



# MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church  
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**TITLE:** Seeking to Bring Us JOY!

**SERMON IN A SENTENCE:** Christ seeks to bring us into the Kingdom of JOY.

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 19:1-10

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 19, verses 1 to 10.

Starting at verse 1:

He entered Jericho and was passing through.

There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man.

So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since He was about to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today I must stay at your house."

So he quickly came down and welcomed Him joyfully.

All who saw it began to complain, "He's gone to lodge with a sinful man!"

But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord! And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much!"

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

-- May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

-- I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

-- I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

When I was a child, we used to sing this song in Sunday school:

Zacchaeus was a wee little man,  
A wee little man was he,  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree  
For the Lord he wanted to see;

And as the Savior passed that way,  
He looked up in the tree,  
And He said, "Zacchaeus, you come down,  
For I'm going to your house today,  
For I'm going to your house today."

Just saying it doesn't give it justice. I will play a little clip of this song:

We loved that song, in part, because we were wee little kids, and found the thought of a wee little man amusing.

We loved it, in part, because the wee little man—small like us—was the hero of the story.

- When we sang about the "wee little man," we held our thumb and forefinger about an inch apart to show how small he was.
- When we sang about him climbing the tree, we would reach up with one hand and then the other, as if we were climbing the tree.
- When we sang about him wanting to see Jesus, we held our hand to shade our eyes, as if we were looking for someone in the distance.

I still enjoy the story of Zacchaeus—in part because of that song—and in part because it is an amusing, happy story:

- Amusing, because it involves a short but rich man climbing a tree to see Jesus.
- Happy, because it shows Jesus welcoming this man whom nobody else liked. It says that Jesus saved him—brought salvation to his house—restored him to be a son of Abraham.
- And it is also a happy story because of the last verse. In the last verse of the story, Jesus talks about you and me. Listen to what he says:

"For the Son of Man came  
to seek and to save  
that which was lost" (v. 10).

That's you. That's me. We were lost. Jesus came to save us.

Of course, in this story, Jesus was referring to Zacchaeus, who was lost. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, and was probably dishonest. People hated him—no doubt about that! My guess is that Zacchaeus felt that God hated him too—but God didn't hate him.

If God needed reasons to hate Zacchaeus, he could surely find them. Zacchaeus had probably gotten rich by overcharging poor people. God has very little patience with rich people who cheat poor people. If God wanted to damn Zacchaeus, he could find plenty of reasons for doing so—and Zacchaeus knew it.

But God didn't want to damn Zacchaeus. God wanted to SAVE him! That is the happiest part of this story. Zacchaeus didn't deserve to be saved, but God WANTED to save him. We know that because of something that Jesus said. When Jesus spotted Zacchaeus up in the sycamore tree, he said:

"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down,  
for today I must stay at your house" (v. 5).

For Jesus to single out Zacchaeus conferred great honor on Zacchaeus. Jesus was popular. People loved him. People wanted to hear him—to touch him—to get near enough to him so that even his shadow would touch them.

Jesus was a great celebrity. For him to go to Zacchaeus' home was like having the president come to lunch. It was hard to imagine such an honor. It would have been especially hard for Zacchaeus to imagine that Jesus would come to his house, because everyone knew that Zacchaeus was a sinner. If Jesus were going to honor someone with a visit, surely he would honor a saint! But, no! Jesus decided to honor this sinner! Amazing!

Jesus explained his visit this way. He said, "Zacchaeus..., today I MUST stay at your house."

This little word, "must," is important. In the original Greek, the word is *dei* (pronounced day-ee). *Dei* suggests a Godly duty. When Jesus says that he MUST stay at Zacchaeus' house today, he means that God has called him to do this.

It was no accident then that Jesus spotted Zacchaeus sitting up in the sycamore tree. Just as Zacchaeus was trying to see Jesus, Jesus was trying to see Zacchaeus. Jesus was looking for Zacchaeus, because he had a God-given duty to seek him and to save him.

