

Does God seek us...? Or do we seek Him...? Is it God Who chooses us and initiates a relationship...? Or is it US who choose Him...? ... .. Please stand-by... because our Bible text in Luke today will answer that for us. ... But first... I need to establish some context and do a little background review... since it has been several weeks from the last time we were studying Luke Gospel together.

We are in the “home-stretch” of Luke’s Gospel. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to be crucified. He has been very clear about His impending suffering and death... but His disciples are having NOTHING to do with it. They are not comprehending any of what Jesus is *plainly* telling them... and they won’t until AFTER Jesus died and has risen back to life.

In our last study of Luke... Jesus performed His ***last miracle***... before He entered Jerusalem for the last time. Next week we will study the ***last parable*** that Jesus told. (And) today we will be looking at... the THIRD part... of 3 narrative events that teach us about *how we are converted into followers of Christ*. We have already studied the first two... which came immediately before this (in Luke 18) – and we (now) get to the third... as we open the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke.

The connection between all three consecutive narratives (following one right after the other) is very strong. Closing out Luke 18... we read about a poor blind man who diligently sought Jesus. He cried out many times. When the crowd tried to silence Bartimaeus... he yelled *all the more* – and got even louder. He was DILIGENT in seeking the Lord.

Then Jesus heard the desperate... shrieking anguish of the penniless man (who was all too aware of his own need - both physically and spiritually.) ...

He asked the Messiah for the ability to see... and Jesus restored his physical sight and gave him **spiritual** sight for the first time.

That narrative (about poor and blind Bartimaeus)... and the narrative that we are covering today... BOTH happened as Jesus passed through Jericho... on His way to die in Jerusalem. Bartimaeus was a poor begger – and was saved. The person in today’s narrative was VERY rich – and he too was saved. Narrative #2 (involving Bartimaeus)... and today’s narrative (which is narrative #3) have a strong contrast.

But there is also a very strong connection with narrative **#1** – (which was about the rich young ruler ... and **started** this sequence of three narratives that teach about how we are converted into followers of Jesus.) ... When the rich young ruler was confronted with his sin of covetousness... he refused to repent or ask for deliverance. ... Because he loved his wealth more than he loved God... he gave tacit allegiance to the dominion of evil - rather than enter the kingdom of God. His love of wealth made salvation impossible for him.

That narrative concluded with Jesus telling His disciples that it is **impossible** for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. It would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

We now know that Jesus was telling them that it is impossible to be saved **by depending on your wealth.** Wealth does not save and does not indicate that salvation belongs to the person who has it. – Because TODAY (in narrative #3)... a very wealthy man **IS** saved (without wealth having anything to do with it.)

There are two big contrasts that we will see in this third narrative. A contrast with the first one (where a wealthy man trusted in his riches and did **not** receive salvation)... AND a contrast with the **second** narrative... (which had a poor man diligently pursue Jesus.) You see... in today's... it is **Jesus Who does the seeking.** ... Jesus seeks out and finds the one who was desperately lost.

Does God seek us...? Or do we seek Him...? Is it God Who chooses us and initiates a relationship...? Or is it US who choose Him...? The answer is "yes." ... It is both. ... It is not - either/or. ... It is both/and. ... While many people find such an answer distressing – passages like Luke chapters 18 and 19... are making me increasingly comfortable in accepting it. (I hope it will do the same for you.) ... We are actually going to see in Luke 19:1-10... BOTH (a man chose and diligently seek Christ) AND (Jesus diligently seek out a lost sinner.) ... This is one of the clearest passages for us to observe both the sovereign will of God and the free-will choice of man... working together... at the same time. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

I have just a little more setting-up of the passage... in hopes of a greater impact on us. So please bear with me.

I would like for you to imagine yourself going through life being bullied by other people... because you were the runt of your family... the runt in your neighborhood... and the runt in your school. ... Every single day... you had to deal with people who pushed you around... beat you up... called you names... and mercilessly made fun of you.

