

March 24

Lesson 4 (NIV)

CALLED TO REPENT

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Chronicles

16:8-13, 23-27

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:1-10

LUKE 19:1-10

¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four

times the amount.”

⁹Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”



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KEY VERSE

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. — **Luke 19:10**

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Unit 1: Call to Discipleship

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recall details of the story of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus.
2. Illustrate the transforming effect of God's grace through the example of Zacchaeus.
3. Commit to a change in attitude toward money and compassion for others.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. From All to Nothing and Back Again
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Determined Glimpse (LUKE 19:1-4)
 - A. Challenging Setting (vv. 1-3)
 - B. Humiliating Solution (v. 4)
 - Napoleon Complex*
- II. Surprise Announcement (LUKE 19:5, 6)
 - A. Invitation by Guest (v. 5)
 - B. Response of Host (v. 6)
 - Recipeace*
- III. Varied Attitudes (LUKE 19:7-10)
 - A. Crowd's Complaint (v. 7)
 - B. Zacchaeus's Promises (v. 8)
 - C. Jesus' Declarations (vv. 9, 10)

Conclusion

- A. Two Different Responses
- B. Prayer

HOW TO SAY IT

Jericho	<i>Jair-ih-co.</i>
Laodiceans	<i>Lay-odd-uh-see-unz.</i>
Mosaic	<i>Mo-zay-ik.</i>
Pharisees	<i>Fair-ih-seez.</i>
Zacchaeus	<i>Zack-key-us.</i>

Introduction**A. From All to Nothing and Back Again**

What is the measure of your life? An accountant can calculate your wealth. Your boss can state your contribution to the organization. Your family and friends can tell you how much you mean to them. Internet sites can tell you the impact of your social media posts. A physician can assess your health. Your résumé can detail your professional accomplishments. Which of these, if any, is the best measure?

We may also ask how the choice of measuring instrument has changed for you over the years. Were you once concerned with wealth, power, and/or popularity, but now you reject those touchstones in favor of assessing your life differently?

Such a change in assessment is central to what the Bible calls "repentance." Repentant people revalue their lives, and

with renovated values they embark on renovated behavior, the subject of today's lesson.

B. Lesson Context

Our text is part of Luke's narrative of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Jesus had warned his disciples that he would be put to death but raised to life again ([Luke 18:31-34](#); see also [9:22, 44](#); [13:31-33](#)). Having arrived in Jericho, the setting of today's lesson, Jesus was only about 15 miles from Jerusalem and its momentous events.

This lesson's account is the last of three in close succession in which Jesus interacted with individuals who sought him out. The first was a conversation with the man we call the rich young ruler ([Luke 18:18-30](#)); the second involved a blind beggar ([18:35-43](#)). The first man seemingly had every advantage and had followed every law of God; the second had nothing except the audacity to cry out persistently for Jesus' mercy.

The surprising outcomes were that the advantaged man departed disappointed, while the disadvantaged one received his request and followed Jesus on the way. The reason we say surprising is because of commonly held viewpoints on privileged wealth and disadvantaged poverty (compare [Matthew 19:23-25](#); [John 9:2](#); [James 2:1-4](#)).

Those outcomes set the stage for the third and final encounter of the sequence. This encounter is with a tax collector (older versions of the Bible refer to such an individual as a publican). People in every time and place grumble about taxes and tax collectors. But tax collectors in first-century Israel were especially despised. The Roman Empire had a practice of contracting for the collection of certain taxes. The process involved an auction for the authority to collect taxes in a particular location.

Recognizing an opportunity to make a profit, people would estimate the taxes that could be collected and bid accordingly. The winning bidder would then do everything possible to maximize taxes collected in order to maximize personal profit.

Tax collectors were therefore despised for two reasons. One was the unfair and burdensome taxes they charged to enrich themselves. The other was the fact that such Jews were collaborators with the occupying force of pagan, oppressive Romans.

I. Determined Glimpse

(LUKE 19:1-4)

A. Challenging Setting (vv. 1-3)

1. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

Jericho is a prosperous settlement in an oasis in the desert of the Jordan River valley. Though only about 15 miles from Jerusalem, it is more than 3,000 feet lower in elevation and thus a demanding, uphill journey. *Jesus* is approaching the place of his predicted death and resurrection. The shadow of the cross and the light of the empty tomb fall across this episode.

2. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

We now meet the man with whom *Jesus* will interact. *Zacchaeus* is described first as a *chief tax collector*—those who collect taxes for the Romans (see the [Lesson Context](#)). Mentioned in the Bible only here, his description likely means that *Zacchaeus* is responsible for a region and supervises other tax collectors. This intensifies our sense that *Zacchaeus* is powerful and despised. The added note that *Zacchaeus* is *wealthy* confirms his status and reminds us of the rich young ruler ([Luke 18:23](#)).

What Do You Think?

As we seek to make disciples ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)), under what circumstances, if any, will it be helpful to categorize people in terms of their wealth or lack thereof? Why?

Digging Deeper

In what ways, if any, do the multiple ways of defining “wealthy” have a bearing on the question above?

3. He wanted to see who *Jesus* was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd.

Luke has noted the crowds that surround *Jesus* as he travels to Jerusalem ([Luke 12:1; 14:25](#)). The growing multitude fills the narrow streets of *Jericho* and prevents *Zacchaeus* from seeing *Jesus*. Luke implies that *Zacchaeus* desires to learn about this well-known prophet so that he may evaluate him. *Zacchaeus*’s *short* stature prohibits him from looking over the crowd, and his outcast status makes it unlikely that anyone will make space for him.

What Do You Think?

What safeguards can we adopt to ensure that we don’t block others’ view of *Jesus* as He should be seen today?

Digging Deeper

Think in terms of acts of both omission and commission in behavior and speech.

B. Humiliating Solution (v. 4)

4. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since *Jesus* was coming that way.

Jesus was coming that way.

Zacchaeus solves his problem with actions that do not comport with his powerful status. In biblical times, powerful men do not run. They have people do that for them. But Zacchaeus accepts the humiliation of running to get ahead of the crowd following Jesus. That expedience accomplishes little, though, when the crowd catches up as Jesus passes by.



Visual for Lesson 4. As you reach [Luke 19:7](#), call for silent discussion by challenging learners to create a hand sign that reflects the opposite of the above.

So Zacchaeus takes another exceptional action: climbing into a *sycamore-fig tree*. This is one of the fig trees that flourishes in Jericho, with its hot climate and abundant spring water. Grown men—especially powerful men—do not climb trees in Jesus’ time. For the moment, Zacchaeus has humbled himself in hopes of seeing Jesus ([Luke 18:14](#)).

NAPOLEON COMPLEX

It’s called “Napoleon complex” or “short-man syndrome.” The theory is that short men may exhibit overly aggressive social behavior to compensate for below-average height. Napoleon Bonaparte was thought to compensate for his 5’2” frame by seeking power and conquest.

The existence of such a complex has long been disputed, but recent research seems to strengthen arguments for it. A study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that men who struggle with their masculinity are more than three times as likely to commit violent assault.

Though Zacchaeus of Jericho lived long before Napoleon, one wonders if we could classify him as having short-man syndrome. While the Bible does not mention any physically aggressive behavior on his part, his rise to be a top-dog tax collector may have been a way of compensating for self-perceived deficiencies. That’s just speculation, but this is a fact: the only deficiency that counts in the long run is sin. Until we realize that, we focus on the wrong thing.

—J. E.

II. Surprise Announcement (LUKE 19:5, 6)

A. Invitation by Guest (v. 5)

5a. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus,

We are not surprised when *Jesus* sees the curious sight of a grown man in a tree. But *Jesus*’ reaction is in every way exceptional.

To address *Zacchaeus* by name is a remarkable personal note, for minor characters in the gospel story are seldom addressed by name. In any event, it is astonishing that *Jesus* recognizes and calls by name a man he has never met. This is one of many examples in the gospel story in which *Jesus* exhibits supernatural knowledge, knowledge that can be rightly expected of God alone (see [Luke 5:22](#); [6:8](#); [7:36–50](#); [8:46](#); [19:29–34](#); [22:7–13](#)).

5b. “come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

Here *Jesus*’ divine knowledge is applied to expressing a personal, urgent invitation to the man in the tree. *Zacchaeus* is to *come down immediately*: that is, to do all in his power to accomplish what *Jesus* commands. *Zacchaeus* had climbed the tree to see *Jesus*; but now, having humbled himself, he will need no such undignified posture. *Jesus* will come to be a guest at *Zacchaeus*’ house.

