

The Friend of Sinners

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This is a communion Sunday for us. That's what you see there in front of you. I wanted to go to a passage, kind of a narrative passage, to remind us of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us as we see his saving mission played out in the life of one of the biblical characters on the pages of Scripture. Luke 19:1 through 10. Hopefully I can give you something that will put that children's song about Zaccheus being a wee little man out of your mind and give you something of a little bit more substance, we hope, that would give you a deeper appreciation for this one who is the great friend of sinners. We're all born into sin; we inherited guilt from Adam; we participated in guilt with our own sin; we needed redemption and there was no one in the universe that could save us. There were no works of our hands that could redeem us. There were no tears that we could cry of repentance. There were no deeds that we could do. There were no rituals that we could go through. There was no religion that could save us. We were miserably and hopelessly lost except for one man, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is alone the friend of sinners.

What we see in this passage that I read earlier was a display of the glory of the Gospel, and on this communion Sunday, I want to draw your mind to think about our Lord Jesus Christ as the friend of sinners. I realize that as we go through our Christian lives, as we struggle with sin and get caught up in the things of the world, it's easy to lose sight of this. Sometimes we think that God, because life is sometimes difficult, we wonder if God is arrayed against us; if he is somehow unhappy with us. Well, come back to the Lord Jesus Christ and realize as a true Christian you have a great, unspeakably wonderful friend who has intervened on your behalf, and let their never be any doubt in the Christian's mind that God is favorably disposed toward him because of what we will see here in Luke 19.

Look at chapter 19: verses 1 and 2, to just kind of set the setting again in our mind. Jesus is moving toward Jerusalem. The events are beginning to accelerate that would take him to the cross and to the cruel death of Calvary, and he was gladly, boldly, courageously moving forward in that direction. And as he was going in verses 1 and 2, we see that, "He entered Jericho and was passing through," that city on his way to Jerusalem and while he was passing through that city, verse 2, "there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich." Those little words about Zaccheus are of great importance for us to understand the fullness of what is going on in this passage; the

fact that he was a tax collector and the fact that he was rich in that culture tells us a lot about the man Zaccheus before he met Jesus. In the Empire of Rome, Roman officials sold the right to collect taxes to various men. They would pay a premium to Rome and then Rome would give them the authority to collect taxes in a local area, and the men who had that right were called publicans, and these men had to collect a set amount of taxes on behalf of the Roman government, and then anything that they collected over and above that, they were allowed to keep for themselves. So their authority was enforced by the Roman government and the system that was set up guaranteed abuse and tax collectors were notorious for their fraud and dishonesty. There was no one to appeal to beyond them; they had authority as they collected taxes, and if they abused their privilege, it simply worked out to their financial benefit.

Well, in the area of Palestine, these publicans would hire local Jews to do the actual collection. Jews, of course, did not want Roman domination over them; they wanted to be free to conduct their own affairs, but they were under the authority of Rome. So there was a built-in tension between Jews and the Roman government, and the Jews hated the tax collectors. They hated them. This is really important. They hated tax collectors because they were Jews who had, as it were, sold their souls to the Roman government and profited by collecting taxes from their fellow Jews. So they were not only serving the Roman government, which the Jews detested, but they were also profiting as they did so. So they were enriching themselves at the hands of their fellow Jews while serving the hated Roman government.

Zaccheus was a chief tax collector, that means that he probably supervised the foot workers on the street, and he had made himself rich in the process. So as Zaccheus walked through the streets of Jericho, he was a rich man and people who saw him realized that he had profited at their expense. His wealthy lifestyle had come at the exchange of their hard earned dollars. So for a Jew to be a tax collector was to be despised by those that were around; to be a chief, rich tax collector was even worse. They were viewed as among the worst of sinners by the local Jews. They were hated and detested. They were cheats who got rich at their own expense. Traitors to their own people.

