

Sermon Title: Jesus Pulled Up for Zacchaeus—and You.

Text: Luke 19:1-10

Speaker: Tim Wolfe

Luke 19

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Main Focus of the Text:

“Have you ever felt like you had to climb just to be seen?”

Jesus doesn’t just pass by—He pulls up, calls us by name, and invites us to the table of transformation.

Introduction

If you grew up in church, you probably remember the song: “*Zacchaeus was a wee little man...*” But this story is far more than a children’s tune. It’s a gospel-saturated moment that reveals the heart of God—a God who seeks and saves the lost.

When I think of Zacchaeus, I can’t help but think of Las Vegas. Pastor Chip Heitzig of Calvary Chapel once said, “If I think of Vegas, I think of how it started with the Mafia. And then I read Zacchaeus and I think, ‘You know, it kind of fits.’” Zacchaeus was like the ancient Mafia—wealthy, powerful, and feared. He ran a corrupt system under Roman approval, exploiting his own people. And yet, Jesus sought him out.

If you came to The Brook today - you climbed the tree, too. You expended time and effort to get a glimpse of Jesus. You should expect to see Him here. You should be actively looking for Him right now. You might see Him in this sermon – but you might not. It’s just as likely you see Him in the worship, in the fellowship, in the generosity of tithing, or through the prayers of the people around you. The important thing is that you climbed this tree – now look for Jesus – because when you look for Jesus, Jesus ALWAYS looks back.

LET’S PRAY:

1. God, we pray that each person who came to the Brook today will see King Jesus.
2. Jesus would let me know you see me and you know my name and want to be saved and care for me.
3. That you hear me Jesus.

The Hustler's Climb

Luke 19:1–4

“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.”

In a sermon on Luke 19, Dr. Ralph Douglas West paints a vivid portrait of Zacchaeus, “what if Zacchaeus’ journey from a greedy, ambitious child to a wealthy chief tax collector complicit in Rome’s exploitative system. Dr. West emphasizes that Zacchaeus wasn’t just any tax collector—he was the only one in the New Testament called *chief*, owning his own tax franchise. As Jesus passed through Jericho on His final journey to Jerusalem, Zacchaeus, driven by curiosity and perhaps conflicted motives, sought to see Him. Dr. West insightfully notes that *any motive is a good motive* if it brings you closer to Jesus, and warns that the “crowd”—whether people, pride, or distractions—can often block our view of Christ.

Zacchaeus is rich, powerful, and yet unseen—by people and by God, or so he thinks.

Kanye – “Jesus Walks” - “I wanna talk to God but I'm afraid 'cause we ain't spoke in so long So long, so long.” That’s Zacchaeus. He’s spiritually distant, but still curious. Still climbing. Still hoping. And Jesus meets him right there.

Application: People in our cities—Miami included—are grinding, climbing. Not trees, but careers, relationships, addictions, distractions. They’re trying to see something that will satisfy them. And Jesus is pursuing them.

From the Tree to the Table: When Grace Comes to Where you Stay.

Luke 19:5–6

*“When Jesus reached the **spot**, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must **stay** at your house today.’ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.”*

Jesus stops. He reached the spot!. And He calls Zacchaeus by name. Jesus wants to stay!

This is divine initiative. Jesus doesn’t wait for Zacchaeus to call out. He calls him. He invites Himself in. That’s grace.

And here’s the irony: the name “Zacchaeus” means *pure* or *innocent*. That’s not how anyone saw him. But Jesus wasn’t calling him based on who he was—He was calling him based on who he would become.

Zaccheus climbs a sycamore tree—something no dignified man would do—just to catch a glimpse of Jesus. He climbs a tree not just because he’s short, but because God put that tree there for Zaccheus to climb. - Vs. 5 - the spot

Theological Insight (Dr. John MacArthur): From Genesis 3:9 to Ezekiel 34:16 to Romans 3:11, Scripture shows us that God is the seeker. We don’t find Him—He finds us.

As Charles Spurgeon said, “Never was a man so taken with surprise before, but with the word there came a divine softness into the heart of the chief of the publicans.” That’s what grace does—it surprises us, softens us, and calls us by name.

The Pursuit of Happyness the Movie with Will Smith - There’s a scene in movie where Will Smith’s character is told, “You got the job.” And he just stands there—speechless, overwhelmed. That’s Zacchaeus. He didn’t earn it. He didn’t expect it. But Jesus found him. And it changed everything.

Unfollowed by the Crowd, Found by the Christ -The Resistance to Grace

Luke 19:7

“All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”

The crowd grumbles. Zacchaeus was a traitor, a thief, a disgrace. But Jesus wasn’t concerned with public opinion—He was concerned with personal redemption.

Juxtaposition (Pastor Chip Heitzig): Just one chapter earlier, the rich young ruler walked away from Jesus (Luke 18:18–25). But Zacchaeus runs toward Him. What’s impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27).

Bonhoeffer’s concept of “Cheap Grace” vs “Costly Grace.” (from his seminal work “The Cost Of Discipleship.”)

“cheap grace” as a superficial understanding of grace. Cheap grace is forgiveness given without an obligation for transformation or even change. It’s a teenager saying... “uh... sorry” after leaving the dishes in the sink for the millionth time.

“Costly grace,” on the other hand, is profound. It’s transformational. The grace offered by Christ compels you to be different - compels you to love differently, to act differently, to carry yourself differently, from that point on.

