

Seeing the Lost Through Our Redeemer's Eyes

Luke 19:1–10

(Discussion Questions on page 9)

Have you ever judged someone at first glance—by their clothes, demeanor, or the way they carry themselves—only to realize later how completely wrong you were? I've been there, and I suspect you have too. It's a humbling reminder that our eyes don't always see the full picture. In contrast, the eyes of our Redeemer pierce straight to the heart and sees not only a person's current story, but who they can become by His grace. In a world quick to label and dismiss people, Jesus teaches us to look deeper, to see the lost not as hopeless cases but as souls ripe for redemption. As Jesus said in John 7:24, *"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."* John 7:24

Pastor Chuck Swindoll once shared a humbling story from his years of preaching. He noticed a man asleep in the pew next to his wife during a sermon. "This guy is checked out," he thinks, "probably wishing he was anywhere but here." He quietly judges him, assuming he was overcome with boredom. But later, the truth hits him like a thunderbolt: that man was battling terminal cancer, and his body was weighed down by medication that made his eyelids as heavy as lead. Yet, Swindoll learned from his wife that he loved his preaching, loved God's Word, and dragged himself to church to hear it. Swindoll stood humbly corrected. After telling that story, he challenged the congregation, "Don't judge a soul without knowing their story."

There's another similar story I came across recently on social media. An influential preacher, needing a quick haircut, walked into a Barber Shop and was met by a young woman he wasn't expecting. Her arms and neck were a canvas of tattoos, her face sparkled with countless piercings, and her hair? A loud fluorescent green color. He hesitated, while his heart whispered negatively, but he sat in her chair anyway. As she snipped away, she asked, "So, where do you work?" He mentioned his ministry, half-expecting her to shrug it off. Instead, her eyes lit up. "No way," she said. "I was just at your ministry's library yesterday, picking up a Bible. I've been feeling so lost, and I'm

desperately searching for some kind of hope.” That preacher’s jaw nearly hit the floor, as his assumptions unraveled faster than a bad haircut. Tears welled up in his eyes as he asked, “May I grab my Bible later and share a study with you?” She accepted his offer, and on her break, he shared Jesus with her, while her face glowed with excitement, and radiated with newfound hope.

These stories remind us how quick we are to judge by appearances, while never considering the person’s story—how they got where they are or the Lord’s heart for the lost. In Luke 19:1–10, Jesus meets Zacchaeus, a tax collector despised by all, perched high in a sycamore tree. As we will see, the crowd saw a sinner, a cheat, a lost cause. But Jesus saw something more—a man whose story was about to be rewritten by grace. What drew our Redeemer to Zacchaeus? Was it his effort to see Jesus, his weakness as a sinner, or his penitent heart? Jesus’ concluding words sums it up: “*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10).

Main Idea: Jesus came on a rescue mission to seek and save the lost, and He calls and equips His disciples to join Him by seeing people through His redemptive eyes.

Let’s walk through this story, to uncover three qualities that attracted Jesus to Zacchaeus—his **godly pursuit**, his **grace potential**, and his **genuine penitence**—and how we, as His disciples, can join His rescue mission.

1. Our Redeemer Was Drawn to Zacchaeus’ Godly Pursuit

First, our Redeemer was drawn to Zacchaeus’ **godly pursuit**. As Jesus continued His journey to Jerusalem, where He would be crucified—a path of suffering He had just foretold to His disciples (Luke 18:31–33)—Luke records: “*He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich*” (Luke 19:1–2).

It’s important that we stop and consider the description Luke gives of Zacchaeus. He provides not only his name, but also his position and

status. This is important because Zacchaeus provides a contrast with the rich young ruler in Luke 18, whose wealth blinded him not only to his need for mercy, but also the worth of Jesus (Luke 18:18–30). Moreover, his position as a tax collector meant that he would have been despised by his people. He was Jewish, as his name suggests, which made him a traitor to his people. Interestingly, his name in Hebrew Zakkay (Zechariah), means “pure” or “righteous”—which must have seemed like a cruel joke to those who knew his greedy ways of extorting his fellow Jews for Roman gain. Yet, in God’s economy, names often have a prophetic element, and I submit that Jesus saw beyond the irony of Zacchaeus’s name to a man who could be made pure through grace.