Now, notice this and watch this: by the very nature of who Zaccheus was, he was a reject and a social outcast, even though he was a wealthy and powerful man. The people around him hated him because of his very position. But you know how the story goes. It is men like Zaccheus that show us why Jesus Christ is the friend of sinners, and we're going to see this in two main points here this morning. Why is Jesus the friend of sinners? Let's look at verse 10 and we'll structure our message around two points out of verse 10 and then we'll go back up and pick up the story where we left it off. He says, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Why is Jesus Christ the friend of sinners? First of all, he seeks sinners out. He seeks sinners. And secondly, why is he the friend of sinners? He saves them. He seeks sinners and he saves them. Those who are lost in sin, those who are doomed to eternal judgment, those who feel the weight of sin on their conscience and feel the guilt of their disobedience to God, have in Jesus Christ one who can relieve them; one who can save them, who has the power and the authority and

the desire to do so. So we're going to look at this passage around those two main points: why is Jesus the friend of sinners? He seeks sinners and he saves them. That's where we're going this morning.

So let's look at that first point: he seeks sinners. I'm going to give you three ways that the Lord Jesus Christ seeks sinners and it's going to surprise you, I believe, the greatness and the elevated, the high nature of his seeking out of sinners. First of all, this is a sub point if you're taking notes: he seeks sinners with a sovereign call. He seeks sinners with a sovereign call. What we mean by that is that he seeks sinners with divine authority. He seeks sinners with divine authority.

Look at verse 3, "Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature." Then in verse 4 we see, "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." Notice the urgency that is on the heart of Zaccheus to see the Lord Jesus Christ. This is really remarkable. Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, it says in verse 3, and it gives the idea of a repeated effort. He wasn't able to see Christ because he was too short to see over the people. You can kind of picture him up on his tip toes trying to get a shot between somebody's shoulders and he realizes that he wasn't going to be able to see him; a repeated effort was yielding no fruit in his effort to get a view by which he could see Jesus. The crowd was too big and Zaccheus was too small and so what did he do? He didn't turn and walk away. He didn't give up. Verse 4, it says that he ran on ahead. This is very uncouth in Jewish society for an adult man to be running. That just wasn't done. That wasn't appropriate. And beyond that, he acted like a schoolboy and climbed up into a tree in order to see Christ because he was about to pass through this way.

Now, we read through those two verses rather quickly if you're going through a Bible plan or something like that, and you read through it, but stop for a moment and think about what we're seeing here. We are seeing a man with great authority in his position as a chief tax collector, we're seeing a man who was wealthy, who therefore has no earthly need, and yet something is motivating him, something is pressing upon his heart to see this man named Jesus. What on earth is going on here? Why did he want to see Jesus so badly? Listen, we really need to think about this. We need to give some attention right here. Zaccheus could not have possibly needed physical healing, right? He had the physical ability to run. He had the strength to climb a tree and to position himself and maintain balance there. There was nothing about his physical condition that would have prompted him to see Christ. He was different from the blind man who would cry out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Or the man who was lowered on the pallet through the roof and Jesus said, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Zaccheus needed no physical healing. Jesus had nothing physical to offer him because he was a man in good health.

Secondly, Zaccheus could not possibly have wanted money from Jesus. Zaccheus wasn't after a health and wealth Gospel. Why would he? He was already rich. He had no need for financial resources and if he wanted more, he could have simply taxed more because he had the authority to do that. He didn't need Jesus to be his personal fundraiser and,

besides, Jesus had nothing, had no money to offer him. Jesus, you recall from the Gospels, didn't even have a place to lay his head. So why is this wealthy man with authority running and, in a sense, disgracing himself with his physical actions of climbing up in a tree to see this itinerant teacher, supposedly, going by? Jesus had nothing earthly to offer Zaccheus.

