

Group Study Guide

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

Why Christmas? (Luke 19:1-10)

12.10.17

Main Point

Amid a busy Christmas season, we must not forget why we celebrate the birth of Jesus. This morning, we are reminded that Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost.

Getting Started

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When you hear the name “Zacchaeus,” what immediately comes to mind?

What types of things do you think Zacchaeus wished about himself?

What is the biggest wish for your life? Why?

We often consider the story of Zacchaeus to be a children’s story. However, it reveals important truths about Jesus’ mission and the resulting change of one who embraced His message. Just as Jesus sought out Zacchaeus and transformed his life, Jesus seeks us out, saves us, and re-purposes our lives to be used by Him. The love of Jesus compels those who receive it to extend it to those around them. Jesus is the reason for the season, and Jesus is still seeking lost people like Zacchaeus today.

Observation

Ask a volunteer to Read Luke 19:1-6.

Why do you think it was important for Luke to mention that Zacchaeus was a tax collector? What reputation did tax collectors have in this day and time?

What did Zacchaeus do in this story to see Jesus?

What other stories can you recall of Jesus’ interactions with the outcasts and sinners in that society? What does this show you about who Jesus is and what He values?

Zacchaeus was head of the large office of tax collectors for Jericho. As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus likely purchased from Rome the right to collect the taxes due for the area. By using subordinates, he imposed heavy— probably exorbitant—taxation on the people and caravans to reimburse himself and also to make a huge profit. The people likely resented Zacchaeus for being a traitor to their country, a tax collector for a foreign power, and for exploiting them. The people judged tax collectors to be chief sinners.

What can we gather about Zacchaeus' desire to meet Jesus based on his persistence to see Him (v. 4)? How easily might it have been for Zacchaeus to give up from the start?

Given that running in public was considered undignified behavior in that day, what can we learn about the importance Zacchaeus placed on a potential relationship with Jesus above others' thoughts or perceptions of him?

Why do you think Jesus wanted to meet in Zacchaeus' house? What does this indicate about His ability and desire to meet us where we are in our relationships with Him?

Zacchaeus likely knew how Jesus stepped across social and religious barriers to share God's love with all people, even those who were hated by others. Zacchaeus likely knew of Jesus' ability to overcome social limitations. He wanted to see this one who befriended tax collectors and sinners. He could not see because he was short, so up he climbed into the tree.

Ask a volunteer to Read Luke 19:7-10.

Why do you think those around them "grumbled" based on Jesus' actions (v. 7)?

What might this have indicated about their own pride and judgment?

Jesus could have won a following from the prejudiced crowd by belittling Zacchaeus. Instead, Jesus exposed Himself to their anger by choosing to stay at Zacchaeus's house. Jesus befriended Zacchaeus to show God's love for people others hated most. Also, He sought to open doors to reach other sinners, to make Himself known to those who desire to see Him, and to fulfill His mission of love.

What transformation must have occurred in Zacchaeus to spur his reaction in v. 8?

How might this have been a change from the way he would have responded to the poor before his relationship with Jesus?

What might have been the reaction of those who previously grumbled to this act of generosity? How might it have spoken to or even silenced their previous complaints?

Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus and then to the crowd. Jesus gave Zacchaeus assurance of his salvation. That salvation included a covenant relationship with God in which God would never forsake him, but would do all things necessary to make Zacchaeus like Christ. By sharing about Zacchaeus's faith and salvation in front of the crowd, Jesus shows us that salvation is both personal and for all people. His power to save is greater than the many limitations faced by Zacchaeus and even the crowd.

Application

What can we learn from Zacchaeus' example in terms of seeking the Lord?

How might gratitude for Jesus' forgiveness and cleansing have spurred Zacchaeus' selflessness and compassion for others? What does love require of us in terms of showing compassion to others?

What can we do to love people where they are, just as Jesus did for Zacchaeus?

Take some time to pray for your five in your small group today. Consider that Jesus still seeks and saves the lost, as he did in Zacchaeus' day.