Now, listen to verses 3–4: *“And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.”* Zacchaeus was weak—short in stature, unable to see over the crowd, and spiritually trapped in greed as a tax collector. Yet his effort to climb a tree, despite his limitations and status, showed a heart reaching for Jesus.

Beloved, our Redeemer is attracted to weakness because His “power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9), and He honors even small steps toward Him (Matthew 7:7). Like the lost hairstylist seeking a Bible, Zacchaeus’ pursuit, born of weakness, caught Jesus’ eye. On His rescue mission, Jesus seeks those who need Him most, and meets their efforts with his rescuing grace.

Brothers and sisters, let me ask you: Are you noticing the **godly pursuit** in the people around you, even if it looks clumsy, weak or unexpected? Perhaps it’s a coworker asking hesitant questions about faith, or a neighbor showing up to church for the first time. Don’t dismiss their efforts because of their weaknesses or backgrounds. Like Zacchaeus, whose name whispered of a purity he hadn’t yet lived, they may be climbing their own “sycamore tree” to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

Remember, in last week's message about the blind man whose sight Jesus restored, we learned that when we respond to the light God gives, He grants more light. I submit to you that Zacchaeus pursued the Lord because Jesus first pursued him. Though rich, Zacchaeus began to feel empty, perhaps ashamed of his ill-gotten wealth. Like the blind man, he heard about Jesus—not only the claims of His messiahship or miracles but of His great mercy, calling even despised tax collectors like Matthew, one of the twelve, to a renewed life by following Him. That light not only drew Zacchaeus to Jesus but, like the blind man in Luke 18, sparked in him a holy resolve that would not be deterred, despite his stature and reputation.

Brothers and sisters, let me ask you: where do people today see the light that draws them to Jesus, despite their hang-ups? We've heard the challenge before, "Christian, you are the only Bible some people will ever read, before they ever pick up a physical Bible." Let us not unnecessarily be the reason that someone is turned off by Christianity. It's been said, "The best argument for Christianity is a Christian, and sometimes the best argument against Christianity is also a Christian." Let us, by God's grace, be the former. Let us pursue Jesus with the same holy resolve that Zacchaeus demonstrated, so that we come to know the love of Jesus and display that love to a lost world, drawing them to Jesus and pursuing them with the same grace that Jesus pursued us.

2. Our Redeemer Saw Zacchaeus' Grace Potential

Secondly, our Redeemer saw Zacchaeus' **grace potential**. Continuing in verses 5–7: "*And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner'"* (Luke 19:5–7).

As Jesus passes through Jericho, He looks up, calls Zacchaeus by name, and invites Himself to his home. It's important to note that this was a shocking act that flipped the script on social norms. In that culture, a revered teacher like Jesus would be hosted by someone

“honorable,” not a despised tax collector. Yet Jesus inverts the power dynamics through elevating Zacchaeus' dignity by choosing his home, which challenged the crowd's judgment with grace.

Rosaria Butterfield captures this beautifully: “Jesus didn’t run projects or programs; He ate with people. **The table is where ministry happens, where the lost find grace**” (*The Gospel Comes with a House Key*). By entering Zacchaeus' home, Jesus showed that grace meets people in their mess and transforms weakness into strength (2 Corinthians 12:9). The crowd, on the other hand, grumbled, seeing only a “sinful man” (v. 7), just like we, if we're honest with ourselves, misjudge others based on our assumptions.

But Jesus saw beyond Zacchaeus' reputation to his potential to live up to his name, which again means “righteous”—a name joyfully given to him by his parents, perhaps with dreams of a faithful life. Mom and Dad, your child may be far from the Lord, and breaking your heart in the process. But don't give up hope—don't stop praying; our Redeemer's grace is greater, and there are still unwritten chapters left in the redemption story.