And what I want you to see, beloved, is that therefore there has to be a spiritual explanation for this urgency that Zaccheus was expressing with his heart. Maybe Zaccheus had been attracted by reports of Jesus' teaching and miracles. Maybe he had a guilty conscience that was troubling him. Whatever the case, there was something in his heart that was urging him toward the Lord Jesus Christ. And if that's the case, beloved, you need to understand that there is something much bigger going on than what we see simply by the outward actions of Zaccheus. Romans 3 says that there is no man who seeks after God. When you see a man who is seeking after God, you know that something else is going on in his heart. In John 6:44 Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." This urgency that was being expressed by Zaccheus' physical actions were a sign of what was going on in his heart. Zaccheus was gladly acting like a schoolboy. The consuming passion of his heart was, "I have to see this Jesus." But where did that compulsion come from? The compulsion came from the fact that God was already working on his heart. God was seeking Zaccheus originally. The impulse, the early motions, were coming from the God who was seeking Zaccheus to begin with. Our Lord Jesus Christ was in the process of seeking Zaccheus, planting in his heart a desire that was drawing him to Christ. Jesus was seeking him with a sovereign call that had no earthly explanation.

So Jesus was seeking him with a sovereign call, but do you know what? As we see this story unfold, Zaccheus wasn't the only one who had a divine compulsion on his heart. This is really, really wonderful, and this is so very rich what we are about to see. No, Zaccheus wasn't the only one that had a divine compulsion on his heart, an urgency, an irresistible force that was moving him toward this encounter, Jesus had that same compulsion on him. As we continue to read the passage, we see that Jesus seeks sinners not only with a sovereign call that he places on their hearts, Jesus seeks sinners, secondly, according to a sovereign plan. According to a sovereign plan, and I am so happy to be able to show this to you from the Scriptures.

Look at verse 5 with me. Jesus was seeking Zaccheus according to a sovereign plan. Look at verse 5, "When Jesus came to the place," meaning he came to the place where Zaccheus was, propped up in that sycamore tree. "Jesus came to the place and he looked up," into the tree, "and said to him, 'Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today,'" watch this, "'for today I must stay at your house.'" He knew Zaccheus' name and he calls him and he calls him down from the tree and says, "Zaccheus, hurry up and get down here because I must spend today with you." Why would Jesus speak that way? "I must stay at your house." Who is telling Jesus what to do? Who is telling the Lord what to do? Why is he saying, "I must." There is something almost external to Jesus that is on his mind as he says this. He says, "I must stay at your house." Well, that word "must" in the Gospel of Luke is very, very important and I'm going to set this context for you. Listen to me

carefully here so that you understand what's going on in this encounter between Jesus and Zaccheus. That word "must" is critical. Jesus repeatedly in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus repeatedly uses that word "must," translated in the English "must," he repeatedly uses that word to, watch this, express the will of God in salvation. Jesus repeatedly uses that word to express the will of God in salvation and I'm not just going to say that to you, I'm going to show you from the Scriptures so you can see it for yourself.

Go back to Luke 4:43. I'll give you a moment to turn there. Luke 4:43. Oh, this is so wonderful. We'll start in verse 42, Luke 4:42, "When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them." They were trying to put an external constraint on him so that he would stay where they were. They wanted him to be with them. But look at verse 43, "But He said to them, 'No, I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.'" There was a divine obligation on him. There was the divine plan of salvation that he was carrying out in what he said. He said, "I cannot stay here. I cannot possibly remain in this location. I must go out because it is the will of God for me to preach the Gospel to these other cities as well. I must move on," he says. There was a divine compulsion. This was the will of God on his life that he continue on to the other cities.

Look over at Luke 9:22. I hope you're writing these down so you can go back and look at them again. Luke 9, we'll start at verse 20. Luke 9:20. You remember the exchange, Peter, Jesus is asking the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" They go through some alternatives and Peter says in verse 20, "You are the Christ of God." Verse 21, "He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, saying," look at verse 22, "The Son of Man must," there it is, "He must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." Once again, he is expressing by that word "must," the will of God in salvation. It was the will of God before the foundation of time that Jesus Christ would go to the cross. He is the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. And so when he entered into human flesh, when he entered into this world, there was a divine compulsion on him, not only to preach the Gospel, Luke 4, but to go to the cross. It was inevitable. It had to be that way because it was the sovereign plan of God. The preaching was sovereignly planned. The cross was sovereignly planned, and his whole earthly life was moving in that direction. The cross was no accident. While it was unjust, it was not an unplanned injustice. This was exactly what God had appointed Christ to do. Jesus says, "I must. I'm divinely compelled to go to the cross."