One of the interesting things about the grace given by Christ in these passages is that it is costly to both Jesus and Zacchaeus. Followers of Jesus grumble and some turn away –

That’s nothing compared to the fact that Zacchaeus’s entire life is transformed. He goes from tax collector to philanthropist - from someone who takes to someone who gives. From someone concerned with acquiring wealth to someone committed to using his wealth for the kingdom.

Dr. Ralph Douglas West says, “good won’t get you into heaven. Good might be good on earth but not in heaven. It won’t work. The key to heaven is GRACE”!!!

Receipts of Redemption: When Grace Hits Different

Luke 19:8

“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.’”

This is repentance. This is transformation. He doesn’t just feel convicted—he acts. Grace has changed his heart, and now it’s changing his hands.

Application: True salvation always bears fruit. What’s the evidence of grace in your life?

Christ’s radical generosity with His grace SHOULD compel us to be radically generous with our stuff.

Zacchaeus becomes radically generous -

He opens his house

He gives to the poor

He restores those who he’s wronged

This isn’t done just as a means to repent from his past sins. It’s because he has been transformed by Christ’s grace. Getting more stuff isn’t what’s important to him anymore.

Being with Jesus and Becoming like Jesus: is what’s important to him.

(“You can’t serve two masters...”) This is COSTLY GRACE. He’s using his stuff – giving it away - to serve the Kingdom.

Ruined but Redeemed: The Real Mission of Jesus

Luke 19:9–10

“Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.’”

This is the gospel in one sentence. Jesus didn’t come to improve lives—He came to rescue souls.

Greek Insight: The word “lost” is ἀπολωλός (apolōlos) from ἀπόλλυμι (apollymi)—meaning *ruined, destroyed, headed for destruction*. This isn’t about being misplaced—it’s about being under divine judgment.

Theological Insight (Dr. John MacArthur):

God seeks to save people from Himself—from His own wrath and holy judgment. Romans 3 and Ephesians 4 describe our condition: darkened, excluded, greedy, impure, and spiritually dead. Jesus came not to teach morality but to rescue doomed sinners.

Romans 3:10–12, 23:

“As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’ ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Ephesians 4:17–19:

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.”

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Ruined but Redeemed: The Real Mission of Jesus - Luke 19:9–10

Ephesians 2:1–5:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

These passages reinforce the truth that humanity’s greatest need is not moral reform but divine rescue from sin and judgment—a rescue only Christ can accomplish.

Matthew 1:21 (NIV): “You are to give him the name *Jesus*, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Martin Luther captured this truth when he wrote, “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...” Zacchaeus didn’t find Jesus—Jesus found Zacchaeus. That’s the gospel.

Do we think Zcchaeus knew he was lost? - Probably not.

He probably knew he wasn’t right. He probably craved something of more meaning? He’s probably there because he wants to know if Jesus is really the Messiah. But that’s all of us isn’t it???

Everyone in the room is under the divine judgement of ἀπολλός. Some of us understand that we’re wrong but Jesus has rescued us from the price of His judgement.

Others of us are wrong but are still trying out what we can do to avoid that judgement.

Still others remain blind to the fact that judgement is coming.

The thing that we all have in common, though, is that we are all sinners/lost. We’re all broken. We all need a savior to transform us and make us whole.

Conclusion: Grace Still Climbs Higher

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, once said, “There are three stages in the work of God: impossible, difficult, done.” Zacchaeus looked like an impossible case. But grace climbed a tree, and salvation came to his casa.

Zacchaeus climbed a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus.
But Jesus climbed a cross to bring salvation to Zacchaeus.
That’s the gospel.

From the garden in Genesis to the streets of Jericho, God has always been the One who seeks. He’s not passive. He’s not distant. He’s not waiting for us to figure it out. He moves toward the broken, the rejected, and the rebellious. He moves toward *us*.

Zacchaeus didn’t initiate this moment—Jesus did. He called him by name. He invited Himself in. And that invitation changed everything.

The crowd saw a thief. Jesus saw a son.
The people saw a problem. Jesus saw a purpose.
Zacchaeus didn’t earn grace. He just received it. And that grace didn’t leave him the same.

What looked impossible—God made possible.
What looked like a lost cause—God called “found.”
That’s what grace does. It climbs higher than our shame, our past, and our reputation. It reaches us where we are—and it brings salvation home.

So here’s the question:
Are you still climbing?
Still searching?
Still trying to see Jesus from a distance?

Because He’s not far off. He’s right here.
And He’s still calling people by name.

Is Jesus calling your name today?

Vs. 9 - Today salvation has come to this house

Are you ready to be changed?

Are you ready to allow your life to become one of radical generosity?

Are you ready to become a true disciple of Jesus?

Are we joining in God's work becoming like Jesus and seeking out the Lost to share the good news?

Sources Consulted and Sited:

- John MacArthur, Grace to You
- Chip Heitzig, Calvary Chapel Albuquerque
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- Charles Spurgeon, Expositions on Luke
- Martin Luther, Small Catechism and theological writings
- Hudson Taylor, missionary journals and biographies
- Kanye West – “Jesus Walks” lyrics
- Lecrae - Background Ft. Andy Mineo
- Movie - The Pursuit of Happyness - Will Smith
- Dr. Ralph George West - Pastor of the Church with out Walls