector? The taxidermist takes only your skin.”** I would bet my own skin that tax collectors are not popular in any culture! But the animosity toward Jewish tax collectors in first century Palestine is uncommonly fierce.

These men work for the Romans. The money they collect finances the imperial political machine and army. They tighten the Empire’s grip on the Jewish people.

And Zacchaeus is “**a chief tax collector.**” Unlike the agents under him he deals directly with Roman officials at the highest levels. He actively enforces and manages their oppressive structure on their behalf.

Zacchaeus is a traitor, plain and simple.

■ Verse 2 also describes Zacchaeus as “**wealthy.**” From what he himself says in verse 8, we can reasonably conclude that he is fabulously wealthy – you might say *filthy* rich, with an emphasis on the word *filthy*.

The Romans do not pay provincial tax collectors a wage of any kind. Instead, they authorize them to collect more than the people owe and pocket the excess.

The system incites abuse, so that even low level collectors are rolling in the dough – and Zacchaeus has attained a very high rank. Every Jewish resident of the area is at his mercy, including his subordinates: anyone who wants a post in his district pays him for the privilege, again and again. That is how chief tax collectors amass mind-boggling fortunes.

Zacchaeus is a leech, a blood-sucker, a parasite.

{Tohoroth 7:6} But his power and wealth have not come cheaply. Zacchaeus is barred from giving testimony in Jewish courts. Temple officials will not accept his offerings. If he tries to enter a synagogue he will be forcibly ejected. When he enters a house “[**everything in it] becomes unclean.**”

Any family member who is not also in the business has disowned Zacchaeus. His only “friends” are other tax collectors – the majority of whom are underlings from whom he periodically squeezes large sums of money.

Not only is he almost universally reviled, religious Zealots are convinced that it is their patriotic duty to kill men like him when possible.

He is in a tough spot; but keep in mind that no one goes into tax-gathering by accident, nor does a tax collector “just happen” to be named district chief. He scrambles and climbs and claws his way to the top by perfecting the arts of flattery, back-stabbing and bribery.

{Dt 6:5; Lev 19:18; Dt 5:7, 19, 21} Zacchaeus willfully fails to “**Love the LORD...God with all** [his being],” willfully fails to “**Love** [his] **neighbor as** [himself],” willfully violates at least three of the Ten Commandments (“**You shall have no other gods before me,**” “**You shall not steal,**” “**You shall not covet**”), willfully betrays his people.

He is fully cognizant that, as a consequence, he will be a social pariah, a spiritual leper, and a potential murder victim. Yet he does it anyway, for the money and power.

This is the “**wee little man**” about whom we so casually sing. This is Zacchaeus.

✎ Second, Messiah seeks Zacchaeus.

■ Luke 19:5-6: “**When Jesus** [reaches] **the spot**” under the tree, “**he** [looks] **up and** [says] **to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’**”

Do you hear the urgency in his voice?  
“*Zacchaeus, hurry down! Make haste!*”

Do you hear his resolve to be with Zacchaeus? *“I have got to come to your house! It is necessary for me to stay with you!”*

{Lk 9:51; 22} This is unexpected. Christ Jesus has **“resolutely set his face to go to Jerusalem,”** where he **“must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders ... chief priests and... teachers of the law... must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”** It is his overriding imperative. It is why his Father sent him.

Now he is tantalizingly close, a mere 16 miles from his destination. Staying in Jericho for a whole day would seem to be a distraction, at best.

{Lk 15:1; Mt 9:11; Lk 18:10-14; Lk 5:27} The stunning thing is that he chooses to waste it with a tax collector. I say “stunning” but it shouldn’t surprise anyone. It is common knowledge that, unlike other rabbis, Jesus allows **“tax collectors and sinners... to hear”** his teachings; he has elevated a tax collector to the status of apostle; and he routinely **“[eats] with tax collectors and sinners,”** which is something respectable people would not be caught dead doing.

■ Many in the crowd would love to host Jesus, but he chooses Zacchaeus. No wonder they mutter, **“He has gone to be the guest of a sinner”** (verse 7). Frankly, the thought makes their skin crawl.

{Lk 5:30; Lk 7:39} It also makes them question Christ’s identity and wisdom. In this they are like the teachers of the law who early on made a habit of complaining, **“Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”** They are like the Pharisee who, when the Lord allowed a sinful woman to anoint him, said to himself, **“If this man**

**were a prophet, he would know ... what kind of a woman she is – that she is a sinner.”**

{Lk 5:31-32; Eccl 7:20} They do not grasp that Christ has **“come to call...sinners to repentance.”** They do not accept that he is all about seeking and saving **“the lost.”** Indeed he is. Spending time with Zacchaeus interrupts his journey to Jerusalem, but it advances his mission. Eating with a tax collector violates tradition and offends many observers, but it is essential to his ministry.

✍ Third, Messiah saves Zacchaeus.

■ We see Zacchaeus’ predisposition to be saved when in verse 3 he **“[wants] to see who Jesus [is],”** when in verse 4 he makes the effort to **“[climb] a sycamore-fig tree to see him”** over the crowd, and when in verse 6 **“he [comes] down at once and [welcomes] [Jesus] gladly”** into his home.

■ We see evidence that Zacchaeus is being saved in verse 8, when he **“[stands] up and [says]... ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything’” – “if”?** – **“I will pay back four times the amount.”**

{Eph 2:8-9} To be sure, he does not earn salvation by doing this. **“It is by grace [we are] saved, through faith – and this is not from ourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”**

{Jas 2:17, 14} Still, **“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”** **“What good is it ...if [we] claim to have faith but have no deeds?”** None whatsoever! **“Can such faith save [us]?”** No!

{Eph 2:10} Works are the sign and substance of salvation in the presence, **“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us.”** Zacchaeus has started doing the **“good works, which God prepared in advance for”** him. He is **“God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus”!**

■ Hence, in verse 9 the Lord Jesus declares:  
**“salvation has come to this house.”**

? In verse 2 Zacchaeus he is well and truly lost. *Is there anyone the Son of Man will not seek?*

? By verse 9 Zacchaeus is well and truly found. *Is there anyone the Son of Man cannot save?*

Luke 19 is the Word of the Lord!