The crowd didn't get it. They grumbled, "He has gone in to lodge with a man who is a sinner" (v. 7). (NOTE TO THE PREACHER: Grumble these words as you speak them.)

But Zacchaeus got it! When he realized what Jesus was doing for him, he welcomed Jesus with JOY! The NRSV translation waters that down. It says that Zacchaeus "was happy to welcome" Jesus (v. 6)—but that doesn't do the original Greek justice. The Greek says that Lazarus welcomed Jesus with JOY!

Zacchaeus could hardly imagine that Jesus would honor him by visiting his house, and his heart was full of JOY!

And then Zacchaeus, in his great JOY, said:

"Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor.  
If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone,  
I restore four times as much." (v. 8).

We are in chapter 19 of Luke. In chapter 18, Luke told about Jesus' encounter with another rich man—a rich man who refused Jesus—a rich man who loved his money more than he loved Jesus—a rich man who went away sadly when Jesus told him to give his money to the poor.

Now Luke tells us this story about Zacchaeus, another rich man—but one who loves Jesus—a man who in his JOY at meeting Jesus decides to do something that Jesus has not even asked.

- He VOLUNTEERS to give half of his money to the poor, because he loves Jesus more than he loves money.
- He loves Jesus because of the JOY that Jesus has given him by singling him out—because of the JOY that Jesus has given him by coming to his house—because of the JOY that Jesus has given him by loving him.

Then Jesus says, "**Today salvation has come to this house**" (v. 9). TODAY! Not tomorrow! Not next week! Not in the eternal hereafter! But TODAY! It has already happened. Zacchaeus has been saved—restored as a son of Abraham—restored as a child of God.

And it isn't just Zacchaeus who was saved. Jesus says, "**Today salvation has come to this house.**" He means that Zacchaeus' family has been saved too.

Jesus even lays the groundwork for the salvation of the community. They will see that Zacchaeus means business. They will see him give money to the poor. They will see him make restitution. They will see him begin to treat them fairly. They will begin to trust him. This rich and powerful man will become an honored, beloved member of the community. Who knows what wonderful things he will do! That is part of what Jesus means when he says, "**Today salvation has come to this house.**"

And then, in the last verse, Jesus explains. He says, "For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." That's Jesus' job! That's Jesus' calling! Jesus has come to SEEK OUT sinners—to look for sinners hiding in the trees—to search for sinners who have gone astray. Jesus has come to SAVE them—to save the lost—to bring them home—to redeem them—to make them whole again.

So I love this story—not just because of the little Sunday school song—not just because of the gestures that go along with it—and not just because it's a happy story. I love this story, because it's MY story. The Lord has been seeking me too—seeking to save me.

- The Lord started seeking to save me before I was born.
- The Lord started seeking to save me when he inspired Christian parents to invite my parents to go to church with them before I was born.

- The Lord started seeking to save me when he inspired Christians to build that church.
- The Lord started seeking to save me when he inspired Elsie Leslie to write the little Sunday school song about Zacchaeus.
- The Lord started seeking to save me when he inspired Luke to put the story of Zacchaeus in his Gospel.
- The Lord started seeking to save me before the creation of the world (See John chapter 1, verses 1 to 18)

I don't know why the Lord would do that. I don't know why the Lord would care about me. I have disappointed him. I have broken his heart. I have done nothing to deserve his favor.

- But the Lord has been seeking me since BEFORE the day that he separated the waters from the dry land—since BEFORE the day that he set the sun in the sky.
- The Lord has been seeking me since BEFORE the beginning of time.
- He has been seeking to move me from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of JOY!

And he has been seeking you, too! You have disappointed him, too! You have broken his heart, too! You have not done anything to deserve his favor either! You have nothing in your hands that he needs—except for this. The Lord needs to seek out and to save the lost—and you were lost—so he is seeking you. He is seeking to move you from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of JOY!

