

The Life of Christ

Lesson 8: Friend of Sinners: Grace That Seeks the Lost -- Luke 19:1-10

Jericho was a wealthy town, and Zacchaeus was one of the reasons the locals had to grumble about wealth. He was a chief tax collector, which meant he had grown rich by working for the occupying Romans and skimming off the top of his own people's pockets. Everyone knew it. Everyone resented it. He was the kind of man mothers warned their children about, the kind of man the religious crowd would cross the street to avoid. He had money, but he had no friends among the people who mattered to him, and somewhere underneath the wealth there was a man who was lost.

On the day Jesus passed through, Zacchaeus wanted to see Him. We are not told exactly why. Perhaps curiosity, perhaps something deeper, a hunger he could not name. But he was a short man, and the crowd would not let him through, so he did something undignified for a wealthy official: he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree like a boy, just to catch a glimpse. And there, perched in the branches, hiding in plain sight, he is found, not by his own searching, but by the eyes of Jesus, who stops beneath the tree, looks up, and calls him by name.

"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." The crowd is scandalized. Of all the homes in Jericho, Jesus invites Himself to the house of the one man everyone agrees is a sinner. They grumble, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." But that is precisely the point. This is what Jesus does. He seeks the lost. He befriends sinners. He goes where the religious will not go, to the people the religious have given up on.

And grace, when it is truly received, changes everything. Zacchaeus does not merely enjoy a famous visitor; he is transformed. He stands and announces that he will give half his goods to the poor and restore fourfold anything he has taken by fraud. This is no bargain to earn his way in; it is the fruit of a heart that grace has melted and turned. And Jesus declares the meaning of it all: "Today salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." This lesson is about that seeking grace, the grace that comes after us when we could never climb high enough to reach God, and that, when received, turns sinners into new people.

Group Discussion: The crowd grumbled that Jesus had gone to be the guest of a sinner, yet that is exactly the kind of person Jesus came to seek. Why do you think the grace of Jesus toward notorious sinners so often offends respectable, religious people, and what does that reveal about the human heart?

Personal Reflection: Jesus saw Zacchaeus, called him by name, and sought him out before Zacchaeus had changed a thing. Where in your life do you need to know, more deeply, that Christ has sought you personally, and how might that seeking love change the way you see yourself and others?

Read Luke 19:1-10

Study Questions

1. In Luke 19:1-5, Jesus takes the initiative, stopping beneath the tree, looking up, and calling Zacchaeus by name, and He sums it up in verse 10: "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." What does this account teach us about the nature of God's grace and how a lost person comes to be found?
2. Zacchaeus was the kind of man others had written off as beyond hope. Where are you tempted to believe that you, or someone you know, is too far gone, too sinful, or too set in their ways for the grace of Christ to reach?
3. When Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' house, the crowd grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner" (v. 7). What does their reaction reveal about self-righteousness, and how does it contrast with the heart of Jesus, the friend of sinners?
4. It is easy to grumble, like the crowd, when grace is extended to people we think do not deserve it. Where do you notice self-righteousness or resentment in your own heart toward the grace God shows to others, and what would it take to rejoice instead?
5. Zacchaeus responded to grace by giving half his goods to the poor and restoring fourfold what he had taken wrongly (v. 8). What does his response teach us about the kind of repentance and transformation that genuine grace produces?

6. Real repentance shows itself in concrete change, not merely good intentions. If grace were truly at work in you the way it was in Zacchaeus, where might it lead you to make restitution, to change a practice, or to give in a way that costs you something?
7. Jesus declared, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v. 9), to a man whose faith immediately expressed itself in repentance and changed living. How does this account help us understand that the grace of Christ saves us through a faith that turns from sin and obeys, rather than through a bare "faith only" that never changes the life?
8. Christ has sought you with the same grace He showed Zacchaeus. Have you received that grace with a faith that genuinely turns and follows Him, or have you kept it at a comfortable distance, admiring it without letting it change you? Where do you sense Him calling you down out of the tree today?
9. The grace of Christ that seeks the lost draws sinners to an obedient faith and heartfelt repentance, never to a salvation by "faith only" that leaves the life unchanged (compare Ephesians 2:8–10; Titus 2:11–14; James 2:17). How does Zacchaeus illustrate the right relationship between God's grace, our faith, repentance, and the good works that follow, without turning those works into a way of earning salvation?
10. Looking back over the seeking grace of Christ and the transformation of Zacchaeus, name one specific way you will receive and respond to that grace this week, including one concrete fruit of repentance that would show grace is truly at work in you.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 15:1–10, the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, where God seeks the lost and heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents; Acts 2:38, where Peter calls his hearers to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins; Ephesians 2:8–10, where we are saved by grace through faith, created in Christ for good works; Titus 2:11–14, where the grace of God trains us to renounce ungodliness and live upright lives; James 2:17, where faith without works is shown to be dead.