Now notice Jesus' urgency: “*Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today*” (v.5). Why the rush? It wasn't because Jesus was impatient, but because He knows the danger of delayed obedience. When Jesus shines His light, when He's passing by, He opens doors of opportunity that we must seize immediately. After the parable of the sower, which describes various responses to the word, Matthew 13:12 warns, “*To the one who has, more will be given... but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*” Light refused increases darkness, as Adrian Rogers taught. Delayed obedience gives the enemy room to sow lies, doubts, fears, or justifications. But Zacchaeus obeyed instantly, hurrying down with joy (v. 6), showing a heart being open to change by Christ's rescuing love. Paul Tripp notes, “Grace doesn't just forgive; it changes you, giving you a new heart to love what He loves.” On His rescue mission, Jesus sees who the lost can become and calls them to act now.

Beloved, let me ask you: Have you ever extended rescuing grace to such a degree that it shocked people? Have you taken risks to love the unlikely, like Jesus did with Zacchaeus? Rosaria Butterfield challenges us: “Radically ordinary hospitality is using your Christian home in a way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God.” Jesus didn’t wait for Zacchaeus to clean up his act; He entered his home, his mess, and his life. Are you opening your home to those who need Jesus? Are you making time to build relationships with the lost—the coworker with a troubled past, the neighbor who seems “too far gone,” with the stranger searching for hope? Paul Tripp urges, “Grace means entering the mess of someone’s life with hope, not judgment, trusting God to work.”

Recently, I heard a well-known pastor ask: “How did the early church grow from 120 people to half of the Roman Empire in 300 years? The number one reason they grew was hospitality—just inviting people into their homes and showing love. But here’s the problem: Most Christians never win a lost friend to Christ because they don’t have any lost friends. They’re spending all their time with Christians and [maybe they should spend a little less time] and go home to have a barbecue in their backyard with the neighbor who doesn’t know Jesus.”

There’s truth here, but research shows many Christians do have non-Christian friends. However, close relationships and intentional evangelism are often limited. Lifeway Research (2024) found 71% of U.S. Protestant churchgoers have friends with different beliefs, yet researcher Thom Rainer (2014) noted 82% of unchurched people would attend church if invited, suggesting Christians aren’t reaching out. Hospitality builds relationships, but we must introduce people to Jesus. Zacchaeus was rescued through encountering Jesus, not hospitality alone.

Examine your heart today. Are you grumbling like the crowd by judging those who don’t fit the mold? Are you too busy to open your home, or too comfortable to take risks for the gospel? I’m not talking about hosting a perfect dinner party—hospitality isn’t about entertaining. As Butterfield says, “It’s about meeting people where they are, in their

mess, with the love of Jesus.” Invite that struggling friend for coffee, share a meal with a skeptic, or pray with someone hurting. Equip yourself with Scripture, like Romans 5:8, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” and trust God’s power to transform lives. Don’t delay when God’s light shines; obey now, talk to that neighbor, open your home, and see the potential our Redeemer sees, joining His mission to seek and save the lost.

3. Our Redeemer Celebrated Zacchaeus’ Genuine Penitence

Finally, our Redeemer celebrated Zacchaeus’ **genuine penitence**. Luke, in verses 8–10 brings the story to its triumphant close: “*And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.’*”

Notice that Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus led to genuine penitence—a heart change that was displayed through radical generosity and restitution. He stood humbly before the Lord and pledged half his wealth to the poor and fourfold repayment to anyone he had wronged. This repentance fulfilled the meaning of his name (“righteous”) and showed a transformed heart. And Jesus celebrated by declaring, “*Today salvation has come to this house,*” affirming Zacchaeus as a true son of Abraham, who was restored to God’s family (v. 9).

