

“Seeing Jesus”

Luke 19:1-10

To what lengths will you go to get what you want? I ask myself; “to what length am I willing to go to follow Christ?” Whether it’s physical discomfort, financial sacrifice, social stigma, or whatever, what am I willing to sacrifice to reach my goal?

Our Scripture portion today is Luke 19:1 to 10. It’s the story of what one man wanted and the steps he took to get it. I’ve titled our study “Seeing Jesus,” and we’ll be looking at Jesus’ interaction with a “vertically challenged” tax collector named Zacchaeus. So listen now as I read the account. Luke is the only Gospel writer who records it for us. That’s **Luke 19:1-10**.

Jesus’ interaction with Zacchaeus outlines the STEPS by which all seekers arrive at “Seeing Jesus.”

The First STEP in seeing Jesus is,

The Inclination to See

To begin let’s note a few things about the man and his surroundings. Zacchaeus is a Jewish name. It means “the just or pure;” of which he was neither. He was the chief tax collector for the area around Jericho; which, by the way, was very fertile agricultural land. Jericho also lay on the main trade route between Damascus and Arabia. Local produce and any goods transported through the area by traders were liable to be taxed.

Being a chief tax collector means Zacchaeus had other tax collectors under him; they were accountable to him and probably dependent on him to keep their position. Tax collectors were notoriously dishonest. They demanded more than was due and pocketed the difference.

His position enriched him financially; but likely left him poor when it came to meaningful friendships. Jewish tax collectors were universally despised and viewed as traitors to their race. They were part of the hand of the oppressive, occupying Roman government. They were selling their own people to the Romans and their soul to the Devil.

Zacchaeus must’ve heard of Jesus. Reports from his underlings surely had come to his ears. Bethany was close by; where Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Surely, he’d heard of that incident.

Verse three tells us Zacchaeus wanted to “see” who Jesus was. Here’s the inclination to see; not what kind of a person Jesus was, but which one among the crowd. Why did Zacchaeus want to see Jesus? Did simple curiosity motivate him? It may have started out that way but I believe the length to which he went to attain his goal points to something deeper. Zacchaeus had a significant challenge in fulfilling his inclination to see Jesus; he was short in height.

Picture him with me, as the text does, trying to push his way through the crowd only to be repulsed. Being short prevents him from looking over the shoulders of the crowd. So he’s stymied! What he does next helps us understand his motivation was beyond mere curiosity. Curiosity is a powerful impulse but it’s controlled by certain proprieties. Let’s say there’s something I’m curious about, something I want to know about another person, but it’s inappropriate for me to ask. So my curiosity remains unfulfilled – unless my desire to know is greater than the impropriety.

So Zacchaeus does something a rich, dignified, well-dressed government official would most likely never do; he climbs a tree to see Jesus! What made him do such a thing? Could it be the long working of his conscience? Or the reports Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus; how different He was from the religious leaders and teachers of the day? Or maybe it was the deep, irresistible drawing of God’s Spirit in his spirit? Whatever it was, it motivated action.

Zacchaeus knew there was only one street for the crowd to pass through. So he goes to a lane parallel with that street and runs until he gets ahead of them. Reaching that goal, he climbs into the overspreading branches of a mulberry tree. Concealed there among the leaves he has a good view of the approaching crowd. And then --- he sees Jesus!

My friend, how deep is your inclination to see Jesus? How determined are you to achieve your goal? Your circumstance is different than Zacchaeus’. He had to wait for Jesus to come to his community; all you need to do is turn the eyes of your heart toward Him and you will see Him. You can open the Holy Scriptures or go into your prayer closet and meet Him there.

I find in my life I too often allow little hindrances to prevent me from seeing Jesus. I like my comforts and my ease. I’m too easily dissuaded from seeing Jesus.

Zacchaeus could’ve looked at the circumstances and said “forget it, there’s no way possible I can get near Jesus.” But instead, he persisted. Even at the risk of his reputation and dignity he went after what he wanted. He took the first step in seeing Jesus; and Jesus met him right there with the next step. Do you have an inclination, a desire, to see Jesus?

