

Sinners?
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Luke 19:1-10 (ESV)

Opening: Do you know about the tree-climbing goats in Morocco? It's not a joke, it's a real thing. The National Geographic reports, *"On the dusty road from Marrakech to the coastal town of Essaouira (uh·saw·ruh,) argan trees pepper the rust-colored countryside. The gnarled, thorny plants grown exclusively in southwestern [Morocco](#) and western [Algeria](#) may not be pretty, but they attract plenty of fans. Herds of hungry goats pose in their crooked branches, sometimes more than one dozen in a single tree. There's an explanation for the strange phenomenon. Argan trees produce a fruit that looks like a shriveled olive and ripens each year around June. The resourceful goats crave the bitter taste and aroma, climbing up to 30 feet above ground to get their fix (and up to 84 percent of [their diet](#))."*

If you drove up in your yard and saw a dozen goats in the trees you might yell: *"Hey! Get outta that tree!"* That's a command you'll be hearing a lot as we unpack this famous text in the first ten verses of Luke 19.

There's an old saying: *"Some people would rather climb a tree than stand on the ground and tell the truth."* I might add in these days of social media, some people would climb a tree to BELIEVE a lie rather than stand on the ground and hear the truth; but I digress. We know of one at least one man who climbed a tree and wound up experiencing truth; the truth that Jesus came to seek and to save.

If you ranked the top 3 kids Bible songs of my childhood I would say that #1 would be *"Jesus Loves Me This I Know,"* #2, *"Jesus Loves The Little Children,"* and #3, *"Zacchaeus Was A Wee Little Man."* (They should put his name on the spelling bee list just for fun!) We might think of these verses as just a cute children's Bible story about Jesus and a "wee little man" but there is serious theological "meat" on these bones particularly the last verse. Let's read them:

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. **2** And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. **3** And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. **4** So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. **5** 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." **6** So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. **7** And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." **8** 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." **9** And Jesus said to him,

“Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Here is the TRUTH that should change us in this passage: Zacchaeus thought he was spying on Jesus only to learn that Jesus was looking for HIM. Everyone is looking to fix what’s broken in his or her life but no one is looking for Jesus (Rom. 3:11.) The great news is that Jesus is looking for US because He “came to seek and to save the lost.”

- In two previous lessons in Luke we’ve learned how the Jews despised tax collectors who did the dirty work for Rome. Zacchaeus was even worse because he was the “chief” tax collector at the top of the franchise. He got a cut from other tax collectors below him and it made him a rich man.
- We could say Zacchaeus had his “short-comings” but that would be a “dad joke.” The facts: In the frenzied crowd surrounding Jesus, this man had to resort to the undignified position of shinnying up a sycamore.
- Was he seeking salvation or just acting on his curiosity? We don’t know but John Calvin wrote that, “*Curiosity and simplicity are a sort of preparation for faith.*”ⁱⁱ Perhaps child-like curiosity led to salvation.
- Zacchaeus thought he was secretly spying on Jesus, but that would be impossible with the all-knowing (omniscient) Son of God. Some people think they can secretly check out Christianity with no risk of Jesus getting hold of their hearts. Followers of Christ know when someone gets a good look at the Savior He looks BACK in love, mercy, and grace.
- As the hymn writer said,
*O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There’s light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free.
Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*ⁱⁱⁱ
- Verse five says, when Jesus came by, HE looked up at Zacchaeus.
- This is the seeking Savior in action. Jesus didn’t just look, He spoke:
“Zacchaeus, get outta that tree!”
- “Get outta that tree I’m coming to your house to stay.”
- “Get outta that tree I’m coming into your life to stay.”
- “Get outta that tree Zacchaeus, I’m gonna make you a whole new man!”
- “Get outta that tree I’m gonna give you eternal life forever!”
- Verse six tells us Zacchaeus responded to Jesus in exactly the right way. Jesus said, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down” (IOW: get outta that tree!) Zacchaeus hurried, came down and received him joyfully.