Look at chapter 13, verse 33. The context here is that King Herod was threatening Jesus, wanted to kill him. Verse 32, Jesus said to those that were warning him about Herod, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal.'" He says, "This is all proceeding on a divine timetable. I'm not afraid of Herod. I will fulfill what I have been appointed to do." Now look at verse 33, look for the word "must" again, "Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem." He was headed toward the cross and he said, "I must. I must journey on today and tomorrow

and the next day." There is this compulsion that is moving him toward Jerusalem, moving him to the scene where he would be crucified. There is this weight, this pull, this compulsion in his heart that says, "I must. I must. I must. I must preach. I must be rejected. I must go to Jerusalem."

Then turn to the end of the Gospel of Luke. We'll skip over the story of Zaccheus for just a moment to round this out. Luke 24:44. This is after his resurrection, of course. He brings the whole authority, the whole prior 1,500 years of the Old Testament Scriptures to bear on what he is about to say here in verse 44. He said to his disciples, verse 44, after the resurrection, he said, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." The whole of the Old Testament must be fulfilled, he says. It had to be this way. This was the divine will in salvation that everything that was prophesied about Christ in the Old Testament would be fulfilled. Utter divine compulsion from beginning to end. You know, you can't help but wonder what that was like for the Son of God in his sinless perfection of mind to feel such a compulsion on his life. He had no alternative. This was the driving force that determined everything that he did. It was the divine will of salvation that he was fulfilling throughout his earthly life. The Gospel of Luke makes that extraordinarily clear.

With that background on the word "must" in mind, come to verse 5 of Luke 19. I'll give you a moment to turn back there. Luke 19:5. We said that Jesus seeks sinners with a sovereign call that he places on their heart, and Jesus is acting according to a sovereign divine plan. Look at verse 5 now with that background, "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.'" Divine compulsion on the Lord. There was a divine call going on in Zaccheus' life and there was a holy sovereign compulsion in the Lord Jesus Christ that made this meeting inevitable. It was necessary for this meeting with Jesus and Zaccheus to take place so that the divine plan of salvation in Zaccheus' life would be fulfilled and taken to completion.

Beloved, what I want you to see in this is that this was no chance encounter. This was not a random event that fate just happened to work out this way. This wasn't anything other than a divine appointment at that time, at that place, with that man, with that Savior, with that friend of sinners, so that the divine plan of salvation could be carried out. Stated differently, Jesus could have said it like this, "Zaccheus, we have a divine appointment that is part of the saving will of God. I have to keep it with you. This must happen. It can be no other way. There is no alternative." So Jesus was seeking him according to a sovereign plan.

Now, beloved, let's think through, let's step into the 21st century for a moment, step out of our story from the first century into the 21st century. Listen, our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ was part of a sovereign plan that was certain in its fulfillment. Jesus did not come simply to make salvation possible and then leave it up to us and then step back and watch whether it would happen or not. Do you want to know the truth? If Jesus had left salvation up to you in your unaided will, you would never have been saved. It took

something more powerful than your sinful heart to come to Christ. Jesus didn't come to make salvation possible, he came to achieve it. He came to execute the divine plan and make certain that it was accomplished. It had to be that way. It must. It's a divine compulsion rooted in the eternal counsel of the Triune God. Jesus says, "It must be this way." The only "must" that can come on God the Son, is something that God himself has determined to happen. Creatures don't put the Creator under obligation. You get that, right? So the obligation that's on the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ at this time was God's own carrying out of the compulsion of the divine plan of salvation.

