

ZACCHAEUS

Week 2 | Rascals | Luke 19:1-10

Deeper Dive

During this time in Judea, the tax collectors were Jewish people contracted by the Romans to further oppress their own Jewish communities through heavy taxation. These tax collectors would take more than the required amount as a profit for themselves, often making themselves very wealthy while placing the burden on their entire community. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors, thieves, corrupt, greedy, outcasts, and "unclean" by the Jewish people. This was an occupation that chose greed and wealth over their own family, friends and faith.

Luke describes Zacchaeus as the "chief" tax collector. This indicated that he was in authority over many tax collectors, most likely had been in this occupation a long time, and would collect profits from those he managed giving him extreme wealth.

The city of Jericho, where our story takes place, was a thriving affluent city and was known to be a place that the Romans oppressed & overburdened the Jewish people with taxation.

Day 1 - Seen

READ: Luke 19:1-4

What does it mean to be "seen"? Mental health experts would say it's defined by our basic human need for recognition and acceptance. As social beings we biologically, neurologically and spiritually depend on deep connection & belonging. On the flip side, social rejection or feeling "unseen" has the same neural pathways in our brain as physical pain. Many times we can be so desperate to escape this pain, that we will settle for fake or "conditional belonging". We see this in political groups, extremist ideologies, and even places like fraternities where students will engage in dangerous or malicious acts just to gain acceptance from peers. With "conditional belonging" you have to wear a mask or embody a certain persona to go along with the crowd or risk being exiled from it. True belonging isn't conditional on your compliance. In fact, it requires a level of realness, authenticity, vulnerability, and humility. Sometimes the hardest part about being "seen" is the struggle to simply show up as the real you.

Zacchaeus was a man rejected by his community and "seen" as an outcast, traitor, thief, and the "chief" of all those. He had great material wealth, but lacked true belonging. He was "seen" and labeled as his past mistakes and sin. As our story begins, Luke shares an important detail that we may have missed in our modern context. When he says Zacchaeus RAN & CLIMBED a tree to see Jesus, the original readers would have gasped. In Jesus' time it was extremely humiliating for a man of his status to run, and certainly to climb a tree. This shows us that Zacchaeus' heart was in a place where he was ready and willing to humble himself and become vulnerable to see Jesus. Jesus knows this, sees him, knows his heart, knows his brokenness, and He sees him for more than his mistakes. In the end, Zacchaeus is "seen" and accepted by the only one who truly matters in the crowd.

- Is it hard or easy for you to believe that the same Jesus that saw Zacchaeus in this broken humbling moment is the same Jesus that sees you and me in all our messiness right now? Why, or why not?
- Do you find yourself hiding behind masks, or labeling yourself with your past mistakes? What would it look like to humbly "run and climb a tree" in order to surrender all your brokenness & be seen by the only one that truly matters?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Isaiah 43:1** ~But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
- **Revelation 3:20** ~Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.
- **1 Samuel 16:7** ~But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”
- **Psalms 139: 1-3** ~You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.
- **Genesis 16:13** ~“You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”

Day 2 - Called by name

READ: Luke 19:5

Let's take a moment to place ourselves in Jericho that day. This was towards the end of Jesus' ministry when most had heard of his teachings and huge crowds were curious to see him. Luke mentions that Zacchaeus was "short in stature" in verse 3 and couldn't see over the crowd. We can also imagine that since the crowd probably despised Zacchaeus, they surely didn't allow him space to join them. Zacchaeus didn't give up and decided to desperately & humbly run and climb a tree to see. As we discussed yesterday, this was a culturally humiliating act. We can only imagine how Zacchaeus must have felt as Jesus got closer and looked up towards him. Maybe it was a mixture of fear, excitement, and curiosity. THEN, Jesus calls him by NAME! This is a powerful moment. This signaled Jesus' personal knowledge and concern for him. This was recognition, acceptance, and value to someone that was likely very accustomed to rejection. When Jesus spoke we can imagine that the crowd grew quiet to hear him. Imagine the tension that must have been in the air. Was Jesus going to rebuke this man that had sinned against them? Instead, as Jesus often does, He does the unthinkable. Jesus asks to be a guest in Zacchaeus' home. For cultural context, sharing a meal in someone's home meant acceptance, friendship, trust, reconciliation, and genuine fellowship. This wasn't just a meal, this wasn't just knowing his name, this was grace and redemption for someone that most had written off as too far gone.

