

# Jesus Came to Seek and Save the Lost

Jesus is moving toward Jerusalem to fulfill the purpose of His coming to this earth. John 10:10 tells us that Jesus said He came that we “may have life, and have it more abundantly.” Later in John 12:27, He referred to His death in a conversation with God the Father and said, “For this purpose I came.” Recently, He has left the ancient ruins of Jericho and now He is moving through the city of Jericho that existed in His day. He already knew the religious leaders would arrest and kill Him when He arrived in Jerusalem. Even though Jesus has just recently explained that He is going to Jerusalem to die, the disciples only believed their trip to Jerusalem was a bad decision. They did not understand that Jesus had intentionally planned to die for the sins of the world. A large crowd is still following Him, and they were excited because He was here. Two blind men had just been healed. One of the blind men was Bartimaeus. He had just believed in Christ and had begun to follow Him. We discovered the characteristics of true faith in our last study. This study is about another man. His name is Zaccheus. We are going to discover how true faith conducts itself. Our study is from Luke 19:1-10.

**Zaccheus Was A Sinner (v 1-2).** Luke 19:1-2 tells us that Jesus was passing through the first century city of Jericho. A man named Zaccheus lived there.

*He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. Luke 19:1-2 (NASB)*

Luke 19:2 states that Zacchaeus was a chief tax-collector. A chief tax-collector in Jesus’ time ran a business that collected taxes from the people. His employees agreed to pay him a fee out of the tax monies they in turn collected from



the people. They were allowed to collect as much tax as they wanted from the people as long as they paid the required fee to the chief tax collector. In turn, the chief tax-collector

could set the fee that he desired to collect from his employees so long as he paid Rome the fee they required! It was like a pyramid scheme. Consequently, the top tax-collectors were very wealthy. The tax collection system was very abusive and unfair. Each person in the scheme could demand from the average person any amount of money they desired, as long as they paid the fee to their supervisor. Alfred Edersheim states,

Of course, the joint-stock company of Publicani at Rome expected its handsome dividends so did the tax-gatherers in the provinces, and those to whom they on occasions sublet the imposts. All

wanted to make money of the poor people; and the cost of the collection had of course to be added to the taxation. We can quite understand how Zacchaeus, one of

the supervisors of these tax-gatherers in the district of Jericho, which, from its growth and export of balsam, must have yielded a large revenue, should, in remembering his past life, have at once said: "If I have taken anything from any man by false accusation," or, rather, "Whatever I have wrongfully exacted of any man." For nothing was more common than for the publican to put a fictitious value on property or income. Another favorite trick of theirs was to advance the tax to those who were unable to pay, and then to charge usurious interest on what had thereby become a private debt.<sup>1</sup>

This helps us understand that Zaccheus ran a very profitable business, which probably had many employees. Verse 2 tells us that Zaccheus was rich. We will learn soon that he was very rich. This is not a surprise since his business was at the crossroads of a very profitable trade route between Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, and Syria.

William Barclay says,

Jericho was a very wealthy and very important town. It lay in the Jordan valley and commanded both the approach to Jerusalem and the crossings of the river which gave access to the lands east of the Jordan. It had a great palm forest and world-famous balsam groves which perfumed the air for miles around. Its gardens of roses were known far and wide. It was known as 'The

City of Palms'. Josephus called it 'a divine region', 'the fattest in Palestine'. The Romans carried its dates and balsam to worldwide trade and fame.

