

Message #91

Luke 19:1-10

One of the funniest pranks I have ever read was a prank pulled on a former NFL lineman for the Los Angeles Rams, named Deacon Jones. Deacon Jones was a 6'5 inch 300 pound black football player who was known for his ability to sack quarterbacks.

He was invited to a costume party that was supposed to feature several of his old teammates. He was told that the person who came in the funniest costume would win a considerable sum of money as a prize. Well someone suggested that he could win this thing if he were to wear a pink ballerina costume. His buddy, Bubba Smith, said he was going to wear a blue one. So Deacon Jones had a special pink ballerina costume made for him complete with trim and tights.

On the night of the party, his buddy picked him up and took him to the restaurant. He dropped him off in front of the restaurant and told him he was going to park the car. Deacon Jones got out of the car and in his pink ballerina outfit marched into the restaurant, looking for the party. When he got inside the restaurant he found many people eating and when they saw him, they started laughing, but there was no party.

As Deacon Jones saw all the people laughing, he went to the maître d' and asked where the banquet room was for the costume party and he was told there was no party there. He quickly ran out the front door to tell his friend only to discover his friend was gone and had driven away. He left Deacon Jones out in public wearing a pink ballerina costume. Well cameras had been carefully concealed to film this entire event and you can go on line and see pictures of it to this day.

It is considered to be one of the greatest practical jokes ever played on anyone. It is a good thing that Deacon Jones had a good sense of humor because when you see pictures of him wearing a pink ballerina suit, he looks totally out of place.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, unfortunately, He too, looked totally out of place. Everywhere He went, He was totally out of place. Christ's life was no joke and there was nothing funny about the way He was treated or viewed, but religious leaders viewed Him as someone to mock.

He was nearing the end of His life on earth and He was on His way to Jerusalem and He was on His way to the cross (19:31-32). Following Christ are His disciples and a multitude of other stragglers (18:31, 36). Many of these people had followed Him for nearly three years. You would naturally think that His style of ministry and His teaching of the word of God and His offer of forgiveness and grace would have been well-received. Unfortunately that was not the case.

When Christ took the time to minister to a "blind man" or "tax collector," He was totally out of step with everyone else (18:38-39; 19:5-7).

The people with whom Jesus Christ did His greatest work were considered by most to be a joke. People would mock and criticize as if they were wearing some pink Ballerina outfit. Never is that point more vivid than when you come to this text and this story of Zaccheus. What we see is this:

JESUS CHRIST CAME TO SAVE THE LOST REGARDLESS OF THEIR STATUS OR SIN, AND THOSE WITH WHOM HE SAVES AND HAS FELLOWSHIP WITH ARE TYPICALLY THOSE MOST WOULD CRITICIZE AND REJECT.

Religious hypocrites just have not figured out that Jesus Christ came to save sinners and have fellowship with the sinners He saves. They don't get it.

The people of Christ's day truly believed that He came to establish the Kingdom for Israel first (19:11). But according to Jesus Christ, He came to save sinners first (19:10). This is what most people do not understand. To get into God's Kingdom, you must be saved from your sins and there is only one Person who can do that and that one Person is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came to save people from hell and to rebuild and deliver them from their broken down messed up lives. He came to transform people. It did not matter to Him what side of the tracks they were from. He came to save sinners. When He does save a sinner, some people can't figure out why. They don't understand that God is in the business of saving, developing and using people from any situation or background. That is the story of Zaccheus.

To analyze and understand this text, there are six observations we want to make:

OBSERVATION #1 – Luke writes a very detailed description of Zaccheus. **19:1-4, 9**

Luke really researched information about Zaccheus. He was very detailed in his investigation. Since Luke is the only gospel writer who records this episode in such graphic detail, we must assume that Theophilus could truly relate in some way. We do know that Theophilus did hold a high ranked position (Luke 1:3). There are eight vivid descriptions Luke gives us:

Description #1 - Zaccheus lived in Jericho. **19:1**

Zaccheus lived in Jericho. Jericho was a beautiful city that was located 13-15 miles NE of Jerusalem. It was a major prosperous city at the time of Jesus Christ. Josephus called it the "fattest city in Palestine." It was a city known for its date palms and balsam groves. Many people were drawn to Jericho, which is one reason why Rome decided to make this a good place to collect taxes.

