



Season of Pentecost

11/9/2025

Luke 19:1-10

A Grace Story

One of my favorite books as a kid was *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*. It retold the classic story of the 3 little pigs, but with one important difference. It was from the wolf's perspective. As the wolf tells his side of the story, he says he never meant to do any harm to the pigs, he was just looking to borrow some flour to bake a cake. And he didn't mean to blow their houses down. He had a terrible cold! It gave him sneezes so huge the houses ended up falling with a crash!

It's a goofy story, but it illustrates an important point. When you look at the same events, the same story, from a different perspective, you might learn something a little bit different.

We are going to see that play out in Scripture today. Luke 19 is A GRACE STORY. By viewing that story from multiple perspectives, we'll learn some important things about ourselves. And even better, we'll learn more about the Savior. Jesus.

Let's get started with our first perspective: the disciples in the crowd.

Imagine this. You are one of the 12 disciples, the closest friends of Jesus. For many days you have been walking towards the city of Jerusalem, and now you are nearing the end of your journey. Jericho was only about 18 miles or so from the Jewish capital city. And over the past few days, with every step, the excitement has only been building. Jesus has been telling parables, even doing some healing miracles along the way. After those dramatic events it seems like everyone in the region wants to see him!

You are approaching one of the new neighborhoods on the outskirts of Jericho, when a commotion starts just ahead of you. As you round a bend, you see that right next to the road is a sycamore tree, and perched precariously at the top is a short man in fine clothes, hanging on to the branches for dear life. The locals in the crowd all know who it is. "Zacchaeus! The chief tax collector! What is he doing up there?"

How would you feel to be one of the disciples looking at this guy? To get into the mindset of the disciples in this moment, let me tell you a story I heard from a pastor a couple years ago. Someone in his church was contacted by a scam caller. The scammer told her that the security of her bank account had been compromised, and in order to transfer money as fast as possible, she needed to buy a bunch of gift cards and activate them over the phone. The church member fell for it. When all was said and done, she had handed over her card information and purchased over ten thousand dollars of gift cards. She was never able to get any of it back.

Let's go back to the sycamore tree in Jericho. You look up into those branches, and you see that scam caller up in the tree. A thief. This guy has really, truly hurt people. He's disgusting. Just looking at him gives you a bad taste in your mouth. That's what the disciples felt when they saw Zacchaeus. Jesus had eaten with tax collectors before, but this guy was a different. A CHIEF tax collector. This was a traitor who had sided with the Romans, profited off the backs of his own people, a person who had helped organize suffering. When you look up in the sycamore tree, you are looking at the most punchable man in ancient Judea. The disciples were thinking to themselves, "Jesus has never been shy about dealing with sinners in the past. Let him have it! Shame this guy! Or better, get rid of him!"

Jesus actually stops right below the tree. He listens to the jeers of all the people around him as they shout insults at Zacchaeus. He looks up. But when he speaks, it's not quite what you're expecting. READ.

The crowd is not happy when they hear these words from Jesus. Neither were the disciples. Honestly, I think most of us would have a similar reaction. Because aren't there people that you don't really *want* to hear the gospel?

There's the extreme ones. Criminals. Terrorists. Political assassins. People that have done some truly terrible things. But it can get a whole lot more personal. What about the next door neighbor with political views the total opposite of yours, views he isn't afraid to tell you about whenever you can? What about the cousin who is in and out of trouble constantly, who just gives you a blank stare when you try to tell them how important church is. Those are often people you try your best to avoid, not people you try to evangelize!

But that tinge of disgust. That flash of annoyance. It reveals something, doesn't it? We think we are better. We think we *DESERVE* to be right here with Jesus. We downplay our own sins, feel proud in the upstanding lives we have, and feel like we now have the right to pass judgment on the people around us. Not a new problem, the disciples thought that way too. And Jesus teaches them a lesson.

Back to the disciples. As annoyed as these men feel, they keep on following Jesus to the house of this chief tax collector. When they get inside, they see something surprising. The servants are hard at work, grabbing curtains and

vases and expensive items... and taking them out of the house. As you watch a servant carrying a stack of silk robes start heading towards the Jericho market, Zacchaeus runs up to Jesus and explains: READ. And if that wasn't shocking enough by itself, Jesus has more mind-blowing words to share. READ.