Zacchaeus's life embodied many contradictions. He was physically wealthy, but spiritually impoverished. He held status and power, but was socially rejected. His chosen occupation was a model of corruption, greed and deceit, but his name literally translates to mean - "clean, pure, innocent". Many times we experience similar contradictions in our own lives. Maybe we outwardly look successful by the world's standards or we put on a good "mask" at church. Then, behind closed doors we are experiencing brokenness, rejection, addiction or sin, health challenges, spiritual poverty, or maybe it's just an empty feeling that something is missing in your life. Maybe you feel like you are too far gone for God to call your name, or to redeem what you've been going through. Rest assured, just like Zacchaeus, no one is too far gone, no one is beyond His reach, no one is too far away to be seen, known, and called by God. You don't need to have it all figured out for Jesus to come to your house today. Run ahead, get up in that tree, seek Him, and He WILL 100% meet you there!

- What would happen if you humbled yourself, threw away the masks, and embraced the vulnerability that comes with running towards Jesus today? Where have you believed the lie that you are too far gone, or too broken, for Him to come into your house with His love, grace, redemption, and acceptance?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Romans 8:1** ~Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
- **John 8: 10-11** ~Jesus asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."
- **Galatians 1:10** ~Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.'
- **2 Corinthians 5:17**
~Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
- **1 Corinthians 12:27** ~But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Day 3 - Identified

READ: Luke 19:6-7

Most of us remember the old saying "sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me". Of course we all know that words can truly hurt worse. If you've ever experienced a childhood bully, then you know this to be true. Many times when we think about our core identity, we can mistakenly insert the perception or words of others. This is often a flawed perception based on their own bias filters. Sometimes their words can over-inflate your ego seeking to flatter or to earn favor. Sometimes their words will tear you down due to their own personal inadequacies. When we allow this, we grant flawed individuals control over our identity & inner narrative about ourselves. This is not the identity that God has for us, and it's important to remember that their perception is not the way that God sees us.

A common theme in the gospels is that those who identify with their own self-righteousness prefer to label others by their sin. They struggle to accept the new identity that God can give through His grace. This was exactly what Zacchaeus experienced in verse 7 when the crowd grumbled at Jesus' willingness to choose Zacchaeus. Instead of rejoicing in this moment of potential redemption, they accuse Jesus of associating with a sinner. They couldn't see the big picture that Jesus could give him a brand new identity. Of course we all struggle with this at times, whether it's with others or within ourselves.

Let's take a look at who God says we are?

1. **Created** - Genesis 1:27 - We are intentionally and lovingly created by God. He knows the number of hairs on our heads, our thoughts before we think them, and He loves us unconditionally.
2. **Made New** - 2 Corinthians 5:17 - When we say YES to Jesus we are made new! We are promised a brand new life with Him.
3. **Family** - John 1: 12-13 - We are adopted into God's family. We are His heirs, His sons and daughters, and members of His household. He is our loving Father and we are never alone!
4. **His Body** - 1 Corinthians 12:27 - We are given a role to play in the body of Christ. He knows our strengths and weaknesses, and He places a purpose & calling on each of our lives.
5. **Forgiven** - 1 John 2:12 - We are not labeled by our past mistakes and sins. We are accepted, healed, reconciled, victorious, and completely forgiven and set free from our past, no matter what.

- Are there any false labels or identities that you have believed about yourself? Are there any of these identities that are hard for you to believe and accept from God? What would it take for you to surrender those to Him today?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Ephesians 2: 8-9** ~For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.
- **Romans 5:8** ~But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- **Luke 15:20-24** ~But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.
- **2 Peter 3:9** ~The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Day 4 - Transformed by grace

READ: Luke 19:8-10

When we think about desiring spiritual transformation in our lives, we will often overwhelm ourselves with a checklist of spiritual practices or methods we are trying to follow. In our human nature we want to earn it, control it, and strive to make it happen. We believe that transformation can only come from hard work and effort, right? Maybe you grab a new devotional, study how to do specific types of ultra-spiritual prayers, or take up a new daily practice to draw you closer to God. While these can be really good things, they can also be distractions, over complications, or a prideful way of trying to earn God's grace. This is exactly what the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus' day were doing. They believed that in order to receive transformation from God, you had to first obey the religious laws, repent, and remove any sin from your life. Only then could you earn the chance to be closer to the Lord. This is like the spiritual equivalent to the "chicken or the egg" question. Which comes first? Do we have to clean up our act first, or come to God first?