There is a sad history to Jericho. Jericho had once been a city given by God to Joshua and to the nation Israel. During Christ's day, Jericho was under the control of Rome. The sin of the nation Israel was the very reason why taxes could be collected by Rome because she was captive to Rome.

This is what sin always does; it is costly to the property of God. It lessens the value and takes it captive. This part of the Promised Land should have been the heart of Israel's land. Instead, it was dominated by Rome. Zaccheus lived in Jericho.

Description #2 - Zaccheus was a man named Zaccheus. **19:2a**

The word "man" is a gender word. This word (anhr) specifically refers to the fact that he is a male and not a female. The name Zaccheus is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Zakkai, which means clean or pure or innocent (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 244). In all reality, Zaccheus was anything but clean and innocent, but that was his name.

Description #3 - Zaccheus was a tax collector. **19:2b**

He was a chief tax collector. Other tax collectors reported to him. He was a key man in Jericho. This is the only place in the N.T. where this is used. This must have been a key place for Roman tax collecting and Zaccheus was in charge of all the collectors.

William Barclay said he was "at the top of his profession." A chief tax collector was the equivalent of a chief IRS agent. Typically a tax collector was a Jew who worked for Rome. They were despised and hated by the Pharisees (Luke 5:27, 30; 15:1-2; 18:9-11).

Tax collectors were considered to be thieves and traitors because they were Jews who took Jewish money and gave it to a Gentile power, Rome. Since Zaccheus was a "chief" of this, he was doubly hated.

God often does His greatest work with people the Pharisaical religious world hates. God often does His transforming work in the lives of people the religious hypocrites don't like.

Description #4 - Zaccheus was rich. **19:2c**

Zaccheus was a very wealthy man. He was extremely rich. But even though he had lots of money and business success, he still sensed a need concerning Jesus Christ. He apparently sensed something was lacking or missing.

A person may have a nice home and have a prestigious position and can have lots of money and fame and be absolutely miserable. Fact is, a true contentment and happiness is only found in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ, life, just like Solomon said, "is empty." Zaccheus had lots of money and power, but he sensed he needed a relationship with Christ.

Don't ever make the mistake of assuming that the rich and powerful people are happy and fulfilled. The fact is, Jesus Christ is the key to having an "abundant life" and without Him something will be missing.

Description #5 - Zaccheus had a desire to see Jesus. **19:3a**

By this time, Christ's reputation was worldwide. More than likely, one of the things Zaccheus had heard was that Jesus took the time with tax collectors. Matthew had been a tax collector and one of the things that he had probably heard was that Jesus was willing to associate with them, even though they were put on the same par level with drunkards, gluttons, and prostitutes (Matt. 9:11; 11:19).

The Pharisees had convinced most of Israel that tax collectors were worthless, irredeemable, deplorable people. They taught the people that they weren't worth anything in the sight of God.

Jesus reached out to tax collectors and Zaccheus wanted to see Him. It is our responsibility to communicate to sinners that Jesus Christ wants a relationship with them.

Description #6 - Zaccheus was physically short. **19:3b**

Don't you get tired of living in a world where people are so concerned about being so politically correct that they don't dare tell the truth about anyone? Zaccheus was "small in stature" which means he was short.

In fact, the Greek is even more descriptive because it reads he had a "micro-stature." Zaccheus was a very small man physically. It is the way God made him. God makes some people tall, some short, some white, some black, some brown, some red, some yellow, some thin, some stocky; get over it, that is reality.

Now most Jewish people are not real tall. According to historical researchers, the average height of a Jewish man at the time of Christ was 5'5." So when it is said that Zaccheus was "small in stature" he must have been quite a bit smaller than even the average Jewish man.