The Second STEP in seeing Jesus is,

The Invitation to See

Now Jesus and the crowd moved up the street 'til their beneath the tree where Zacchaeus was. Jesus looked up into the tree, saw Zacchaeus and spoke to him. Several things in the text give us the idea that Jesus knew he was there all along.

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. Can you imagine what it was like for him see this nondescript man whose physical appearance wouldn't attract any attention in a crowd? I'm not being sacrilegious; I'm paraphrasing Isaiah 53 verse 2. But when Jesus looked up into that tree, and when His eyes met the eyes of Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus knew Jesus was different than any man he'd ever met before. That face of infinite Grace he would never forget. That face looked on him with the welcome of recognition.

And then, Jesus addressed him by name. *“Zacchaeus, hurry, and come down from that tree. I must lodge at your house today.”* Did Jesus know Zacchaeus before; or was His omniscience showing through in this experience? Jesus' words give us a clue. Maybe you caught it. **“I MUST** lodge at your house today.” Ah, this was a divine appointment. It was the kind of appointment that Jesus wants to have with every human being; an invitation to see Him!

Imagine, Zacchaeus, the tax commissioner, scorned and rejected by the people of Jericho, is being told by Jesus that He's coming to his house. Jesus, the guest, becomes the true Host; the invited becomes the Inviter! It reminds me of John 10:3 where Jesus said the Good Shepherd *“...calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”* He called Zacchaeus by name.

My friend, the invitation Jesus gave Zacchaeus is open to you too. Jesus knew all about Zacchaeus; He knows all about you too. He knows your past sins and failures. He knows the choices you've made that have brought such pain and heartache into your life. He knows your loneliness, your rejection, your regret, and your sorrow. And in spite of all those things, or perhaps even because of them, He invites to you see Him; to find the healing He alone can give.

I believe Zacchaeus' desire to see Jesus was rooted in curiosity. But when he came face to face with Jesus that desire moved much more deeply into his soul and spirit. I don't know how much Zacchaeus understood his feelings. I can only imagine what he was thinking as he quickly shinnied down that tree and joyfully accepted Jesus' invitation.

What changed Zacchaeus' from a cold, calculating tax-collector to one filled with joy at the prospect of hosting Jesus? It was the invitation of Jesus; the unconditional love and acceptance offered in the midst of a hostile crowd!

Then, notice the reaction of the crowd. They all grumbled that Jesus was going to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. In their eyes he was a sinner because he was a tax collector and because of his character. We're left with the impression that all this is happening right there in the street as Jesus and Zacchaeus are headed to the tax commissioner's house!

But Zacchaeus isn't the only one given an invitation to see. No, this crowd was being invited to see life and people through the eyes of Jesus. They were looking at Zacchaeus through the eyes of hostility. Most likely they had suffered personally from his extortion. They saw him as despicable, incorrigible; a blot on their community and their race. Why would Jesus pay attention to him?

It is always this way; those who see themselves as better than their fellowmen will grumble about God's acts of mercy. Their blindness and jealousy are fatal. But Jesus saw Zacchaeus' heart and knew it was tender; it was longing for something better. He sees your heart too. He knows some people will react to His work of grace in your life. But you're not responsible for what others do; you're responsible to decide whether or not you'll accept Jesus' invitation to see Him as He really is and to experience life as He truly meant it to be experienced.

If you've never truly "seen" Jesus before, today is your day of opportunity; the invitation still is open. And when you say "yes" to Jesus' invitation you will see and experience life in a whole new dimension – just like Zacchaeus was about to do. Which brings us to...

The Next STEP in seeing Jesus is,

The Revelation of Sight

It's amazing how quickly one moves from blindness to sight when they accept the invitation of Jesus! We don't know all that passed through Zacchaeus' mind, but the transformation was, from our vantage point, almost instantaneous.