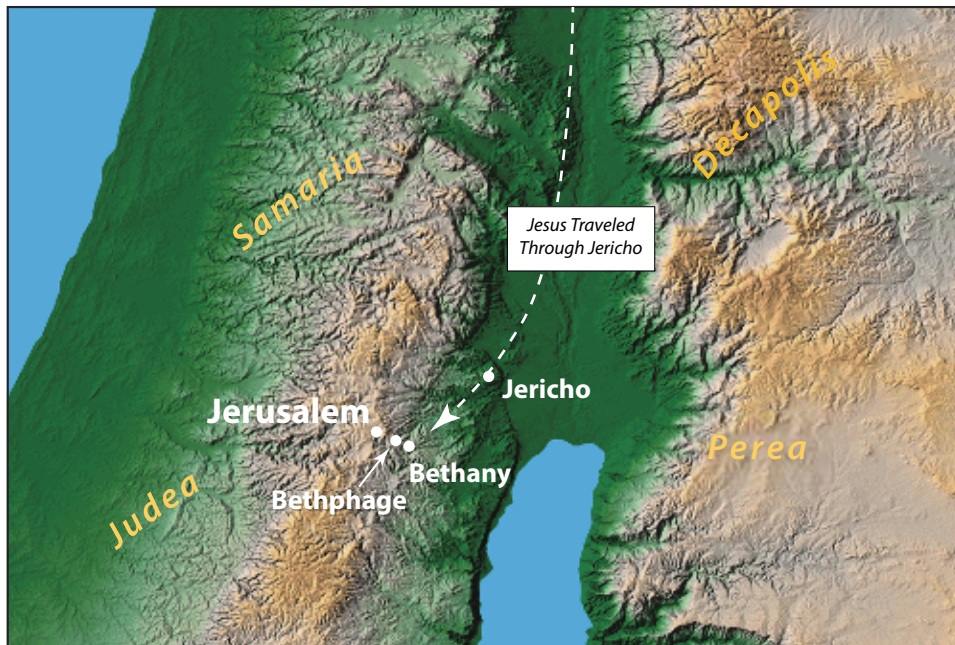
All this combined to make Jericho one of the greatest taxation centers in Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

In summary, these first two verses reveal that Zaccheus was clearly a sinner. The Jews would have agreed with that statement because they hated the tax-collectors because they collected money for Rome, which occupied Israel. But their definition of a sinner, was not a biblical one. For them, a sinner was someone who was worse than most of the people.

But God tells us in Romans 3:23 that everyone has sinned and come short of the glory of God. God is the ultimate standard of sinlessness. No human is sinless. The religious leaders of the day were sinners, just as Zaccheus was a sinner. As we will discover in

verse 8, he was a greedy man who was extremely abusive of the poor. We are sinners too! James 5:1-5 describes men like Zaccheus. It says,

**Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your**

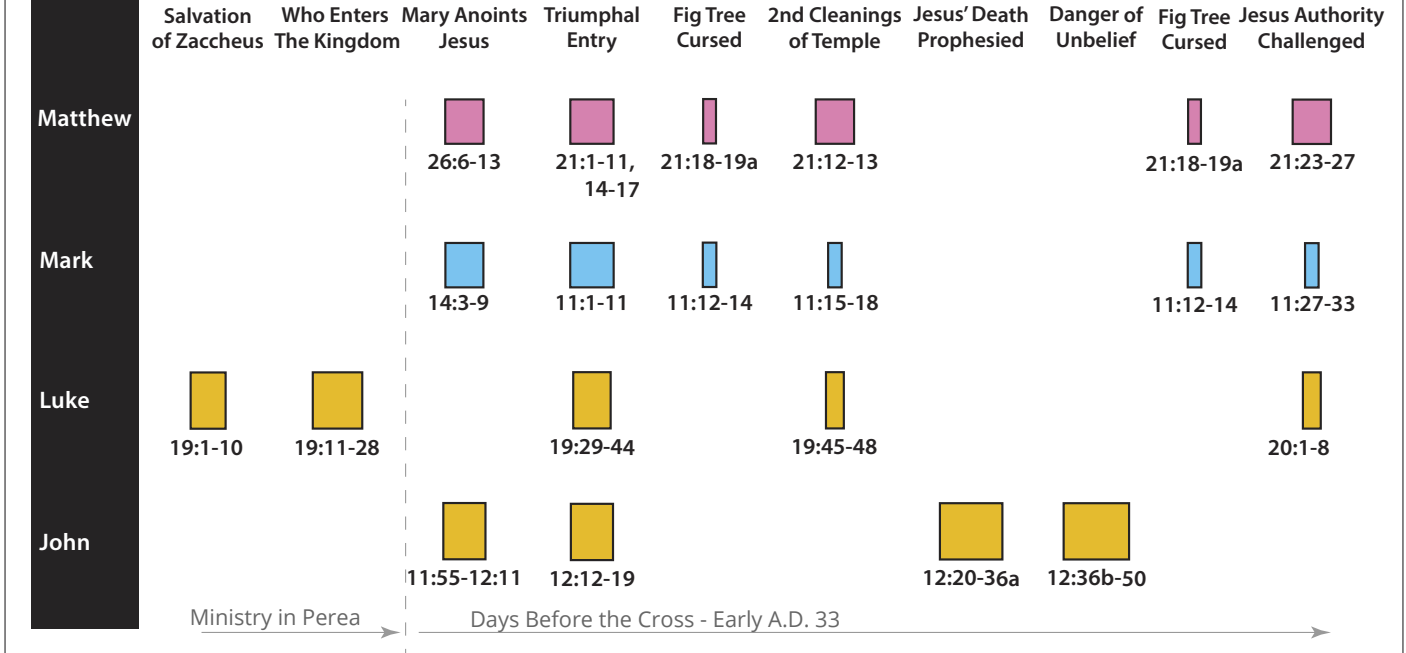


1. Alfred Edersheim. Sketches of Jewish Life. Eerdmans Publishing. 1972. p. 56.

2. William Barclay. The Gospel of Luke. The New Daily Study Bible. Westminster John Knox Press. 2001. p. 277.

# Life and Heart of Jesus

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treasure! Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabbath. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. James 5:1-5 (NASB)

This passage applies to every employer who abuses their employees in our day. God is watching and demands justice everywhere, even in the workplace. Zaccheus was a sinner and needed a Savior. This gives us the first principle in our study. Everyone is a sinner, just as Zaccheus was.

**Drawing of Zaccheus (v 3-4).** The next two verses tell us that Zaccheus wanted to see Jesus, but we are not told how he heard about Jesus. It is possible that one of his employees told him that Jesus was approaching. Maybe Zaccheus had told his employees that he wanted to see Jesus. Whatever the answer, Zaccheus had learned that Jesus was approaching. Verse 3 says,

Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. Luke 19:3 (NASB)

The Greek word for trying is *zeteo*, and it actually means “seeking.” It is in the imperfect tense which means he was repeatedly attempting to see Jesus. We are told why he was repeatedly attempting Jesus. He was short and could not see above or over the heads of the other people. So, he had an idea. Verse 4 tells us how he solved his problem.

So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. Luke 19:4 (NASB)

Zaccheus’ solution was to climb up into a sycamore tree, which in appearance is similar to a fig tree. The sycamore leaves, however, were like those of a mulberry tree. A mature sycamore tree was a large tree with low, very thick branches. The tree would have been easy for him to climb. The Greek implies that he was high up in the tree.

Now we are *not* told why he wanted to see Jesus. But it is obvious that he did. He could have been curious about Jesus' appearance from the news about Jesus that had spread throughout the region. Maybe he had heard about Him from someone in the crowd. Jesus was famous at this point in His ministry. Many people today are curious about Jesus too, when they know very little about Him. In that way they are like Zaccheus. Zaccheus was taking his first step toward believing in Christ.

Whatever Zaccheus' reason was for seeking Jesus, it will soon become clear that God the Holy Spirit was drawing him to faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is always the One who must draw every person to Christ because unbelievers do not seek Jesus on their own. Romans 3:11-12 sends us the bad news that no one seeks God, including Zaccheus. It says,

**THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;  
ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE,  
TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.  
Romans 3:11-12 (NASB)**

Here we learn that no one seeks for God. The reason is that no one does good, not even one! We are unable to seek God by ourselves.

1 Corinthians 2:12-14 reveals that unbelievers cannot understand spiritual truth without the help of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must draw individuals to Christ. Jesus, clearly teaches this truth in



John 6:44,

**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him . . . John 6:44 (NASB)**

Earlier, Jesus said,

**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me . . . John 6:37 (NASB)**

So, in verses 3-4 we can see the result of the Holy Spirit drawing Zaccheus to Jesus. From Zaccheus' perspective, he wanted to see Jesus. It felt like something he wanted to do, but it was the Holy Spirit who moved him in some way to have that desire. Now Zaccheus is responding. He wants to see Jesus!