One of two ... key things... is going to happen to a person that faces this kind of situation. ... They will be overwhelmed... hurt... and go into deep

depression and defeat... trusting no one... - **OR** - ...they will become angry... bitter... and determined to succeed - so that they can get back at the world! ... They will thirst for power... in order to gain control of others and take revenge.

I believe the man we study today is one that had such a rough upbringing... because of his very short size. (He was a tiny man.) ... It makes sense to me that he was pushed around most of his life... and it made him bitter toward the world.

Why else would he turn his back on his own country and endure it's hatred for helping its Roman oppressors...? Why else would he isolate himself from friends and family and the whole Jewish society. He would not be able to worship at the Temple – but so what? He could smack his lips and savor the juicy vengeance on those who had given him such a hard time. ... Such childhood pain could cause anyone to lash back at those who inflicted hurt... and want to see those people suffer in return.

An opportunity came up where he could (not only) gain power... but also great wealth. But he would have to be ruthlessly **vicious** in order to rise to the position of CHIEF tax collector of the wealthiest district in Judea. (AGAIN – so what?) ... So that is exactly what he did. ... He made his profession pay. He did not conduct his business halfheartedly. ... If he went to collect taxes from a widow who could not pay... he (no doubt) would put her out of the house. ... If a father of young children could not pay whatever amount he would arbitrarily demand... he would separate the father from his family by putting him in prison... and his family would be out on the streets. ... He had robbed many people through excessive charges... and probably felt that these people deserved it! Everyone HAD to pay

whatever sum of money he said – or face the might of Roman soldiers who were stationed there.

This man got the power he wanted. He attained great wealth and got almost anything he wanted. He was on top of the mountain... but found... there was nothing in it that satisfied.... He got his vengeance... but was vehemently *hated*. He was *hollow* on the inside... and he was *not happy* at all. Vengeance NEVER satisfies! ... I am *certain* that he was feeling that there had to be something *more* to life than what he had already. ... Ah!... but our narrative today records how Zacchaeus' life was turned around by the Lord Jesus Christ... and how the Lord satisfied the longing in his heart.

I can't say for sure *that all I have surmised about what motivated Zacchaeus to become a chief tax collector* did (*indeed*) happen in this way – but it is *extremely likely*. He was very short and had been all his life. Tax collectors for Rome were very much despised. Their behavior was despicable. (“Hated” is not strong enough of a word.)

The chief tax collector had to be *the most despicable* of the despicable... in order to be over the entire tax farming operation of a district. ... There must have been a lot of scratching and clawing to get to the top of this most prestigious of all districts. It was the wealthiest... and every tax collector in this district had to pay **Zacchaeus** whatever Zacchaeus arbitrarily told them to... from what THEY unfairly amassed from their Jewish brethren.

This *could not have been* a nice guy. He would be *the LAST person on earth* that anyone would have expected Jesus to seek out... in order to save. But he was “ripe fruit” for Jesus.

Zacchaeus became a big man in a little body. Please note that this story occupies a very serious place in Luke's account of Jesus' life - because it is Jesus' last personal encounter before His arrival in Jerusalem... and the events leading to His death. (This is NOT just a Sunday School story that was made into a song many of us sang when we were little (ourselves.) Let's see how this man with a little body became a big man.

### **Luke 19:1**

As the story begins... we find the Lord passing through Jericho. Jericho was a very wealthy and a very important town. It was a winter resort for King Herod... and home to many wealthy people. Jericho's temperate climate made it an ideal retreat for royals... who built enormous palaces... and it was complete with swimming pools... gardens... bathhouses... a hippodrome... and a theater. (More than one author that I read compared Jericho to Las Vegas of our day.)

Jericho had a great palm forest... world-famous balsam groves... from which medicines were derived... and rose gardens whose scent perfumed the wind for miles. These rose gardens were known far and wide. Men called Jericho "The City of Roses or The City of Palms." The Romans carried its dates and balsam to world-wide trade and fame.

