

Luke 19:1-10 - Guide for Further Study

Have You Found Your Treasure?

Some Key Points

The famous story of Zacchaeus is found only in Luke's gospel. Though brief, it illustrates a number of themes that touch our lives today.

The name Zacchaeus is a short form of Zachariah, which means "righteous one". Zacchaeus was an Israelite, born into the family of God. He almost certainly studied the scriptures as a boy – he knew right from wrong. Yet for some reason he had become a chief tax collector for the Roman government. He was a player in a corrupt system – power was abused, poor people were overtaxed. Zacchaeus had become wealthy as a white-collar crook.

Climbing a sycamore tree to see Jesus may make for a lovely drawing in children's Sunday School class, but for an adult it was an act of desperation. Zacchaeus exposed himself because he was ready to repent. He wanted to see Jesus, but he was hoping Jesus would see him.

Jesus' reaction to Zacchaeus illustrates grace in action. Even before Zacchaeus speaks or repents, Jesus extends a gesture of friendship. To stay at someone's home in Jewish culture was an act of intimacy; in the Mediterranean world, you would only eat with people in your own social and religious class. This explains the grumbling of the crowds. How could Jesus lower his standards to draw near to a disgusting sinner like Zacchaeus?

Zacchaeus' public repentance is astonishing. He applies to himself the harshest Old Testament penalty for theft (repaying four times what was stolen – Exodus 22:1; 2 Samuel 12:6), then pledges half his money to the poor (there was no requirement for that!). Truly he found his spiritual identity, and began to live up to his full name. What was lost had been found by Jesus.

For discussion:

1. What do you find exciting in this passage? What is troubling or disturbing?
2. Share a time when you were shown grace, either by Jesus or by another person.
3. Jesus' gesture of intimacy to Zacchaeus drew a negative response from the crowd and disciples. Why do many Christians today find it easier to judge sinners than extend grace like Jesus did? What did Jesus see in Zacchaeus that we need to see in sinners?
4. What are some ways Bethany Chapel can become a more grace-filled church?

Moving forward:

Think of an area in your life where you need grace. Imagine Jesus reaching out to you with love. Write or say a prayer to Jesus in response to His love for you. Then pray for someone who needs your grace today and consider how you might reach out to them like Zacchaeus.