It's possible that the angry murmurs of the crowd alerted Zacchaeus to the consequences of his earlier choices. He's defrauded them; his neighbors and countrymen. Before this, he wouldn't have cared a whit; but now he sees the effects of his greed and the thought pains him. At any rate, let's look at the evidence of Zacchaeus' newly revealed sight.

Obviously, he's still a baby in his understanding of spiritual things. But he's aware that something deep within him has changed significantly. And he's willing to respond in the only way he knows how. He will make restitution. He will do all he can to right those wrongs.

The text says he stood. The word is used of the posture of one making a formal declaration. Like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable in Luke 18, Zacchaeus wanted to be noticed; but for very different reasons than that self-righteous fellow. Zacchaeus likely made his declaration in verse 4 while standing on the steps of his own house. Doesn't that make sense that he would make this declaration before those whom he had wronged; those who were grumbling that Jesus would spend time with such a sinner?

It's true, Zacchaeus had wronged his fellowmen individually; but the wrong they suffered was common to all of them (except a privileged few). I believe there's a principle here relating to forgiveness and restitution; when offenses are given publicly they need to be confessed publicly. What Zacchaeus had done wasn't done in a corner; everyone knew what he and his fellow tax-collectors were doing. Now, he admitted in their presence what he'd done.

Not only did he admit what he'd done, he publicly stated his intention to remedy the situation. First, he devoted half of his possessions to meet the needs of the poor. That was pure generosity toward those less fortunate than he was. He was under no obligation to do that.

Next, he stated that "as far as I have defrauded anyone by false accusation, I will restore four times what I took." The text uses the word if, but not in the sense we use it. That Zacchaeus had defrauded others was beyond question. Now, he was willing, even eager, to make restitution.

The Mosaic Law required him to restore what he'd taken and add one-fifth or 20 percent. He went way beyond that requirement by restoring four times as much as he'd gotten dishonestly. Restitution is good proof of a genuine change of heart. Today, many people want to be forgiven but they don't want to pay the price of restitution. They fail to relive their offense through the eyes of those they've offended. Zacchaeus wasn't like that; he eagerly offered to make restitution. His actions proved that something had happened in his heart.

The Final STEP in seeing Jesus is,

The Proclamation of Salvation

Jesus said "*this day salvation has come to this house because he is also a son of Abraham.*" Salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house; but it was not yet a day old! And what was

the source of that salvation? It was his exercise of faith, just like his ancestor Abraham. It's true; he was a son of Abraham by birth, just like most in the crowd. But now he is a partaker of Abraham's faith; a true son of Abraham. Here he stands, transformed, in their presence!

And why did salvation come to this house? Because "*the Son of Man is come to seek and to save those who are lost (like this one).*" The people in the crowd that day saw Zacchaeus as beneath them. He was a sinner; he was a lost cause. In their eyes his occupation and lifestyle choices had severed any possible connection with God. Why would Jesus choose to spend time with Him instead of one of them? They were so much better than him!

The people grumbled that Jesus would go to the house of a sinner. But that house was no longer polluted; it had been redeemed! There was a new spirit and a new master occupying that house. It had been a place of darkness and greed; now it was filled with light and generosity. The lost had been found and saved!

My friend, the same transformation that took place in Zacchaeus' house can take place in your house too. If you have an inclination to see Jesus, if you are willing to risk your reputation and your dignity Jesus will come to your house too. If you take the first step in seeing Jesus He will meet you right there with the next step.

Jesus will give you an invitation to see Him and know Him. He will invite Himself into your house if only you will respond to his invitation. Zacchaeus responded joyfully to Jesus' invitation; and Jesus led him to the next step.

Zacchaeus saw his life through the eyes of Jesus and through the eyes of the crowd. His faith in Jesus revealed to Him things he hadn't seen before. Inviting Jesus into your life will do that. You will see people differently and you will see how having offended them, you have offended Jesus too.

When you come to this realization and are willing to do what Zacchaeus did Jesus will proclaim to you; "this day salvation has come to this house." You will have completed the steps to seeing Jesus and eternal life will be yours!