The city also sat on one of the busiest trade routes in the ancient world... with formalized connections to important coastal cities in northern Israel and to Egypt in the south. 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. ... Wherever you find vast amounts of wealth... traders needed to pass through... and large numbers of

politicians... you inevitably find an enormous funnel for taxes. (There was no better place to be – for a chief tax collector.) Let's meet him now...

### **Luke 19:2**

He enjoyed a lifestyle few could imagine. To say that Zaccheus was rich is an understatement. He was unbelievably rich.

Ironically - the name *Zaccheus* means “righteous one.” When he grew up... I think there was a lot of fun in Jericho when his young friends would call him by his name. Perhaps they would mockingly say, “*Hello, Pure One!*” ... And then... what a name for him... once he became a tax gatherer! He certainly had **not** lived up to his name (until now.) Because when he professed his faith... just before Jesus announced his salvation... Zaccheus confessed that he had been cheating folks. In a few minutes we will we examine his confession and resolve that he made to Christ... and see that it is evident that he gained some (if not all) of his wealth through dishonest ways.

### **Luke 19:3**

Zacchaeus basically had everything he wanted materially... but spiritually he was bankrupt. ... Luke tells us he “**sought**” to see Jesus. When you look at the Greek word for this word... you find more of a sense of urgency because of the tense and the meaning. ... First of all, it is in the imperfect tense (which means that he continually sought the Lord.) ... It was not a casual... one-time search. ... Secondly... the word comes from the Greek word **zeteo {dzay-teh'-o}** (which means “to strive after... to crave... to

demand something from someone.”) ... This man is in a desperate condition.

Zacchaeus' efforts to see the Lord were futile. There were so many people that blocked his view of Jesus. Imagine him trying to pry his way through the crowd... but he was blocked in every direction. Nobody would let him through. Remember - these people do not like him at all. Can you see him trying to hop up and down or trying to climb on something like a rock or cart to get a peek at Jesus? ... No matter what he tried to do... he could not break through the mob to see the Lord.

There is a lesson here. ... .. Many times the crowd of this world will hinder you from seeking Jesus. ... Some will get in your way. ... Others will intimidate you... embarrass... scoff... or mock your desire to know Christ or serve Him. ... They will question or scoff your attendance at church and your love for the Bible... saying that it is foolish or silly. ... They will scorn the hypocrisy of carnal Christians... too. ... Oh! May you be just like Zacchaeus! Go right on ahead and seek the Lord... anyway!

#### **Luke 19:4**

His desperation is demonstrated by his humiliating behavior. ... In the East... it is unusual for a man to run (especially a wealthy government official)... and yet Zaccheus ran down the street like a little boy following a parade. ... And he even climbed a tree! ... His undignified running... excitement... tree climbing and curiosity were certainly child-like characteristics. ... .. John Calvin wrote that such “*Curiosity and simplicity are a sort of preparation for faith.*”



**Luke 18:17 (ESV)**

*<sup>17</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”*

Both the running and climbing demonstrate passion in the pursuit of Christ. You need this passion if you are ever going to achieve in the spiritual area. If you wish the blessings of Christ... you must show some earnestness and zeal or you will never obtain them. ... (**LISTEN!**) ... If you would successfully pursue spiritual blessing... you may at times look strange and even ridiculous to the worldly crowd. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

This is probably as good a time as any for me to give two lessons from what we have encountered so far in this passage.

**First** - if you want to get close to the Lord and know Him... position yourself where you will find Him. Zacchaeus placed himself on the path where Jesus would pass. We need to do the same thing in a similar manner.... A good path to trod - is the path to church.

Folks! The fellowship of wonderful Christians and Bible preaching will do wonders for you if you will listen to it and apply it. ... It will increase your faith and help you to grow closer to the Lord. ... Another good path is the path that leads to personal Bible study and a prayer time with God.

