

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

## THE RESCUE *begins*

### GOD AMONG US

#### *Jesus and Zacchaeus*

I searched on line for things that people seek in life. First, I found a site that listed 57 specific things that people seek – not one item mentioned Jesus. The top of the list was money. I found another site that addressed 23 things that people who loved their lives are doing differently. This list included: flowing with life and not going against it; believing in the possibilities ahead; nurturing your own inner peace. It concluded do the best you can to smile. God's Word says concerning seeking in **1 Chronicles 22:19 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *Now set your mind and heart to seek the LORD your God... Isaiah 55:6 (ESV)* <sup>6</sup> *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Jesus said in Matthew 7:7 (ESV)* <sup>7</sup> *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. Today, we will study a seeker, Zacchaeus, who was found by The Seeker, Jesus!*

Zacchaeus' story is a familiar one. However, in God's Word there is always something new to discover. When we think of Zacchaeus we usually think of a short man who is eager enough to see Jesus that he is willing to climb a tree in order to see past the crowd. But, how often have we thought specifically of the crowd itself who hindered Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus. In applying the thought of the crowd blocking Zacchaeus' vision, we are reminded how sometimes 'religious' people put up barriers that prevent people from seeing Christ. Does there ever become a point in the life of a church when the church becomes a crowd that gets in the way of people seeing Jesus rather than being the vessel we are called to be to point others to the Savior? Could it be possible that there are times we hinder others from seeing Jesus without even realizing what we are doing? Zacchaeus overcomes obstacles in order to see Jesus.

**Read Luke 19:1-4 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *He entered Jericho and was passing through.* <sup>2</sup> *And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.* <sup>3</sup> *And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.* <sup>4</sup> *So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.*

Jericho was a very wealthy and important town. It was a winter resort for King Herod and home to wealthy people. It had rose gardens whose scent perfumed the wind for miles. These rose gardens were known far and wide. Jesus was just passing through Jericho reminding us of how He passed through Samaria and met a woman at a well. On this 'pass through' Jesus would encounter a man in a tree!

The name Zacchaeus means "righteous one," but he was not living up to his name. In fact, the Jewish religious community in Jericho would have considered him extremely unrighteous since Zacchaeus was

the chief tax collector in Jericho and had other publicans working for him. We have already studied how Jesus called Matthew aka Levi, a tax collector, to be one of the His 12 disciples.

The job of collecting taxes in a given area was sold to the highest bidder. In turn, the one chosen worked to get back his investment plus a profit. He also had the authority of the Roman government and the power of the Roman army behind him in collecting taxes. Such a system was subject to abuse and corruption. Tax collectors, or publicans in the King James Version, were notorious for collecting more taxes than required; the more money they collected, the more income they enjoyed. Since Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector, he would have had the opportunity to place his hand in many tills. Wiersbe comments, "Though Zacchaeus was a renegade in the eyes of the Jews, he was a precious lost sinner in the eyes of Jesus."

The people thought Zacchaeus was a wealthy man, but actually he was only a bankrupt sinner who needed to receive God's gift of eternal life, the most expensive gift in the world. This man heard that Jesus was coming to his town. The scripture does not tell how much he knew about Jesus, perhaps very little; perhaps he had been told by others that Jesus was the Prophet who was to come into the world to reestablish the kingdom of Israel. For whatever reason, Zacchaeus heard about Jesus and was seeking to see Him.

However, the crowd blocked his view. Imagine him trying to squeeze through the crowd, but being blocked in every direction – whether intentional or unintentional, scripture does not say. Nobody would let him through. In fact, Zacchaeus got so 'inventive' in seeking Jesus, he was willing to climb a tree. In the East, it is unusual for a man to run, especially a wealthy government official; yet Zacchaeus ran down the street like a little child. And he even climbed a tree! Jesus said in **Matthew 18:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> ... *"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

To the average temple-going worshiper of God in Jericho, Zacchaeus would not have been a likely prospect for God's kingdom. After all, he was a chief tax collector! The Jews regarded the tax collectors or publicans as traitors to their own people. We still draw social lines today. Let's be honest. There are people we just don't consider as 'church material'.

I may have mentioned this example before but it is something that has always haunted me. The first church I attended as a child was a very small, country type church. There was a man in the neighborhood who was a church member and also a known drunkard. I remember the day that this church "withdrew" fellowship from that man because of his drunkenness. What bothered me about it, even as a child, was that the man was there at church for worship when they withdrew the fellowship. It just didn't make sense to me then and still not make sense to me today.