Some of you have been found. Others are still lost. All of us, in some measure, are still lost. I feel my lostness every day. I often find myself, like the Apostle Paul, doing bad things I don't want to do—and failing to do good things I want to do (Romans chapter 7, verses 14 to 25). Like Paul, I know that I am not just a sinner, but chief among sinners (First Timothy 1:15).

But the Lord is searching for us—not like a traffic cop with stealthy radar—not like a telemarketer, looking for a quick buck—but like a lover seeking for the beloved—seeking to bring us JOY!

In his book, *Healing of Memories*, David Seamands tells the story of John Everingham, an Australian journalist working in Laos. John fell in love with a Laotian woman named Keo, but the Communists forced John to leave Laos and he had to leave Keo behind.

But that's not the end of the story. The Mekong River separates Laos from Thailand. If John could get Keo across the Mekong, they could be together again.

But the Mekong is a big river—a wide river—and the mission was dangerous. If the Communists learned of John's scheme, they would arrest him—they might arrest Keo too.

So John worked out a plan. He decided to use scuba gear to cross the river underwater. He would carry scuba gear for Keo, and together they would swim underwater to Thailand.

John managed to get word to Keo to meet him at the river. At the appointed time, he donned his scuba gear and set out across the river. But the water was murky and the current carried him downstream. When he surfaced, he was far from the meeting point. So he swam back to Thailand, walked upstream, and tried again. By the time he crossed the river again Keo was gone. Exhausted and desperate, John took a terrible chance—he yelled her name. Keo heard, and came running.

John showed Keo how to use the scuba gear, and they made their way into the water. She didn't know how to swim, so he pulled her across the river underwater. After a very long time, they crawled exhausted onto the shore in Thailand. They were safe! They were saved!

Isn't that a lovely story! It's a story of true devotion—love that is willing to risk everything to win the beloved.

- That's the way that Jesus is seeking you.
- That's the way that Jesus is calling you.
- That's the way that Jesus is trying to save you.
- That's the way that Jesus is loving you.

Jesus wants nothing more than to bring you to the safety of the other shore. He wants nothing more than to bring you into the Kingdom of JOY!

John Newton crammed a lot of living into his 82 years. His mother died when he was six years old, and he joined his father at sea when he was eleven. He served his apprenticeship as a sailor, and rose through the ranks until he became the captain of a slave ship. He abandoned the religious training that he had experienced as a child, and reveled in the dissolute life of a slave trader. He was noted for his profanity and his cruelty.

But one stormy night, when his ship was in danger of sinking and he was in danger of dying, Newton had a real change of heart. It might have been his religious training at his mother's knee surfacing after all those years — or it might have been his love for Mary Catlett, a Christian woman whom he later married — or it might have been his reading of the book, *Imitation of Christ*, by William Law — or it might have been all three. In any event, Newton had a real conversion experience.

For awhile, Newton continued on his slave ship, but he began to treat both the slaves and his crew with a good deal more compassion. Finally, convinced that the slave trade was wrong, he left his ship and took a job onshore.

He then felt a call to the ministry, and was ordained at age forty and assigned to a church at Olney, England. He continued in ministry through the rest of his long life, even after failing eyesight made it impossible for him to read.

This hymn, *Amazing Grace*, is in a sense Newton's own story. It was amazing grace that saved him, and it was amazing grace that was the focus of his preaching. But *Amazing Grace* is the story of every Christian. It is amazing grace that saves us — nothing else — no works of our hands or gifts of our wealth. It was amazing that God would love and save John Newton, but it is amazing that God would love and save any of us. It is indeed a sweet sound to hear about it, but it is so amazing that it is hard to believe. Believe it, because it is true.

Remember, you have a choice. You can be like the rich young ruler who, when he heard what discipleship was going to cost him, went away sorrowfully.

But don't be like that. Instead, be like Zacchaeus, who was glad to see Jesus—overwhelmed to know that Jesus cared about him—and thrilled to move into the Kingdom of JOY!

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! -- For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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