

July 26, 2026

“Zacchaeus, the Repentant Tax Collector”
Lesson 3

Luke 19:1-10

Intro

Jesus and His disciples are headed toward Jerusalem for Jesus’ final Passover. Jericho was their last stop before getting to Jerusalem. Luke groups three stories of people who encountered Jesus on this trip: a “certain ruler” (18:18-30), a blind beggar (18:35-43), and Zacchaeus (19:1-10). Each of them sought out Jesus. The first man was wealthy and privileged but went away unfulfilled. The blind man was insistent and persevering, and Jesus healed him because of his faith. Zacchaeus was a “chief tax collector” in Jericho. It was a position of authority and prominence, but came with hard feelings from the people. Tax collectors frequently overcharged to make a profit. They were despised and mistrusted, seen as people who collaborated with Rome.

Read Luke 19:1-10

1. vs. 1: Jesus has already healed the blind man, and is continuing his journey to Jerusalem
They are likely intending to pass through Jericho without stopping

2. vs. 2: Luke includes Zacchaeus’ name, unlike the story of the rich young ruler in chapter 18
The Greek form of his name means “innocent”, “pure”, or “clean”
Luke names his profession as a tax collector, and says he is wealthy
This wealth connects Zacchaeus with the rich young ruler’s story

3. vs. 3: Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus
The word translated as “wanted to” comes from the concept of “seeking”
However, Zacchaeus is short, and the crowd is thick; he can’t see Jesus at this point
If he wants to see Jesus, he has to find another way

4. vs. 4: As a man of wealth and status, he does two things that aren’t usually done
He runs, and he climbs a tree
He goes ahead of the crowd on the route Jesus is walking through town
He doesn’t use his status, having others do the running to get something
He is willing to look undignified to get to see Jesus
This shows his interest in Jesus is more than idle curiosity

The sycamore has a wide, short trunk and low branches
This would have made it easier for the short Zacchaeus to climb
Again, climbing is not something normally done by men, especially men of status

5. vs. 5: Jesus does three remarkable things here
First, he calls to Zacchaeus before Zacchaeus calls to Him
He calls Zacchaeus by name
Second, he tells Zacchaeus that He *must* stay at Zaccheus’ house *today*

Jesus invites Himself over, and says this stay *must* happen; a divine necessity
Third, Jesus honors Zacchaeus by coming to his house
Other dislike and mistrust Zacchaeus
Jesus is always willing to associate with those on the margins

6. vs. 6: Zacchaeus comes down “at once” and welcomes Jesus “gladly”
He doesn’t seem flustered or annoyed at suddenly having multiple houseguests
Instead, he seems joyful
Zacchaeus just wanted to see Jesus
Now he sees him face to face, and will be sharing a meal and time with Him

7. vs. 7: The crowd’s reaction here is not surprising
They mutter (grumble) that Jesus is going to eat with “a sinner”
This shows Zacchaeus holds no respect from others in the community
The crowd sees him as disloyal to both God and His people
It shocks them to think Jesus would associate with him
Jesus has done this very action many times in the gospels
Here again, He does the right thing, not the popular thing

8. vs. 8: Zacchaeus may have heard what the people said in vs. 7
He stands up here and makes a startling announcement
Standing shows that what is going to say is important
He is going to give up 50% of his possessions to the poor!
Also, he is going to make restitution for any acts of taking advantage of others
“If I have cheated anybody out of *anything*...”
He is willing to repent and make changes to do the right thing
He promises to pay back four times as much as was taken
This echoes the amount required by the Law of Moses for stealing livestock
(See Ex. 22:1)
He calls Jesus “Lord”, a respectful title
He is taking an attitude of humility and reverence towards Jesus
Zacchaeus here chooses righteousness over wealth (unlike the rich young ruler)

9. vs. 9: Jesus pronounces that “Today, salvation has come to this house.”
Zacchaeus doesn’t have to wait for the future to see God’s justice and mercy
He participates in both of these by the actions he is now doing
In this day, the “house” included all who lived and worked there
So if Zacchaeus had a bad reputation, so did all who lived there or worked for him
Zacchaeus’ repentance changes the household’s reputation and status as well

Jesus further says “This man, too, is a son of Abraham”
His bad actions as a tax collector likely made some think he was cut off from God
A “son of Abraham” means He is one of God’s people, who will inherit God’s kingdom
He is forgiven and restored, and his name of “clean” now regains its meaning

10. vs. 10: Jesus uses the term “Son of Man” here

It shows up many times in the Old Testament

It began by meaning a person who received authority from God to rule

This person would be served by all people, nations and languages

By Jesus’ time, the phrase carried the idea of judgment and deliverance

The person was now considered a servant of God and sometimes the Messiah

In using the title for Himself, Jesus pairs His humanity and divinity

Here He claims the authority to “seek and to save”

Jesus didn’t come to Zacchaeus’ house just for a meal; he came to seek and save him

This is the nature of Jesus’ ministry

Application: Jesus offered Zacchaeus and his household saving grace, but it must have been difficult for Zacchaeus to face each person he had harmed. It must have been difficult to return the money he likely thought was his rightful possession. After all, he hadn’t broken societal rules; he had worked within the system surrounding him. Yet, after welcoming Jesus into his life, Zacchaeus is called to something better than the culture he lives in. He is called to a new generosity and righteousness as a citizen of God’s kingdom.

As followers of Jesus, we too are called to repair, as best we can, the harm we have done to others. This might take the form of not treating someone with generosity, or failing to pay someone back, or taking credit for what another has done. On a larger scale, is there a system you have participated in which has caused harm to others? What is Jesus calling you to do to restore righteousness within your community?

Prayer: Father God, we come before You with contrite hearts. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves consistently. We acknowledge that we have failed to act with generosity in the work of reconciliation and restoration. Help us to live our faith in You with immediate boldness and resolve. When that is uncomfortable, empower us by Your love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.