What you see in this story of Zaccheus is the veil is pulled back and we get a little glimpse into the nature of the friendship of Jesus toward sinners; the friendship of Jesus toward you. It was a divine compulsion and, beloved, when we come to the communion table here in just a few moments, we're remembering a great salvation. We're remembering something that God planned that was God's desire that Jesus Christ executed for us and carried out and made certain would occur in our lives. We are the recipients, we are the beneficiaries of the great eternal counsel of God between the members of the Trinity saying, "We want salvation to occur for these people." And Jesus came to earth with that great plan in mind under divine compulsion, "It must happen. It must happen. It must happen." At every stage of his public ministry you see him echoing these words, "It must. It must. It must." And in Zaccheus we see an illustration of the fact, it's not just a macro event that they had in mind, but that it had individual application that was equally part of the saving plan of God. And if you're a Christian and you're rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ today, understand that your salvation, this is so great and so humbling and it's hard to even get our minds around it, but your salvation and mine was part of a divine "must." God intended this to happen. It must happen according to the will of God. He said, "I wanted you. I want you for mine and it must occur." So he placed a compulsion on your heart to bring you to Christ and you came in glad response just like Zaccheus did.

Look at verse 6. Now, Zaccheus obviously didn't know the fullness of all of what we just covered here today, he just knew that Jesus had called him. Look at verse 6, I love this, "he hurried and came down and received Him gladly." He hurried and came down and received him gladly. Look at it one more time: he hurried and came down and received him gladly. Do you know what Zaccheus was seeing there? Remember what he wanted, he just wanted to see Jesus from his own understanding. His goal was to see Jesus just pass by and be a brief witness to the passing greatness of this itinerant teacher. "If I can just see him." It kind of reminds me of the woman who had the hemorrhage for 12 years. "If I could just touch the fringe of his cloak, that would be enough." And what he got instead was something far greater, far more wonderful, than he had dared to hope. "If only I can climb a tree and see him," and now this one that he wants to see calls him by name and says, "I've got to stay at your house tonight." All of a sudden the realm of blessing is exploding on his mind and he's realizing, "This is far greater than anything I could imagine. All I can do is follow. I just know I'm really happy about this." Whenever I read this, I always kind of picture Zaccheus almost falling down out of the tree, he's so shocked and surprised and hangs by a branch and then drops down and hurries over to Jesus. "Yes Lord, come to my house. I want you here. I welcome you. I'm so very glad to

welcome you into my place." Jesus utterly thrilled Zaccheus with those words. "Jesus, you'll spend time with me? You'll come to my house? You, the great one, would be with me? Let's go. Let's be together. Whatever you want for me, Lord, I want to hear." This was a sovereign plan that was now being executed in real time. It was being carried out and Zaccheus was the beneficiary.

Beloved, if you have any sense of the greatness of salvation, the greatness of Christ, the greatness of the cross, the greatness of his shed blood, the greatness of the work of the Spirit, the greatness of the word of God, it should shrink you and humble you in your pride and cause bursting gratitude to come out of your innermost being to realize that God has bestowed this same gift of salvation on you. The Lord Jesus Christ, if you're a Christian, has come to you in no less a great way than he came to Zaccheus that day. He came to the unworthy home of your heart and said, "I want to abide there." This great, great, great, great Christ has condescended to save you and redeem you. We've got to be glad and happy just like Zaccheus was. We have to be so overwhelmed by the greatness of this salvation that we can only hurry into his presence and receive him gladly and here at communion to remember him gladly. "Lord, you did this for me under a divine compulsion and now I benefit from it. Lord, I'm so very grateful and so very happy. You sought me." Wow.

Now, thirdly, we've said that Jesus seeks sinners with a sovereign call according to a sovereign plan, watch this in verse 7, he also seeks sinners with sovereign independence. Sovereign independence. The crowd did not like what Jesus was doing. Remember what we said at the start? They hated Zaccheus. They resented him. They hated everything that he stood for, and the crowd did not approve of this at all. They thought Jesus should stay separate from Zaccheus and let that chief tax collector rot in his sins. Verse 7, the contrast of verse 7 with everything that has gone before should stun you in its ugliness, because in verse 7, "When they saw it," the crowd around, in other words, "When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, 'He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'" He calls himself a great holy teacher but he's going to be with a man who is a sinner. What does he think he's doing? We disapprove.