**1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)**

*<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—*

**Secondly** - as Zacchaeus humbled himself by running and climbing a tree to get close to Jesus... we need to humble ourselves before the Lord and others. ... If we have the attitude: “*Lord, I need your help, your wisdom and*

*understanding. Forgive my failures and weaknesses. Teach me to do your will.” - That kind of attitude will draw us closer to Him.*

**Psalm 34:18 (ESV)**

*<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*

**James 4:6 (ESV)**

*<sup>6</sup> But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*

**James 4:8 (ESV)**

*<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

**Psalm 145:18 (ESV)**

*<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*

**Luke 19:5**

When we read this from the perspective our American politeness... Jesus seems like He is being quite rude... doesn't He...? He doesn't ask... or say: *“Zaccheaus... I would like to stay at your place tonight...”* Instead... Jesus TELLS him: *“I must stay at your house.”* ... To us it might sound rude and presumptuous... but everyone who was there would have understood this according to their 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish culture... They considered it a high honor to host a traveler (especially important people... and Zaccheaus saw Jesus as important.) Everyone on that parade route through Jericho would have LOVED to host Jesus – but wouldn't dare assume such an honor was theirs. Rather than being rude – Jesus gave tremendous honor to Zaccheaus.

(And) when Jesus said “I must stay with you...” Jesus was declaring that His encounter with Zaccheaus was a divine mission. His seeking Zaccheaus was a work of sovereign grace.

Zacchaeus thought he was seeking Jesus... but Jesus was seeking him! Just imagine how this little man felt as he looked down on the approaching crowd that was following Jesus. ... The fire of excitement had to be burning in his veins as the Lord walked closer and closer. ... I’m sure his heart was beating like Indian drummers pounding out a rain dance. ... (THEN)... when the Lord looked up at him – his heart must have been pounding out of his chest. ... It may have been fear. Certainly it would have startled him. He had been discovered. ... What will happen now?

Jesus eases any fear that he may have had by calling him by name. He knew Zacchaeus. ... By the way... He knows you (too.) ... Just as the Lord saw Zacchaeus... He sees every one of us - even in those dark and hidden places.

While Zaccheus took extraordinary initiative to understand more about Jesus... Zaccheaus was not the one who initiated the contact. Jesus did... calling him by name. ... Do you see it? This is sovereign grace... and this is man’s free-will... both at work at the same time. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Zaccheaus recognized that this was grace. So He scrambled down the tree “lick-ity-split!”

### Luke 19:6

Zacchaeus obeyed the Lord immediately and made “haste” in coming out of the tree. The word “**haste**” here is from the Greek word *speudo* {spyoo’-do} which not only means “to make haste... but to desire

earnestly.” ... He earnestly desired to be with the Lord and spend time with Him. ... Does this describe you?

Unfortunately... many professing believers could care less about spending time with God. ... They are apathetic when it comes to the matter of serving the Lord... learning about Him... going to church... praying or reading the Bible. ... They act like they are dragging a ball and chain. ... Zacchaeus did not waste any time goofing off. ... The result of his obedience was joy. Finally... probably after discovering that his life of vengeance left him still miserable.

Let me ask: “Are you a happy Christian?” ... If not, why not? Do you understand God’s grace toward you?

What grace we see here! ... Jesus called to fellowship with a horrible sinner! ... Zacchaeus was so UN-deserving! And Zacchaeus knew that he was. ... That is why he hurried and came down joyfully.

To put this into perspective... Jesus’ staying in the home of Zacchaeus was like accepting the hospitality of the child sex-trafficker Jeffrey Epstein and staying on his famed island. ... And it would look like (to those watching) a tacit endorsement of this horrible man’s behavior. Oh! This was scandalous... indeed! This why we are about to read that it shocked the citizens of Jericho. They were outraged. What kind of a messiah could this be who would actually invite Himself into the home of a *publican*? A *chief* publican no less?

**Luke 19:7**

The critics were not happy with Christ's actions. But **first...** this is so *predictable*. Whenever Christ moves into a heart... the enemy will be upset. No success in the Lord's work will please Satan.