Jesus of course will be *Zacchaeus*’ guest, yet *Jesus* initiates the invitation! It is as if he were the host. *Jesus* takes the role of authority in the exchanges, yet in

so doing he dignifies *Zacchaeus* by designating the man’s home as the place where *Jesus* will receive refreshment. The added note of time (*today*) stresses the urgency of the invitation.

Further, *Jesus* uses a telling expression translated *must*. In *Luke*’s Gospel, which features 12 of the four Gospel’s 30 occurrences in Greek, this word often signifies something that has to take place to fulfill God’s purpose. Despite *Zacchaeus*’ being despised by his contemporaries as a traitor, *Jesus*’ visit to the man’s home is a divine necessity.

B. Response of Host (v. 6)

6. So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

Luke describes *Zacchaeus*’ reaction with words that precisely replicate *Jesus*’ instructions. The wealthy tax collector readily submits to *Jesus*’ greater authority; he does not submit fearfully or grudgingly, but joyfully. He has hoped only to catch a glimpse of *Jesus*, but now he has been chosen to be *Jesus*’ host. *Zacchaeus* seems to recognize the invitation as one of divine grace, representing a new opportunity of some sort.

What Do You Think?

What are some practical ways your church can demonstrate the joy of encountering Christ?

Digging Deeper

How might these practical ways differ from church to church due to the nature of their surrounding communities?

RECIPEACE

The International Day of Peace has been observed in some form on September 21 every year since 1982. It is dedicated to world peace and envisions the absence of violence. In 2013, the day was dedicated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to peace education.

Peace Day is celebrated in a variety of ways by various organizations. Of these, perhaps none is as intriguing as the efforts of a social movement known as “Recipeace.” Partnering with professional chefs, Recipeace strives to bring people together over food.

Recipeace offers recipes based on historical “peace meals.” For example, a plum pudding recipe recalls a Christmas Eve during World War I. Weary soldiers from Germany, Britain, Scotland, and France laid down weapons and left trenches to celebrate with carols and sweet treats. A three-meat mock-turtle soup recalls a dinner meeting between President Theodore Roosevelt and Booker T. Washington in 1901. This first-ever meal shared by a sitting president and an

African-American in the White House featured discussions on ways to ease racial tensions.

Recipeace also gives directions for Underground Railroad jerky (hidden in tree stumps for escaping slaves) and Amish friendship bread. Eating meals together has long been part of recipes for peace.

Jesus understood the goals of Recipeace. He broke bread with the chief tax collector Zacchaeus. He promised the lukewarm Laodiceans that he would come and eat with them ([Revelation 3:20](#)). He even accepted dinner invitations from Pharisees bent on trapping him ([Luke 14](#)).

As you follow our Savior’s footsteps, who can you invite to share dinner, coffee, or dessert?

—J. E.

III. Varied Attitudes

(LUKE 19:7-10)

A. Crowd’s Complaint (v. 7)

7. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

Not everyone is joyous, however. The crowds that accompany Jesus include many who recognize Zacchaeus as a notorious tax collector. They express the common opinion that such people are, by definition, evil. Disloyal to God and his

people, tax collectors opportunistically link their fortunes with the pagan oppressors.

Jesus frequently receives such criticism in this Gospel (Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1, 2). Only here do we see the hostility directed against a specific individual. And historical sources show us that this is unlikely to be the first time Zacchaeus has faced such hostility. He is a member of a despised class, and those who despise the class do so for what they believe are godly reasons.

It's likely that Zacchaeus has never gotten used to such treatment, even though it is painfully familiar.

B. Zacchaeus's Promises (v. 8)

8a. But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor,

It is not clear where and when *Zacchaeus* speaks these words. Bible translations and commentators propose one of three scenarios: (1) immediately, on the spot, (2) while walking to his home with Jesus, or (3) when the two are inside the man's house. Time and place are not nearly as important as the content of the declaration, however.

Luke draws our attention to the importance of the pronouncement by indicating that Zacchaeus stands to speak

and begins with the word *look*. This expression draws attention to what is to follow (compare Luke 21:29). Further, Zacchaeus addresses Jesus as *Lord*. This indicates at least high respect (as in "sir"), if not Jesus' divine, supreme authority.