Can you imagine the haughtiness of an attitude like that? To look at the Son of God showing mercy on an individual sinner and someone, a man, standing up and saying, "No, stop! This is not right!" Are you kidding me? Really, really, you're kidding, right? This shows you the ugliness of the sin of man in its whole wretched rottenness. These proud sinners who were watching this happen, would interfere with the divine "must" of Jesus Christ; they would insert themselves and say, "No, the divine plan can't go there. This man is a sinner," totally missing the fact that they were equally lost, on the one hand, and totally missing how utterly inappropriate, to put it mildly, it is for a sinner to accuse God of unrighteousness. You are saying, "This isn't righteous. This is wrong. He's going to be with a sinner."

Well, do you know what? God is sovereign in his independence. He saves whom he wishes to save. God does not submit his mercy to a council of human beings for approval before he decides whom he is going to save. He has mercy on whom he desires. That's his

prerogative. Salvation belongs to the Lord. He can give it to whom he wishes, and you ought to be, listen, you had better be glad he does if he gave it to you, because you had no more claim on it than that rotten tax collector from 2,000 years ago. There was nothing about your life that prompted God to save you. There was no goodness in you that prompted him to save you. None. Zero. And we have to humble ourselves under that and realize that we're no better than any other sinner that's around. Salvation is God's gift and he is free to dispense it according to his good pleasure and, beloved, mark it, unsaved men hate him for that. They would rather choose for themselves who would go into God's kingdom and then leave others out.

And if you think I'm saying too much there, let's take a look at 21st century Christianity, shall we? Let's look at the church today: the church in all of its politics; the church that makes liberal Democrats the enemy; the Christians who just continually speak about how they hate Islam and hate Muslims and, "Bomb the Muslims"; the so-called Christians that are known more for their anti-homosexual agenda rather than the fruit of the Spirit being lived out in the lives. This is an immediate, direct issue for the church of Christ today. Beloved, these people who have a different political agenda, have been enslaved by deviancy, have been born in and raised in false religion, are not our enemies that we self-righteously want to crush. They are sinners who need our Lord Jesus Christ just like you did, just like I did. If you're going to rebuke the Jews and Zaccheus for being self-righteous and who do they think they are that they would exclude him, look around you, look at what comes out of a lot of pulpits in a lot of places driven by a political agenda and, "We've got to stop this. And we've got to hate this. And we've got to, you know, stop everything else," and understand that that same spiritual self-righteousness and prejudice is at work in that as much as it was in the sinners who criticized Jesus for going to the house of Zaccheus.

It is not our place to say who is worthy of salvation and who is not. Don't turn our mission field into the enemy. We're not calling sinners to become conservative Republicans, we're calling them to the friend of sinners. We're calling them to salvation. We realize that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. We realize that we ourselves are recipients of mercy undeserved, free and high and amazing, as Phil sang earlier for us. I have received this amazing grace? I stand complete in Christ? I'm going to heaven but I would deny it to someone else from a different culture or who has been bound in sin or whose politics aren't to my liking? Please. What do we stand for as Christians, I ask you? What do we stand for? Do we stand for conservative politics? Listen, Christians are never going to be a political force. If they had all the reins of power, it wouldn't fix what's wrong with society.