But here is the thing, Zaccheus was small in physical stature, but he was very strong in spirit and mind.

No matter what people thought or said, Zaccheus was a solid thinker. It is quite obvious that he was an achiever and accomplisher and no obstacle could stop him from doing what he set his mind to do.

Zaccheus had the ability to dream big and if he set his mind to doing something, he went after it.

Description #7 - Zaccheus was creative in solving problems. **19:4**

When you read this verse, it is obvious why Zaccheus made it to the top of his profession. He was a quick thinking, creative, divergent problems solver. He was able to see a situation or problem and quickly come up with a solution or plan to solve it.

Zaccheus was very short and the crowd surrounding Jesus was large, so he quickly came up with a plan to see Jesus. He ran ahead of the crowd and climbed up into the tree so he could see Christ.

The Sycamore tree resembles our oak tree, but it features lower limbs. It was a type of fig tree that was capable of growing to be 30-40 feet high. It had a relatively short trunk and its branches spread quickly. It was ideal for Zaccheus.

More than anything else, Zaccheus wanted to see Jesus Christ. He was a very prestigious, prosperous and powerful man, but he was not too proud to climb up a tree to see Jesus Christ. He was a man willing to sacrifice his reputation in order to see the Lord. Most rich people would consider this to be beneath them. It isn't classy to climb trees. But most rich people never are right with God (Luke 18:25).

We need to think more like Zaccheus in our own lives. The truth is, spiritually speaking, we are small in stature when compared to God and we need to climb our own Sycamore trees in order to get closer to Him.

- 1) We need to climb higher into the Scriptures for it is there we will see Him.
- 2) We need to climb higher into prayer for it is there we will hear from Him.
- 3) We need to climb higher into church for it is there we will learn about Him.
- 4) We need to climb higher into obedience for it is there others will see Him in us.
- 5) We need to climb higher into service for it is there Jesus will use us.

Description #8 - Zaccheus was Jewish. 19:19b

Zaccheus was a Jewish man. How tragic that the Jewish religious system had written him off. That shouldn't surprise us because it had written Jesus Christ off.

OBSERVATION #2 – Luke writes what Jesus Christ did to Zaccheus. 19:5

This is dramatic. Jesus came to the place where this tree was located and He looked up and He looked straight at Zaccheus, and in front of all of these people He said Zaccheus, hurry and get down from the tree because “I must stay at your house.” Actually, the Greek is even more emphatic because it stresses that at this point in time, “I am going to stay and remain at your house.”

Now how in the world did Jesus Christ know the name of a man up in a tree? We know Zaccheus had never met Jesus Christ, in fact, he had never seen Jesus Christ. The only explanation is that Jesus Christ is God and He knows everyone by name.

Now what is fascinating is that He says, “I must” stay at your house. Zaccheus was a “must” or a “necessity” at this point in the life of Jesus Christ, to the whole sovereign plan of God. This tax collector who was hated was a sovereign must in the work of God. Christ needed to stay in his house.

Now I don't know what your view is of sovereign election, but you cannot deny that here. Zaccheus did not ask for this; this was all by the sovereign grace and election of God. Jesus Christ specifically chooses Zaccheus and He specifically chooses to go and stay in his house and have fellowship with him and says this is a "must" in the program of God.

Now what was so necessary about this? The text does not say. We may assume that one of the things that this would do would be to show the reason why Jesus is going to Jerusalem. He is going to Jerusalem to die for sinners so He may have fellowship with sinners, even the worst of them. Zaccheus certainly illustrates that.

This would be the last house Jesus would stay in before He would go to Jerusalem. He chose to have intimate fellowship with Zaccheus and He said get down out of that tree.

If we are going to have fellowship with Jesus Christ, we must get down out of the trees:

- 1) Some are still up in a tree sinning and they need to get out of it.
- 2) Some are still up in a tree hanging on to the old branches of bad habits they should let go.
- 3) Some are still up in a tree hanging on to old religious thinking and they need to let go and transform their minds.