**Effectual Call of Zaccheus (v 5-7).** Zaccheus had climbed into the sycamore tree and was waiting. Verse 5 tells us what happened next.

**When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." Luke 19:5 (NASB)**

Have you ever asked yourself why Jesus told Zaccheus to hurry and come down from the tree, and not someone else?

Why did Jesus tell him, "Today, I must stay at your house," and not someone else? Notice that Jesus said, "I must." The Greek word for "must" is *dei*. It refers to divine necessity. When Jesus said, "I must stay at your house," it

is obvious to us that Jesus wanted to talk specifically to him about spiritual issues. The Holy Spirit drew Zaccheus to Jesus. Zaccheus is like a fish. The hook is set in his mouth, and now Jesus is going to reel him in.

Verses 6 tells us that Zaccheus quickly obeyed.

**And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. Luke 19:6 (NASB)**

The only reason he hurried down was that he desperately wanted to spend time with Jesus. Otherwise, he would have climbed down slowly. What motivated Zaccheus? Was he feeling guilty about his many sins and his abusive behavior toward people? We do not know the answer, but it is obvious that Jesus had a mission, and Zaccheus was eager to spend time with Jesus.

Verse 7 is a very important verse. It is not out of place, nor is it unimportant. It reveals that the crowd did not like Zaccheus. They called him a sinner. It reveals that Zaccheus must have severely mistreated them. They hated him because they considered him to be a traitor for collecting their abusive taxes for Rome, the occupying enemy of Israel. His greed for money motivated him to betray his own people. The verse says,

**When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” Luke 19:7 (NASB)**

Here we are told the crowd rebuked Christ for meeting with this man. They could not believe that Jesus would spend any time with a sinful man like Zaccheus. It is possible that both Jesus and Zaccheus heard the crowd complaining.

So, Zaccheus eagerly wanted time with Jesus, and the crowd does not understand that God the Father is drawing this man to Jesus Christ. I imagine that Zaccheus did not care about the crowd because He was so eager to see Jesus.

May I ask, “How did you feel just before you became a Christian?” Were you eager to be forgiven by God because you were feeling guilty because of wicked things you had done? Maybe you were afraid that you were going to hell.

So, you were eager to talk with God and ask Him to forgive you. I know that I was afraid I was going to hell. I remember crying and pleading for God to forgive me. I was willing to do anything to have my sins forgiven so that I could escape hell and go to heaven. I wonder if that was how Zaccheus felt. I wonder if Jesus had been teaching the crowd about salvation and Zaccheus had heard it.

Zaccheus did not realize it, but he was going to become a believer in Jesus Christ. He did not know that Jesus had come before the foundation of the world to be saved. Ephesians 1:3-5 tells us that God the Father chooses people to become believers. Our salvation was His decision.

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will . . . Ephesians 1:3-5 (NASB)**

The passage says that in love God the Father predestines people to be saved. He also planned to make believers holy and blameless in Christ. So, He adopted those whom He chose to become part of His family. Little did Zaccheus realize it, but his name was written in the Book of Life.

In the “white spaces” between verses 7 and 8, the two men talked in the privacy of Zaccheus’ home. We do not know what they talked about, but verse 8 will make it clear that Zaccheus was saved in that time. This evil and oppressive man during that visit accepted Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

### **Evidences of Zaccheus’ Saving Faith (v 8).**

Verse 8 gives us the evidence that Zaccheus believed in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. It reveals his life was transformed.

**Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back**

four times as much.” Luke 19:8 (NASB)

We are told that Zaccheus wanted to give up half of everything that he owned. This statement alone reveals something significant had happened to this man. Who would willingly give up half of all they own? If he were living in our world today, that would be like giving away half of his bank account, financial portfolio, if he had one, and half of the property he had acquired.