For Zacchaeus to pledge to give *half* his wealth *to the poor* is an exorbitant gift! This act of generosity reflects the generosity that God is now showing him through Jesus.

8b. "and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Next, Zacchaeus responds to his prior life. *If I have cheated anybody out of anything* might sound as if Zacchaeus is waffling on responsibility for his actions. But in the original language text, it is clear that he is confessing openly that he has done such things and is ready to make restitution. This will be to any and all, not just to some, whom he has wronged. The Mosaic Law called for restitution between two and five times when theft or fraud is committed (Exodus 22:1-14). Zacchaeus does not debate the proper number. Rather, he openly promises a high level of restitution.

What Do You Think?

What challenges should we anticipate when a person with a notorious reputation comes to Christ?

Digging Deeper

Under what conditions, if any, should conversion of such a person be accompanied by expectations of restitution?

We wonder if Zacchaeus's promise is foolhardy. Since he begins by promising half his wealth as a gift to the poor, does he not run the risk of exhausting his resources before fulfilling all the restitutions? This very extravagance seems to be Luke's point. Zacchaeus is no longer the profit-minded opportunist. He is now the recipient of the extravagant grace of God, so he responds with similar extravagance.

Zacchaeus displays the full ideal of repentance. Repentance is a change of mind, heart, and life in response to God's gracious gift. Its fullness is measured not in how guilty the individual feels, not in how emotional is the transition, not even in how immediate the change is. Rather, repentance is genuine when an individual's life increasingly reflects God's goodness and grace. Zacchaeus is now on the right track in that regard.

C. Jesus' Declarations (vv. 9, 10)

9a. Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house,

Jesus affirms Zacchaeus's repentance. This is a momentous occasion, one that reflects fulfillment of God's promises and Jesus' mission.

Salvation in the New Testament reflects all that we typically associate with it and more than we sometimes realize. To be saved by the Lord is to be graciously granted life with the Lord beyond death. It is to guarantee resurrection to eternal life in God's recreated heavens and earth. It is also to be restored to God's blessed life in the present, to begin to experience the authentic life for which humans were made.

The latter does not imply an easy or materially wealthy life, of course. Salvation comes by the cross and calls the saved to take up their crosses ([Luke 9:22-26](#)). But salvation also transforms our perspectives to realize that the life of humble service in the Lord's name is the divinely blessed life for which God has created us. For Zacchaeus, the salvation that comes to his *house ... today* is more than the assurance that death will not have the final word. It is also his restoration to the authentic life of God's people.

9b. "because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

Zacchaeus's contemporaries consider him a traitor who has forfeited citizenship in Israel, God's people. Jesus now pronounces the opposite: Zacchaeus is a *son of Abraham*.

It is no accident that Jesus refers to Abraham instead of Jacob, Abraham's grandson who became father of the 12

tribes. God's promise is to bless all nations through Abraham's seed ([Genesis 12:3](#); [22:18](#)). Having been considered by his neighbors to be part of the pagan nations, Zacchaeus is now reclaimed for God's people according to God's promise. Ironically, those devout Jews who are hostile to Zacchaeus run the risk of missing out on God's promise if they fail to respond to God's generosity in Jesus as Zacchaeus has just done.

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

In the New Testament, the expression *Son of man*, with one exception ([John 12:34](#)), is used only by Jesus to refer to himself. Though its significance is widely debated, most scholars today affirm that Jesus is alluding to [Daniel 7:13, 14](#). There "one like a son of man" is a figure who reigns over God's kingdom as God defeats the beastly empires that have oppressed his people in the past. In other words, Jesus' referring to himself as *the Son of Man* is a veiled claim to be God's triumphant king.

How does that king rule? This episode of today's text illustrates Jesus' rule as one who seeks and saves *the lost*. Jesus called Zacchaeus down to him as that man looked down from a tree. Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus's home as an expression of grace. Jesus has pronounced salvation as coming to Zaccha-

eus's house; that affirmation is of Jesus' authority alone, apart from temple and sacrifice. Whatever opinion of Zacchaeus his neighbors hold, Zacchaeus is now surely identified as having been lost but now found and saved. He is a success story of the divine search-and-rescue mission.

When Jesus encountered criticism for eating with tax collectors previously in this Gospel, he restated his mission in similar terms (see [Luke 5:32](#)). The result was celebration for the lost as having been found ([15:7, 10, 32](#)).