Prayer

Close your group time in prayer together. Take time to thank God for sending Jesus, who is greater than all these barriers, and who meets us where we are to form a relationship with us and to draw us to Himself. Pray that group members would trust in their relationships with Jesus alone this week, overflowing His love and grace in relationships with others.

Commentary

19:1-2. "Zacchaeus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew Zaccai (see Ezra 2:9; Neh. 7:14). Nothing else is known about this man. Although the name in Hebrew means "Righteous One," nothing is made of the meaning of the name. Jericho was a well-known toll place in Palestine, especially for goods passing east and west between Judea and Perea.

19:3. He wanted to see who Jesus was. We are not explicitly told why. It was not for the sake of curiosity (see 9:9; 23:8) or to see him perform a sign (see 11:16,29; 23:8). Luke revealed to his readers what Zacchaeus sought by describing what he received in 19:9. Zacchaeus sought the salvation Jesus spoke of in 19:9-10. Being a short man, the crowds proved to be a hindrance for Zacchaeus both here and in 19:7.

19:4. Such undignified behavior, according to that culture, indicates that more than curiosity was at play here. Herodian Jericho, unlike Old Testament Jericho, had numerous parks and avenues in which trees grew. The phrase "since Jesus was coming that way" is literally because He was about to pass through [that way]. The same verb is used here as in 19:1.

19:5-6. How Jesus knew Zacchaeus's name is not stated. Was it due to supernatural knowledge (see John 1:47-48)? Was it due to Zacchaeus's being small of stature and well-known? Whatever the explanation of this in Jesus' setting in life, for Luke, such a question was unimportant and probably irrelevant since he made nothing of this. The "must" (dei) in "I must stay" implies a divine necessity to do so. Just as Jesus' forthcoming passion in Jerusalem was divinely ordained, so Jesus' individual actions all fit into the divine plan, even his bringing salvation to Zacchaeus's home. Because of Luke 19:10, Jesus had to stay at Zacchaeus's home. Besides the literal meaning of "today," there may be a suggestion here of God's kingdom having come in Jesus'

ministry with its offer of salvation to the outcasts (see 4:21). “Today” prepares the reader for the “today” in 19:9.

19:7. The symbolic significance of Jesus’ staying in Zacchaeus’ home was clear to all. The people’s negative attitude stands in contrast to Luke’s usual portrayal of their being positive toward Jesus.

19:8 But Zacchaeus stood up. We are not told if this took place after Zacchaeus came down from the tree, in Zacchaeus’ home, or after dinner. For Luke, such a question was unimportant. The verbs “give” and “pay back” in this verse are in the present tense in Greek and may be translated “I am in the habit of giving” or “I shall now give.” “Half of my possessions” refers to half of his belongings (see 8:3; 12:33; Acts 4:32), not his earnings. In other less severe instances the Old Testament requires only a 20 percent increase (Lev. 6:5; Num. 5:6-7). It is best understood as a futuristic present, which along with his giving half of his goods to the poor reveals in Zacchaeus’s actions what “I repent” says in words.

19:9-10. The statement was made to Zacchaeus, but it was directed to the people because of their reaction in Luke 19:7. The salvation brought by God’s kingdom was now “realized” by Zacchaeus. “Salvation has come” is not to be interpreted as meaning that the “Savior” had come to Zacchaeus’s house but that salvation had occurred. The lost Zacchaeus had been sought (see 19:5) and now saved (see 19:10). The promised salvation had come to Zacchaeus and his family (see Acts 16:31).

“Because this man, too, is a son of Abraham” was not due to his being racially a descendant of Abraham (see 3:8) but to his having brought forth fruit in keeping with repentance (3:8a) and having responded in faith and repentance to Abraham’s Seed (Acts 3:25-26; see Gal. 3:16). By this, Zacchaeus bore witness to God’s grace by which even a rich man can be saved (see Luke 18:27). For the sense of being Abraham’s seed due to physical descent, see 13:16.