No, no, we have to understand, beloved, you and I individually and as this fellowship takes root, we have to understand that our mission is spiritual; that we proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ who seeks and saves sinners. And wouldn't it be wonderful, wouldn't it be glorious if as we're doing that, someone in the chains of homosexual sin heard that and responded and came to Christ as a result? If the most virulent advocate of homosexuality came and said, "I feel the weight of my sin. Christ will receive me?" And we say, "Yeah, he's a friend of sinners. Come to Christ. I don't care about the politics. That will get

sorted out in time. Your soul is what's at stake. Come to Christ." Wouldn't that be wonderful? Wouldn't it be wonderful if one day this room had 75 converted Muslims in it who once had wanted to bomb but now were just loving Christ? Wouldn't that be wonderful? You've got to see what it is we're after and what it is that we do. It is precisely here that we have to examine ourselves. We graciously and unashamedly offer Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners, to them, and we overlook the other differences if only for the sake that our Lord would work in their lives and be gracious and save them just like he saved me and saved you.

That's the Gospel and the Gospels repeatedly show that Jesus Christ showed mercy to tax collectors and prostitutes over self-righteous men who thought they needed no repentance and condemned those sinners as being unworthy of a position in God's kingdom. The crowds complained but they didn't get a vote. Beloved, I want to say this to you and just make this really direct and personal: wouldn't it be wonderful if the leader of the free world came to Christ? Could you rejoice in that or are you too busy hating him and his policies to even let that thought take root in your heart? We have to examine ourselves. We have to ask it is what we love the most. We love the Gospel, we love the friend of sinners, and we want to see sinners come to him. And do you know what? When sinners come, they going to come out of backgrounds that are different than what we think. God saves them according to his sovereign independence.

There is a, I'm leaving the name out just so that you don't Google it and find it, there was a man many, many years ago who was executed for just the most heinous crimes against some young children and just utterly, utterly wretched and undoubtedly provoked the worst kind of grief in the families that were affected by that. He was hung. He had been interviewed and all of this, and he was hung. Before the trap door opened and gravity pulled him down to his earthly death, he gave this testimony. He said, "I had said that there was no hope for men like me. I had said that there was no way to change them. I was wrong. There is hope. There is peace. I found both in the Lord Jesus Christ." People look at that and, "No, I can't let the Gospel go there." Really? No, no, God saves sinners. Do you see? He saves sinners, the worst of them. That is the glory of the Gospel and we don't hold back the Gospel based on some kind of degree of sin that someone has committed. The worst of criminals, the hardest of men, we openly, freely say, "Jesus Christ is a friend of sinners, come to him." There is no prequalification. There is not a line of sin that you cross that suddenly excludes you. If that line had been crossed in Zaccheus' day, Zaccheus never would have come. We have to, you and I, we have to get with the mind of Christ on this and realize that the Gospel is for sinners and sometimes the sin is going to be really, really ugly, but that's up to the Lord to sort out. Jesus said, look at verse 10, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." This is why he came.

Now, second major point here. He seeks sinners and I'm glad he does because he sought me, secondly, he saves sinners. He saves sinners. Do you ever wonder what they discussed, what Zaccheus and Jesus talked about while they were at dinner? It's right there between verse 7 and 8, it's just that there's no print there to show us. Luke doesn't

tell us exactly what they discussed but it's not hard to guess because throughout the book of Luke, Jesus stressed repentance and the righteousness of the kingdom.

Look back at Luke 5. Don't try to follow along. I'm going to speed through this a little bit. Luke 5:32, Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." He said, "It's not those who are well who need a physician but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Well, if he's calling Zaccheus, he says, "We've got to meet today to discuss these things," what's he going to talk about? He's going to talk about repentance. Chapter 13, verse 3, Jesus said, "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Luke 15, Luke 24, also speak of this. Jesus Christ throughout the Gospel of Luke said, "I came to preach repentance." When he got together with Zaccheus in the fulfillment of the divine plan, he spoke to Zaccheus about repentance as well, and the dialogue that they had resulted in the conversion of Zaccheus. So when he saves sinners, he brings them to repentance.