**Second...** notice that it was *plentiful*. They "**all** murmured." The biggest majority in the earth is the crowd that is against Christ! The "*all*" crowd will be in the murmuring category when it comes to Christ.

**Third...** it was *perverted*. "*Saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.*" The critics (by their statement) perverted Jesus' mission by implying that by going to Zaccheus' house... Christ approved of Zaccheus' sin. But that was not the case. Christ went to Zaccheus' house to convert him. (But the critics will pervert every good work into some evil work.)

**Fourth...** it was *pitiless*. The critics had no pity for sinners. They did nothing to save them. Zaccheus could go to hell as far as they were concerned... and their attitude shows that it was one that wished he would go to hell.

Have you ever known people in the church to be this way? Some church have people who are like this. (Thankfully we do not have any here – right now.) ... They will oppose the church's ministry... if it might dirty the carpets... or damage tables or chairs. (I did face this in a previous ministry... when we had a marvelous opportunity to minister to migrant farm-workers.) ... When this happens people show how they are against the enlargement of the church's ministry to reach souls... on the basis of keeping things "nice" around the church. ... Sinners can go to hell as far as they are concerned. ... Oh! Lord... may we never devolve to this!

## Luke 19:8

“**IF** I have defrauded anyone...” is not exactly what it sounds like in our English language. This is what is called in the Greek... a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition. It does not mean... “I might have... or I might not have...” It is more like “Since I have defrauded others...” Zaccheaus is making a confession to Jesus.

But not only **that**... Zaccheaus used the Law (in Exodus 22) and exceeded the requirements for him to make restitution for his wrong.

He had cheated many people... and now he placed his entire fortune in jeopardy to make things right. In effect... he lived out the command that had earlier caused the rich ruler so much grief: “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (18:22). ... Zaccheaus (in contrast) **DID** do it. He was walking through the eye of a needle and living to tell about it.

The little man had become a big one! Acceptance by God had given the tax collector what he had vainly sought through the accumulation of wealth—wholeness and satisfaction. The compulsive drive to make money was gone. He no longer needed his wealth. Instead of the passion to get... he now had a passion to give. He went into his house the littlest man in Jericho. He left the biggest man in town. All because of Jesus.

Something had happened to this man! He admitted that he **had** been robbing the poor... and promised to give half of his goods to the poor and to restore fourfold to those whom he had falsely taxed. Something had happened inside Zacchaeus... and he was a new man.

If salvation has truly happened – the saved person will ALWAYS be changed. Nobody can invite Christ into his life and not be changed.

We know that these were not just words. (Anyone can say that they will do something – and then renege on their promise.) All we see (here) is his promise to do it. But we know this was sincere because of Jesus response.

### **Luke 19:9**

Zaccheus' statement did not save him... but it DOES reveal that he had been saved and changed within. ... Christ simply confirms the truth with this statement about Zaccheus' salvation. ... “This day is salvation come to this house,” Jesus declared. The willingness to give and to make abundant restitution to those he had wronged was evidence of a new heart and a saved soul. Jesus called him “*a son of Abraham*” (that is - a true believer.) ... Zaccheus was a Jew so was related to Abraham... but salvation has made him a true son of Abraham.

### **Luke 19:10**

The Lord explained (here) just why He had “gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.” ... It was because “the Son of man has come to seek and to save the lost.” ... **[ P A U S E ]** ... The next time Christ comes back to earth... it will not be to save but to conquer. Every prophecy points to the fact that Jesus' return is about to happen. ... Has He been seeking you...? Time is short!

Zacchaeus had trusted in the Lord and was promptly saved. This was the purpose of Christ. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. If you

do not know Him today... He wants to come into your heart. Why not trust in Him right now?

**Romans 10:9-10, 13 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. [...] <sup>13</sup> For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

What grace He offers to anyone who will call on Him today! We have seen today that the Gospel is even for the most despised outcast.