Jesus has told us that we cannot love both money and God. Matthew 6:24,

**No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Matthew 6:24 (NASB)**

That is one reason why Jesus told the rich, young ruler that it is hard for the wealthy to be saved (Matthew 19:23-25; Mark 10:23-27; Luke 18:24). Zaccheus and the rich, young ruler teach us that it is not impossible for the wealthy to be saved, it is just very hard. They tend to believe that they do not need God and consequently do not understand their need for the Savior. When Jesus said,

**For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Luke 18:25 (NASB)**

He did not mean it was impossible. Remember His following words,

**The things that are impossible with people are possible with God. Luke 18:27 (NASB)**

That is, God can save any wealthy person. Here we see the evidence of saving faith. God the Father had chosen and called Zaccheus. Jesus said that He must stay at his house. It was part of God’s plan to save him. God gave him the faith to believe (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Peter 1:1). At the same time, Zaccheus felt the emotion and desire to see Jesus. He was

being drawn to Christ. He believed in Jesus and was emotionally moved to give up his half of his possessions.

Notice the two things he did. First, he promised to give half of his possessions to the poor. The Greek word for “poor” means beggars, such as Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. This reveals the genuineness of his conversion. Why give anything to people who live on the street? He could have given the money to a synagogue and earned himself some respect. Instead his heart was moved to provide for beggars.

Second, he promised that if he had “defrauded” anyone of anything, he would give back four times as much. The Greek word “defrauded” refers to creating false charges against someone in order to gain money. He had been dishonest and greedy.

**Salvation of Zaccheus’ Certain (v 9).** Verse 9 reveals that Zaccheus was really saved. Why? Because Jesus said so!

**And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.” Luke 19:9 (NASB)**

The man believed that Jesus was His Savior and Lord. Jesus also said that the reason he was saved was because he was a son of Abraham. Yes, Zaccheus was a Jew, but Jesus’ message is that he was finally a real or completed Jew because he believed in Jesus. I used to work for the American Board of Missions to the Jews. I soon learned that the Jews who believed in Jesus called themselves “completed Jews.” They are Jews by race then by the Holy Spirit. Zaccheus was a Jew indeed.

Romans 2:28-29 helps us understand Jesus’ statement. It says,

**For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. Romans 2:28-29 (NASB)**

Romans 4:9-12 also reveals that Abraham was made righteous

because of faith. As a result, he is the spiritual father of everyone who believes in Christ.

... For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. Romans 4:9-12 (NASB)

That means a real or completed Jew is one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

**Mission of Jesus (v 10).** Then Jesus added,

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke 19:10 (NASB)

This event gives glory to our God. First, the salvation of Zaccheus gives God glory because it reveals that Jesus was fulfilling His mission. Jesus' mission was to seek and save the lost. We do not know how many people were saved during His ministry while He lived here on earth, but Zaccheus was the last one before Jesus was crucified on the cross.

Second, this event gives God glory because it reveals the power of God. God can save anyone. He effectually calls men and women to Christ (John 6:37, 44, 65). The salvation of Zaccheus reveals that while it is difficult for the wealthy to be saved, it is not impossible for God to save anyone. Salvation is an act of God. Jesus came looking for Zaccheus. That is why He said, "for today I must stay at your house." Jesus came looking for and seeking for Zaccheus. Jesus came to Jericho to find him. Jesus walked down that road so that Zaccheus would hear about Him and seek Him too! Jesus found him in the sycamore tree and told him that He was going to his

house. Then Jesus spoke to this dear man about His need to be forgiven. Why do we know that? In John 8:24, Jesus said that unless we believe He is God, we will die in our sins. In Luke 24:46-47, He told the disciples to preach about His death and resurrection so that people would believe and have forgiveness of sins. Jesus came to save the lost.

Third, this event also gives God glory because it reveals that if a man or woman wants to believe in Jesus, they can. Yet it always occurs according to His will.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12-13 (NASB)

Romans 10:9-13 says it well,

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; or "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." Romans 10:9-13 (NASB)

Fourth, salvation gives glory to God because we do not know exactly how it works. Men are urged to believe and it is not possible for men to save themselves. Only God can do that. This is a wonderful insight into God Himself.

In conclusion, do you need your sins to be forgiven? If so, call on Him. He has promised, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." Zaccheus found that to be true. Do you need your sins to be forgiven? Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. So, ask Him to save you!