What Do You Think?

What changes will you make to better prepare to pursue the calling to seek and save the lost?

Digging Deeper

Which Scriptures convict you most in this regard? Why?

Conclusion

A. Two Different Responses

Considering Zacchaeus's pledge to give half his wealth to the poor, we may wonder why Jesus celebrated that promise when he had challenged the rich young ruler to give it all ([Luke 18:22](#)). The difference is in how each man viewed himself and how that view directed the response of each.

The ruler came to Jesus in self-assurance. He intended to do some great deed that would earn God's favor (Luke 18:18). He was quite sure that he was blameless before God's law (18:21). Zacchaeus, on the other hand, responded with repentant generosity. He recognized his real need—his weakness in what seemed like strength—and was ready to accept indignity in order to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

God's grace in Jesus seemed to be far more than Zacchaeus had hoped for. His generous pledge was not a means of earning God's gift. Rather, it was a grateful response to the gift he had received in his weakness. His generosity reflected that of the Christ who stood before him on the way to the cross.

Which man are you more like? Are you trying to offer something to God as a gift? Or having received his gift without merit, are you reflecting it with a life of Christlike generosity?

B. Prayer

Father, we are helpless on our own. Grateful for your incomparable gift, we ask that your Spirit empower us to reflect your grace in every part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen!

C. Thought to Remember

God grants his grace to those who know

they need it.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Prepare slips of paper on which are printed these job descriptions, one per slip: I work from home; my job involves accounting; I am on the computer four or more hours a day; I checked my work e-mail this weekend; my work involves transportation; I work in sales; I can wear jeans to work. Have everyone stand (or hold a hand up).

Say, "If the slip I read applies to your current (or if retired or unemployed, previous) work situation, please sit down (or drop your hand)." Draw a slip from a container and read it aloud. Repeat until only one person is left. Give the winner a token prize, such as a box of paper clips.

Say, "The work situations mentioned may be stressful personally, but they don't necessarily cause others to hate you. But what would it be like if everyone treated you as an outcast because of your profession? Zacchaeus met a man one day who did not hate him. Let's see why."

Alternative. On the board, draw blanks for a seven-letter word. Announce that you're going to play a game of Snowman to guess a word. Divide the class in half

and ask one side to begin guessing letters. For every wrong guess, write that letter on the board and draw one of the parts of a snowman so that nine mistakes results in a complete snowman and loss of game. Once the correct answer of *Jericho* is revealed, say, "This is the city in which today's lesson takes place."

Then erase that game and do the same for the name *Zacchaeus*, for the other team. Afterward, say, "Jesus was passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem to die. Zacchaeus was headed toward eternal death until he encountered Jesus. Let's see how much you know about the story."

Into the Word

Test learners' familiarity with the account of Zacchaeus by reading the following statements and inviting answers of either true or false as to whether it applies to Zacchaeus. 1-Well-respected (*F*); 2-A tax collector (*T*); 3-Wealthy (*T*); 4-Tall (*F*); 5-Climbed a tree (*T*); 6-Had met Jesus before (*F*); 7-Jesus addressed him by name (*T*); 8-He invited Jesus to his home (*F*); 9-The crowd was happy for Zacchaeus (*F*); 10-He offered to give half of his goods to the poor (*T*); 11-He denied ever having cheated anyone (*F*); 12-Jesus said salvation had come to his house (*T*). (*Option.* Put the statements [without answers] on handouts for learners to take

individually, then score their own.)

Distribute handouts of the following assignment (you prepare) to groups of four or five: “Interview Zacchaeus to find out why his life changed so dramatically. Select someone from your group to be the interviewer and another to be Zacchaeus. Then work together to write searching questions and appropriate responses. Be sure to explore what he was like before and after he met Jesus.”

Ask each group to present its best question and answer to the rest of the class.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Transformed!” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete it. Ask volunteers to share their answers.

Into Life

List the following categories on the board:

*Attitude Toward Money / Hope of Heaven
Compassion for Others / Quality of Work*

Say, “After he encountered Jesus’ loving acceptance, Zacchaeus’s life was dramatically changed in each of these areas.” Have students pair off and discuss how their own lives have been changed as a result of their encounter with Jesus in one or more of those areas.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Big

Announcement” activity from the reproducible page. Encourage completion either in class or during devotional time in the week ahead.