Are we ever guilty of standing in the way of others coming to Jesus? “Oh,” we exclaim “I would never stand in the way of others coming to Jesus.” And yet, we vote as a church to withdraw fellowship from a man who is literally sitting in the pew. But then our hindrance might not be that bold. Maybe we hold the pastor’s attention too long at the door on Sunday morning causing a visitor to miss their opportunity to speak with the pastor. Maybe we are whispering to our friends when the message is at the best point for someone else - distracting them from the Word. The ways of hindering others to come to Jesus are countless - mostly we are just being a little selfish - not thinking of others. Don’t forget as long as a person has breath, that person is not beyond the reach of God’s love. Don’t stand in the way of a person seeing Christ because of something they may have done last night. Look at them with a heart that helps to open the way for them to see Jesus today.

Jesus ignores opposition in order to stay with Zacchaeus.

**Read Luke 19:5-7 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *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.”* <sup>6</sup> *So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.* <sup>7</sup> *And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”*

Zacchaeus thought he was seeking Jesus but from this passage we realize that it was Jesus who was seeking Zacchaeus. Jesus looked up and saw the man in the tree. The seeker was found by The Seeker! Although Jesus was often a guest in people’s homes, this is the only recorded time of Jesus inviting Himself somewhere. If we are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we might just have to invite ourselves to some unlikely places. The glory is that Jesus is always available to the seeking soul. Who would imagine that Zacchaeus would have been so happy for Jesus to come to his house?

Verse 7 shows the selfishness of the Pharisees. We need to be careful to give others a chance. There are people right around us who are dying for an opportunity to know the Lord. And don’t be a grumbler in the church crowd like the Jericho crowd that grumbled about Jesus specifically seeking out a known sinner for the purpose of bringing him to salvation. Jesus is the Savior who celebrates a sinner’s repentance.

**Read Luke 19:8-10 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *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.”* <sup>9</sup> *And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.”* <sup>10</sup> *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

The personal conversation that passed between Jesus and Zacchaeus is not recorded. Whatever else was said between them, in the end Jesus declared *today salvation has come to this house*. Zacchaeus’ response is recorded and what a response it was!

Zacchaeus made a heartfelt response to Jesus' personal call of salvation to him. Under the Mosaic Law, if a thief voluntarily confessed his crime, he had to restore what he took, add one fifth to it, and bring a trespass offering to the Lord. If he stole something he could not restore, he had to repay fourfold; and if he was caught with the goods, he had to repay double. Zacchaeus did not quibble over the terms of the Law; he offered to pay the highest price because his heart had truly been changed. Zacchaeus was not trying to earn his salvation by what he did. His actions were evidence of God at work in his heart! Thinking of Zacchaeus' response to Jesus reminds me of an old hymn: What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart. I have light in my soul for which long I have sought since Jesus came into my heart.

Zacchaeus trusted Jesus Christ and became a true "son of Abraham," meaning he had become a child of faith. When Jesus said Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham and yet was lost, he must have shocked those listening. They would not have liked to acknowledge that this unpopular tax collector was a fellow son of Abraham, and at the same time, they would not have wished to admit that sons of Abraham could be lost. But a person is not saved by a good heritage or condemned by a bad one; **faith is more important than genealogy**. Jesus still loves to bring the lost into His kingdom, no matter what their background or previous way of life.

Our final focus is on the words of Jesus: *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*. We must see sinners as Jesus sees sinners – that is as **lost**. How does Jesus **seek** sinners? There are many ways – here are just a few.

**Personally**. Jesus was willing to initiate personal conversations about spiritual conditions. One of the reasons that we often fail in our mission to seek sinners for Christ is that we are too squeamish about getting personal. We are so afraid of offending someone that we remain silent. We do better to remember that we are offending Jesus when we remain silent if the Holy Spirit has nudged us to speak.

**Passionately**. I think that we like to picture Jesus as meek and mild because that is an easier road to take for many of us. Jesus was passionate about His mission. He was passionate enough to die for us. And, we can't get excited enough about Him to even mention His name outside of church?

**Patiently**. If someone does not accept Christ on our timetable, we have a tendency to think – well, I've told them – I did my part – it's their choice. We should be patient and pray earnestly that the Holy Spirit will not depart from entreating them.

*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*. This was the very purpose for which our Lord came among us. He was continually on the lookout for sinners who knew their need and were ready to be saved. It is His mission of grace still. **Luke 14:23 (ESV)** <sup>23</sup> *And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. Let's be about our Father's business.*