Even though Jesus speaks those words to Zacchaeus, they are also directed at anyone who finds themselves in the shoes of the disciples and the others in this crowd. They are words meant for you and me, on those days where we feel so disgusted by the sinful world around us it's overwhelming, and feel more interested in passing judgment on others than sharing the gospel with them.

But Jesus wants us to know that when we think we're better than the people around us, we aren't looking at Jesus. We're looking at ourselves. With these words, Jesus reminds his followers that we aren't believers because of the "good record" we have. We are believers because we were lost sinners who have been rescued by God himself.

I just heard a story about a man who went hunting and got lost. He was stuck in the Sierras for 28 days, and just last week first responders found him and brought him home. But imagine if once he came back, he started bragging, "I can make it in the mountains a pretty long time! I sure know what I'm doing. If you want to learn how to survive, just talk to me!" That would be ridiculous. This guy got himself lost! No, he points to his rescuers and says, "These men saved my life. I can't thank them enough."

That's us too. Don't say, "If people thought and acted more like me, they'd have life figured out!" No! Instead, point to your rescuer. The Savior who died for a tax collector. The Savior who died for 12 disciples who abandoned him at the first sign of danger. The Savior who died for us too. And as you point to Jesus, the Great Rescuer, you'll find that you don't make time to obsess over the outward lives of others. We're too busy! Too busy rejoicing in the forgiveness Christ won for us. Too busy being awestruck by the grace he shows us every single day.

That's what we learn when we put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples. But there's another perspective we want to learn from in Luke 19: Zacchaeus himself.

What was it like to be this guy? We've already talked about how much tax collectors were hated in their community. But it gets worse. They weren't just social rejects. Zacchaeus would have been kicked out of his local synagogue. Would not have been allowed to attend a worship service. He had probably been rejected by his own family – they would have acted as though he were already dead, refusing to talk to him or have contact with him of any kind. Zacchaeus had made some money, had some petty power, sure. But he led a miserable, lonely existence. He didn't sleep much at night. He hated himself.

Sound familiar? Some days we feel like the judgmental people in the crowd. But other days we feel like the scum of the earth. We are kept up at night by the memory of past sins. No matter how disgusted we feel about ourselves, we still have temptations that hound our steps. Every time something bad happens to you you can't escape the feeling that you deserve it. You think, "If I can't forgive myself, how can anybody else? If I don't like myself, how can anybody else like me? I don't even want to know what God thinks of me."

As Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore tree, thoughts like that were going through his mind. He thought talking to Jesus was out of the question. He just wants to see him. Even a glimpse would be enough. But when Jesus stops, looks up, hear what he says again. READ. Jesus knew the sins of Zacchaeus. The shame. The anguish. And you know what Jesus says? "I want to be with you. I want to spend time with you. My grace is for you."

When Jesus saw a man that everyone else had given up on, a man who couldn't even look at himself in the mirror, that's what he said.

What does Jesus say today? What does he say... when he looks at the gossip hound who is finally realizing the damage her words have done? When he looks at the addict whose life is in shambles? At the teenager who isn't so sure life is worth living? At the old man who has ruined every relationship he has ever had? What does he say when he looks at you? He says: "I'm coming to your house today. I won't wait for an invitation. I know you're a mess. But hand that mess over to me. Give me your pain. Give me your sin. Because I love you. Because I want to spend my time with you. Because my grace is for you."

A couple hundred years ago, there was a man who was changed by God's grace. His name was John Newton. He was a bit of a wild child growing up, joined the British Royal Navy, but eventually transferred out for a more lucrative position. He became the captain of a slave transport ship. But after years of profiting from the slave trade, he converted to Christianity and everything changed. He became an Anglican minister, and was one of the most outspoken abolitionists in all of Great Britain. He wrote a number of hymns, some of them ones we still sing today. Listen to this one: READ. A bit ago I said Luke 19 is a GRACE STORY. It is. But it's not the only one. Your life is a grace story. All of our lives are a grace story. Never stop sharing it with the people around you, no matter what their lives might look like. And know that God will never stop sharing the story, the reality of his grace with you. Amen.