WITHIN REACH · WEEK 6

The God Who Came for You

September 20, 2026 · Luke 19:1–10 · Pastor Bart Denny

THE BIG IDEA

Zacchaeus climbed a tree hoping to see Jesus and found that Jesus had come for him, and He has come for us too.

This guide works two ways. On your own, take one section a day through the week, or use the daily readings near the end. In a group, plan on about an hour: read the passage aloud, talk through the background, then choose the questions that fit your group. Nobody has to answer every one.

Read **Luke 19:1–10** at least twice, once quietly and once aloud. If you have time, read **Luke 18:18–43** first, because Luke places those stories right before this one on purpose. This was Within Reach Sunday, the last week of the series. For six weeks we prayed for our ONE, tried to love them well and invited them to come with us. Some people were here that morning because somebody invited them. Whether you've followed Jesus for decades or you're still deciding what you believe about Him, this story is for you.

Where this passage sits

From Luke 9:51 on, Jesus is walking toward Jerusalem, where He knows He will be rejected, killed and raised (18:31–33). Jericho is the last town before the climb up to the city. Zacchaeus is one of the last people Jesus meets on the way to the cross.

Luke sets this story up carefully. In 18:18–23, a rich ruler, respectable and religious, asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to sell everything, give to the poor and follow Him, and the man goes away sad, "because he was very wealthy." Jesus says, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" Many people then assumed wealth was a sign of God's blessing, so the listeners ask, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus answers, "What is impossible with man is possible with God" (18:24–27).

Then, a few verses later, Luke introduces another wealthy man, and this one's wealth came from greed. Luke has raised the question "Who can be saved?" Now Jesus shows us.

A few words worth a closer look

"Chief tax collector" (19:2)

Tax collectors gathered revenue for the Roman occupiers and had plenty of room to enrich themselves. Most people considered them traitors and thieves. Zacchaeus was over other tax collectors, and Luke makes sure we know he was rich.

"Sycamore-fig tree" (19:4)

Not the sycamore of North America. It's a broad fig tree with low, spreading branches, easy to climb.

"I must stay at your house today" (19:5)

Luke uses *must* when Jesus speaks of His mission: the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, be killed and rise (9:22; 24:7, 26). This visit is part of God's purpose.

"Sinner" (19:7)

The crowd's label for Zacchaeus, and not an unfair one. Jesus answers it with a different name.

"Four times the amount" (19:8)

The Law required fourfold repayment for a stolen sheep (Exodus 22:1), and for fraud, the amount taken plus a fifth (Leviticus 6:5). Zacchaeus goes past the minimum.

"Son of Abraham" (19:9)

A member of God's covenant family. The crowd had written him off. Jesus says he belongs.

"Seek and to save the lost" (19:10)

It echoes Ezekiel 34:16, where God promises to search for His lost sheep, and the three parables of Luke 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.

1 Let Jesus close the distance

READ Luke 19:1–7, Luke 18:18–27 and Luke 5:27–32

Zacchaeus wants to see who Jesus is, but he's short and can't see over the crowd. So he runs ahead and climbs a tree. There's something almost comical about it: a wealthy, important man, probably used to people coming to him, scrambling up a tree. He seems to have left some of his dignity on the ground.

Notice, though, how far he plans to go. He doesn't call out to Jesus or approach Him. He finds a place where he can watch. That's a familiar posture. A person can be genuinely interested in Jesus, admire much of what He teaches and still keep enough distance that He doesn't disrupt their life very much.

Then Jesus reaches the tree, stops and looks up: "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Luke gives no sign the two had ever met, yet Jesus knows his name. Pastor Bart asked us to picture walking into a crowded room where you don't know anyone, until someone across the room calls your name and waves you over. Now imagine that the one calling your name is the person everyone else came to see.

The crowd doesn't like it: "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." Before we criticize them, we should admit they had reasons. Zacchaeus had earned his reputation. He'd gotten rich by cheating people, and he admits as much a few verses later. The crowd wasn't wrong to see his sin. They were wrong to think his sin meant Jesus should stay away. Jesus had already answered that when He ate with Levi and his tax-collector friends: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (5:31–32). Like an old-fashioned doctor making house calls, Jesus goes where the sick person is.

Jesus doesn't get close to us and then discover what we've done. He already knows. He knew how Zacchaeus made his money, and knowing all of it, He stopped and called his name. That's grace. "So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly."

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Zacchaeus went to some trouble just to see Jesus. What do you think made him curious?

2. Where do you see people today who are interested in Jesus but keep their distance? Have you ever done that?

3. How would you have felt in the crowd when Jesus picked Zacchaeus's house? Be honest.

4. Read Luke 18:18–27 and then 19:1–10. What do you notice when you put the rich ruler and Zacchaeus side by side?

5. Jesus knew everything about Zacchaeus before He called his name. Is that comforting or uncomfortable for you? Why?

6. Has anyone ever "called your name" in a way that made you feel you belonged? What did it mean to you?

2 Let Jesus change your direction

READ Luke 19:8–10, Ephesians 2:8–10, Acts 3:19 and Exodus 22:1

Zacchaeus stands up and says, "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." Luke introduced him as wealthy. Now he's giving half of it away and making it right with the people he cheated.