Jesus would say the later. Over and over in scripture we are told that we are redeemed through His grace alone. While spiritual practices are good and will absolutely strengthen your faith, they should be BECAUSE of God's grace in our lives and not IN ORDER TO receive it. Just like the prodigal son who came to the Father while still covered in mud, starving, desperate, empty, and deep in brokenness. Jesus WILL run to meet you, accept you as you are, and welcome you home! Once you experience His grace, that's when the party happens.

This is exactly what happens to Zacchaeus. Jesus met him with grace, acceptance and love FIRST. He didn't ask Zacchaeus to get a new occupation or to remove the sin from his life before He could eat with him. Jesus met him right where he was in his humiliation, rejection, brokenness and searching. Zacchaeus' immediate response to this is life changing. He repents, publicly changes his ways, and even gives back what he had stolen. Zacchaeus has a powerful FULL spiritual transformation due to the presence of Jesus in his life. God's presence in our lives is what inspires true and lasting transformation. In fact, the Bible says we NEED to have Him in our lives before we CAN change. There is no way for us to work or earn our way towards redemption. We need His strength and His Spirit to guide us there.

- Are there ways that you are trying to earn God's promises or transformation in your life? Are there spiritual things that you are doing FOR God in your own strength? A good indicator is to look at the areas where you have grown weary of doing good things.
- What would it look like to come to God in all your mess FIRST and seek what He would have you do to draw closer to Him? What is God calling you to do BECAUSE of His love and forgiveness in your life?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Ezekiel 36:26** ~I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh
- **Jeremiah 29: 12-14**
~Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."
- **James 4:8** ~Come near to God and he will come near to you.
- **Psalms 63:1** ~You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water."
- **Hebrews 10:24-25** ~And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.

Day 5 - Living restored

In some ways we can all relate to Zacchaeus at some point in our lives. We have all made mistakes, felt rejected, been embarrassed, felt far from God, and had moments that we were stuck in our shame. Some of us might be in that space right now. This story in Luke shows us that we don't need to have all the answers, we don't have to put our lives back together, and we don't have to clean ourselves up to receive God's grace. In fact, we can't do it on our own. Humbly and earnestly seek Jesus and let Him find you, listen as He calls you by name, say yes to His invitation, and enter into His life transforming presence!

Let's take a look at how we can live into these daily simple truths:

1. **UP: Move towards Jesus no matter what** - When you mess up, pray immediately. Let go of the unworthiness and shame, and allow His grace to meet you there. Read His Word even when you don't feel like it. Show up to church even when you feel like a fraud and your shame tries to keep you away. Meet with your small group even when you haven't had time to read that week and you're exhausted. You need HIM most when you have weeks like this. Pursue Him, show up, run and climb that tree no matter how imperfect you feel or how much you want to give up trying to see over the crowd.
2. **IN: Don't hesitate** - When Jesus meets you at the bottom of the tree, accept His invitation. Say yes and invite Him into your very imperfect home. When He asks you to give Him your brokenness, burdens and baggage allow Him to redeem it. You will be changed by being in His presence.
3. **OUT: Don't give up on yourself or others** - No one in your life is too far gone, including you. Jesus doesn't care where you've been, He only cares that you turn towards Him. Instead of labeling people at their worst, surrender them to the Lord and pray for them. Instead of the broken record of shame and the identity you have given yourself from your past sin, listen to who HE says you are. Persistently pray for those that are far from His grace in your life. Jesus doesn't give up, and we shouldn't either.
 - What barriers get in the way of you seeking Jesus no matter what? How could you show up and turn towards Him even when you don't "feel like it", or your shame pushes you into hiding?
 - What barriers get in the way of accepting His invitation of grace? What would it look like to surrender those to Him today?
 - Who have you given up on? Yourself? Someone else? Pray and give that over to the Lord today.