- The flow of the story should take us right to Zacchaeus' house for a grand celebration of salvation. We'll get there in a minute but first we have to pause for the reaction from an unappointed panel of critics called "they."
 - You know, "they" (or is it them?) We hear their opinions and reactions repeated over and over. *"You know, THEY say...this and THEY say that."*
 - Verse 7: The ESV: *"And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."* The NIV says, *"all the people"* began to mutter. Don't you hate generalizations? Beware whenever anyone declares that "everyone" is saying so and so.
 - Everyone? All the people? You polled all the people? Now, I'm not criticizing Dr. Luke. He was just accurately portraying the feeling as a reporter on the scene. I'm sure it indeed felt like "all the people" muttered.
 - What was offended them so? Once again, Jesus was hanging out with nasty sinners; how dare He? Remember what we said when we studied Jesus calling the twelve in Luke chapter five? I stated that, *"Smelly fishermen and dirty sinners make the best disciples."*
 - Instead of rejoicing in this life-change, the bystanders were offended.
 - We might say there are always "sanctimonious so and so's" who would rather climb a tree and be self-righteousness than stand on the ground and reach out to those who are lost. Get outta that tree and hug a sinner!!
 - It seems that Jesus and Zacchaeus ignored the grumblers. Verse 8:
- 8** 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."
- You talk about "life change" and "heart change!" Mr. Z was a new man.
 - Luke doesn't report that Jesus pulled it out of him (*"Okay Z, how will you prove that you're now a new creation in Christ?"*) Zacchaeus' heart was so full he immediately saw what he needed to do as a follower of Jesus.

9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

- Salvation didn't come because Zacchaeus promised good deeds; good deeds came because Jesus had graciously saved this most-hated man.
- That comment about being a "son of Abraham" was directed at the Jews who thought ancestry would get them into Heaven. Jesus was making it clear that eternal life is about adoption not ancestry.
- Jesus put the period at the end of this salvation story with the whole point of His earthly ministry. If you had to sum it all up, Jesus words do the job:

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Luke 19:1-10 is more than a sweet memory from childhood days it's a snapshot of why Jesus came, what He accomplished on Calvary, and how sinners should respond.

- There's a risk you'll have that childhood song stuck in your head today, but I want to get something else stuck in our heads. I want us to remember the words: *"Get outta that tree!" [New Power Translation]*
- Remember those goats in Morocco? They will climb 30 feet up in a tree trying to get the food they need. You might say they are desperate.
- People are desperately looking to fix what is broken in their lives and they are "climbing trees" of money, sex, power, addiction and more looking for the answer. We might modify that old saying: *"People will climb a tree looking for the fix in their life when they can stay on the ground and find it in Jesus!"*
- Have you looked at the Savior and seen Him look back in love?
- Get outta that tree of sin and walk with Jesus on the journey to eternal life.
- Then to the "sanctimonious so and so's" who climb the tree of self-righteousness to avoid contact with dirty sinners: Get outta that tree and get shoulder to shoulder with the people Jesus came to save.
- What about those of us who HAVE followed Christ as Savior and Lord.
- Sadly, as long as we live in our human "tents" in this fallen world, we will sometimes climb a tree of sin like we used to.
- The Apostle Paul has a word for us in **Ephesians 4:22–24 (ESV) — 22** *"...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*
- Basically, Paul is saying, *"Get outta that tree and back on the ground to follow Jesus by being led by His Holy Spirit who moved into your heart when you were saved."*
- As long as we're breathing air, Satan will be pointing out tasty fruit in the trees of sin. When we're tempted we need to hear the voice of Jesus saying, *"Get outta that tree and follow Me because I'm gonna change your life FOREVER."*
- That's a message we (like Zacchaeus) should receive with JOY!

ⁱ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/video-watch-bizarre-tree->

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 251). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/645>