Moreover, Jesus concluded that this “grace transformation” was a dynamic example and fulfillment of His mission to “*seek and save the lost*” (v. 10). Let me clarify, Zacchaeus’ generosity and restitution didn’t save him; rather it proved that he truly was born again by faith and had become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It’s important to note here that while joining Jesus’ rescue mission requires taking risks, banking on grace to change people, and extending grace with patience; we must also look for evidence of true repentance and genuine conversion. People who know the saving grace of God become givers, not just takers. As Zacchaeus showed,

true faith produces generosity and restitution, not empty promises. While grace is freely given, and sacrifices are made in pursuing the lost, trust must be earned. When extending grace to a friend stuck in addiction, for example, look for signs of repentance like restitution, not just words—otherwise, you may do more harm than good by enabling sin rather than fostering transformation.

But more importantly, to be a part of Jesus' rescue mission we must take on His heart and see people through His eyes. To do so we must pursue intimacy with Jesus with the same holy resolve, urgency, and immediacy Zacchaeus displayed. Don't make excuses, waiting for life to slow down or circumstances to ease to find time for God and His mission. Delay will lead you further astray.

Despite Zac's obstacles, when Jesus drew him, Zacchaeus found a way—love always finds a way, just as Jesus' love reached you. Pray for the Spirit to fill you with His compassion and ignite in you a passionate pursuit of Jesus, enabling you to see and reach the lost.

Conclusion

Beloved, our Redeemer saw Zacchaeus' **godly pursuit**, climbing a tree despite his weakness; he saw his **grace potential**, entering his home to rewrite his story; and He saw his **genuine penitence**, living up to his name, "righteous," through radical generosity. Likewise, we're called to see the lost through Jesus' redemptive eyes to reach them with His love (Luke 19:10). As the apostle Paul prayed, "*having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you*" (Ephesians 1:17), let's seek God to light up our eyes to see the lost as He does.

If you've never trusted Jesus, don't resist His light—respond without delay, for light refused increases darkness. Receive Him by faith as Savior and Lord. He will save you by His grace through His death for your sin and resurrection so you can know His presence and power in this life and forever (1 Peter 3:18). If you're a believer, don't neglect Jesus' call to reach the lost. Jesus made time for Zacchaeus, and we

must too—opening our homes, taking risks to love, and acting without delay, lest darkness deepens (Matthew 13:12).

Who is your “Zacchaeus”? This week, pray for them, share a kind word, invite them to your table, or boldly share the gospel, trusting God’s transforming grace. Let’s be the eyes and heart of Jesus that sees, pursues, and celebrates the lost turning to Him, to the praise of His redeeming grace.

Discussion Questions

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Luke 19:1–10

1. **Godly Pursuit:** The sermon highlights Zacchaeus’ effort to climb a sycamore tree to see Jesus, despite his physical and social limitations. How can we recognize and encourage the “godly pursuit” of people in our lives who may be seeking Jesus in unexpected or clumsy ways? Share an example of someone you’ve seen take small steps toward faith and how you might support them.
2. **Grace Potential:** Jesus saw beyond Zacchaeus’ reputation as a tax collector and entered his home, showing grace that shocked the crowd. How can we practice “radically ordinary hospitality” (as Rosaria Butterfield describes) to build relationships with those who seem “unlikely” candidates for faith? What challenges or fears might hold us back from extending grace to such individuals?
3. **Genuine Penitence:** Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus led to radical generosity and restitution, proving his heart had changed. How can we discern genuine repentance in others while extending grace patiently? Discuss the balance between offering grace and looking for evidence of transformation in those we’re reaching out to.
4. **Personal Application:** The sermon challenges us to see the lost through Jesus’ redemptive eyes and act without delay. Who is

the “Zacchaeus” in your life right now—someone God might be calling you to reach with His love? Brainstorm one practical step you can take this week (e.g., praying for them, inviting them for coffee, sharing the gospel) to join Jesus’ mission to seek and save the lost.