Get the order right. Zacchaeus isn't buying salvation. Jesus didn't say, "Pay everyone back and give enough away, and then I'll come to your house." He had already stopped under the tree and called Zacchaeus's name. Grace came first. Some people hear Christians and think the gospel means, *Clean yourself up, get your life under control, and then maybe God will accept you.* That isn't the gospel. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith . . . not by works" (Ephesians 2:8–9). The next verse says we are "created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (2:10). Good works don't earn salvation. They grow out of a life touched by God's grace.

For Zacchaeus, the change shows up in his money, because money had taken up so much room in the life he'd built. And he isn't looking for the minimum. The Law required fourfold repayment for a stolen sheep and the amount plus a fifth for fraud. He wants to make things right.

Pastor Bart's example: you back out of a parking space and hear that awful crunch. You can feel terrible about it, and you can tell yourself you're usually a careful driver. Repentance takes visible form when you leave your name and phone number and take responsibility. Feeling bad and turning around aren't the same thing. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19). Repentance doesn't mean repairing ourselves well enough to deserve forgiveness. It means we stop defending the road that's been taking us away from God.

Then Jesus says, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.” The crowd called him a sinner. Jesus calls him a son of Abraham. And then He explains the whole story: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Jesus’ journey doesn’t end in Jericho. In Jerusalem He will be rejected and crucified, and on the cross He will deal with the sin that separates us from God. “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24). On the third day He rose. That doesn’t mean every consequence of Zacchaeus’s old life disappears. He still has people to repay, and some in Jericho may never trust him again. But he isn’t headed the same way anymore (2 Corinthians 5:17).

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does it matter so much that Jesus came to Zacchaeus *before* Zacchaeus promised to change?
2. Where have you heard the gospel described as “clean yourself up first”? How does this story answer that?
3. Why do you think the change in Zacchaeus showed up first in his money?
4. What’s the difference between feeling bad about something and repenting of it? Think of the parking-lot example.
5. Is there something you need to make right with someone? What would “leaving your name and number” look like?
6. Zacchaeus still had consequences to face after he was forgiven. How do forgiveness and consequences fit together?

Jesus came for you

READ Luke 19:10, John 3:16, Romans 3:23, Romans 10:9 and 1 Peter 2:24

This Sunday spoke to two groups of people.

Some of us spent the whole series praying for our ONE. Maybe they came with you, and maybe they didn’t. Keep praying. Don’t assume that because you can’t see anything happening, nothing is happening. Zacchaeus had no idea, when he climbed that tree, that Jesus was about to stop and call his name. We can’t save anybody. We can love people, pray for them, speak about Jesus when God gives the opportunity and walk with them through their questions. Jesus loved your ONE before you ever started praying for them, and He’s still the One who seeks and saves.

Others may understand Zacchaeus better than they expected: interested, listening, but keeping some distance. If that’s you, notice where the action starts. It starts with Jesus. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). We need what He has done, because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans

3:23). We can't undo our sin by becoming more religious or by piling up good deeds. Jesus bore our sins on the cross and rose on the third day, and He offers forgiveness and new life to everyone who trusts Him. "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

You don't have to clean yourself up first. Zacchaeus didn't. There's no special prayer that saves you; Jesus saves you. But you can speak to Him honestly: confess your sin, ask Him to forgive you, tell Him you believe He died for you and rose again, and put your trust in Him. If you do, please tell Pastor Bart or someone at Pathway. Following Jesus was never meant to be something you figure out by yourself.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. If you've been praying for your ONE, what keeps you going when you don't see anything happening?

2. Which group did you find yourself in as you read this section? Why?

3. If you're a follower of Jesus, how would you explain to a friend, in a few sentences, what it means to trust Him?

Through the week

☐	**Monday**	Luke 18:18–30. What did the rich ruler lose by walking away? What does Jesus say is possible with God?
☐	**Tuesday**	Luke 19:1–7 and Luke 5:27–32. Thank Jesus that He knows your name and came for you anyway.
☐	**Wednesday**	Luke 15:1–10. Notice the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Pray for your ONE by name.
☐	**Thursday**	Luke 19:8–10, Ephesians 2:8–10 and Acts 3:19. Ask God whether there's anything you need to make right.
☐	**Friday**	Isaiah 53:4–6, 1 Peter 2:21–25 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. Thank God for what Jesus did on the cross and for new life in Him.

Try this

Write Luke 19:10 on a card and keep it where you'll see it: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Each time you read it this week, pray for your ONE by name. And if there's a wrong you need to make right, take one concrete step toward it.

Close in prayer

Father, thank You that You came looking for us. Thank You for sending Jesus to seek and to save the lost. For those of us who know You, help us keep loving and praying for the people You've placed within our reach, and help us trust You with the results. For anyone turning toward You today, give them faith to trust Jesus and courage to follow Him. Thank You for Your grace, and thank You that Jesus came for us. In His name, amen.

Notes

Watch the sermon online

Scan the code or visit **pathwaywes.com/sermons/the-god-who-came-for-you** for the video, this guide and Pastor Bart's blog post on this week's message.

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