Look at verse 8 of Luke 19, "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.'" Do you know what he's doing there? He's implementing one of the distinguishing marks of true repentance, a willingness to make restitution. He says, "Lord, if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I'll give them back four times as much as what I took from them." The Old Testament law required a 20% repayment. He goes way beyond that. He goes 20 times beyond that and says, "I'll give them four times as much." Not to earn salvation. He couldn't save himself. This was the overflow of a repentant heart that says, "Lord, I want to separate myself from everything earthly that I've benefited from in my sin. I'll separate myself from it all because I'm just so glad to have you." That's true repentance. He turned from sin so thoroughly that he wanted to separate himself from its earthly gain.

Beloved, as you think about your own repentance, do you hate your sin enough to make it right when you've harmed others? Oh, man, that's an arrow to the heart, isn't it? If you're conscious that you've wronged somebody, repentance means that you want to do what you can to make it right if you can. You see, repentance is real. It's not simply an outward motion that you go through walking down an aisle. It results in a genuine life change that totally reorients your thinking toward everything that went before. That's repentance. You're oriented toward righteousness so much that the fruit of wickedness you no longer want a part of. Zaccheus here renounced his fortune so that nothing would stand between him and Christ. Jesus had led him to repentance and, secondly, he also when he seeks sinners, he brings them to faith. He brings them to repentance and he brings them to faith.

Look at verse 9, in verse 9, and he says, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham." Well, that's kind of an awkward thing to our ears today maybe. What does that mean? He is affirming the reality of Zaccheus' salvation. He says, "He's become a son of Abraham. He is a son of Abraham." Now watch this, Jesus isn't saying that Zaccheus is a literal biological Jew here in this context. That wouldn't make any sense. He's affirming the reality of Zaccheus' faith. Galatians 3:7 says, "It is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." Galatians 3:7, it is those who are of faith

who are sons of Abraham. And so for Jesus to call of Zaccheus a man of faith, watch this, is to say that he has the same quality of faith that Abraham did and Abraham, God declared Abraham righteous on the basis of his faith, Genesis 15:6. Zaccheus was now a man of repentance and faith. He trusted this Christ who sought him out and at the end of the whole story, verse 10 you see is now the concluding summary of all of this, this divine plan, this divine compulsion, this divine call. The purpose with Zaccheus had been achieved. He was now a son of God through faith in Christ. So in verse 10 he says, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." For all those who are around, for all of those around, he's saying, "Look at this, this is what the purpose of my coming means. This is the goal that it is designed to attain, a sinful man, yes, has been forgiven. A fraud and a cheat has been declared righteous in the sight of God." Jesus said, "This is why I came. Out of the grace and mercy of the love and goodness of God, I came to rescue rebels. I came to save them."

Shortly after this encounter, our Lord Jesus went to the cross and died for Zaccheus' sins and the sins of everyone else who would ever believe him throughout the course of time. In his death and resurrection, he finished that work of which Zaccheus was the beneficiary. Beloved, the message is the same today. Come to Christ, sinners. Jesus Christ promises you eternal life if you'll repent and put your faith in him. Don't think you're too good for it. Watch this, don't think you're too good for it because you're not. Beloved, don't think you're too bad for it either. Look, in a room of this size, I know that there are a lot of wicked deeds kept secret that are represented here: babies have been aborted at some of your hands; you're not foreign to the deviant aspects of our culture, some of you, a few of you. God brought you here today to show you the goodness and the promise of Christ and he came to seek and to save the lost. Your sin does not place you beyond the saving arm of God. Come to Christ. Jesus is your friend. Jesus is the friend of sinners. Jesus saves, that's why he came. I invite you to come to the Christ who saved me from my own wretchedness.

Christian, let's remember that this is our message. Let's beware of getting caught up in secondary matters that aren't central to the Gospel. Let's call sinners to Christ and assure them, promise them based on the word of God, anyone who will listen, Jesus saves. Jesus saves. He will save you just like he saved me. It's a glorious theme that we remember as we come to the Lord's table this morning.

Bow with me in a word of prayer.

Father, today we remember at this table the friend of sinners. We remember that Jesus Christ has purchased us with his own blood. We thank you, our Father, that he sought us. We thank you that he saved us, and it's that theme which we remember as we celebrate communion together this morning.

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