OBSERVATION #3 – Luke writes how Zaccheus responded to Jesus Christ. **19:6**

Zaccheus immediately came down out of the tree and he gladly received Jesus Christ. Carefully notice that when he responded to Jesus Christ, he finally had joy. He received Him gladly.

Perhaps for the first time in his whole life, he was happy. He had something that his money and his position could not buy. He had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and he was happy.

Joy and happiness are only found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

OBSERVATION #4 – Luke writes how the multitude responded to what Jesus Christ did concerning Zaccheus. **19:7**

When the people saw that Jesus Christ had reached out to this tax collector, they began to grumble. The Greek word means they were "muttering" among themselves.

They could not for the life of them figure out why Jesus Christ would have anything to do with a sinner like Zaccheus. Not only did He stop and talk with him, He went to his house.

The sad reality was, these religious people didn't even begin to understand the whole program of God was designed to save sinners (Luke 18:34, 39).

In many churches today, things have not changed. I have actually been in churches where God dramatically saves someone and starts using someone and people start grumbling about it. How can God use that person? Why would God do that?

I have personally seen God save homosexuals, prostitutes, strippers, drunks, drug addicts, alcoholics, those who have served time in jail and those who were given to ungodly things. I have also seen the Pharisees in the church who can't figure it out. They grumble and mumble and complain because they do not grasp the grace of God.

OBSERVATION #5 – Luke writes of the repentance of Zaccheus. **19:8**

There is no question that Zaccheus skimmed a few bucks off the taxes for himself. It was actually permitted by the Romans to do that, so it wasn't stealing from Rome. But what a tax collector would do would be add a little bit to the taxes and by doing that he would pad his own pocket.

When Zaccheus got into a right relationship with Jesus Christ, he wanted to make restitution. Jesus did not ask him to do this; he was led to do this.

He was willing to give half of his possessions to the poor and was willing to pay back four times as much as he had taken, which was the highest amount required by the O.T. law for those who had stolen something (Ex. 22:1, 4).

Again we point out that Jesus Christ never begged or asked him to do this. His heart was moved to do this. When a person is right with Jesus Christ, he has a heart's desire to be different and to right wrongs. You won't have to demand it or manipulate it. He was led to do this and immediately did it.

Many years ago, there was a man who came to faith in Jesus Christ, who had a lot of money. The man went to his pastor (whom I know) and asked him what was needed for the ministry. First, he said we need to have a place to worship. So the man said let's find the land and build the church. After the church was built, he said what else do we need. My pastor friend said well we could use some staff, he said you hire them and I'll foot the bill. Now this man invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in the work of the Lord and my pastor friend never asked him to do any of it. That was his heart. That was the heart of Zaccheus.

What a testimony. He gave half of what he had to the poor and then he paid back four times what he took from those he wronged. If you were actually there watching this, you would have to say, **Jesus Christ changed that man's life.**

By the way, we ask one more question. When was Zaccheus the wealthiest? When he had stockpiles of money and was stealing and hoarding, or when he was giving? He was the wealthiest when he gave his life to Jesus Christ. He is wealthy forever and is forever in the word of God.

OBSERVATION #6 – Luke writes the specific message Jesus Christ gave to Zaccheus.

19:9-10

Now these two verses are critical because they inform us that Zaccheus was saved that very day. The program of God was aimed at Israel and it was now time for this son of Abraham to be saved.

But carefully notice the conjunction “for.” This conjunction makes it clear that Zaccheus was not saved because he climbed a tree or gave away his money; he was saved because he was a lost sinner and Christ came to save lost sinners.

Zaccheus had been a terrible sinner but that is exactly why Jesus Christ came to this world to save terrible sinners.

That has always been the problem with most of Israel and most people. They won’t admit they are sinners who need to be saved.

But if you will believe in Jesus Christ, He will save you and have intimate fellowship with you, just like Zaccheus.