



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
Dr. Rob White – Senior Minister
<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: A Fast Trip Down a Tree

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost—and that's ME—and YOU.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:1-10

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

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! ,,,

-- Hello, 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!

Today let's talk about being short. Kids know what it feels like to be short. All of us have been kids and experienced that. You may need help getting items from a tall shelf. And, when you are in a crowd you are unable to see what is beyond because of the taller people standing around you. You may need to be lifted onto your daddy's shoulders to see a parade or other event.

While it may seem there are obstacles to being short, none of these minor annoyances are things that would stop you from accomplishing your goals. All through history people who are short have made great contributions and done many things to improve the world and help others. Short people have been outstanding astronauts, scientists, musicians, artists, athletes, to name a few.

Laura Ingalls Wilder, who wrote the "Little House on the Prairie," and other books in a series that many of you may have read, was 4'11" tall. Mother Teresa helped the sick and dying children of India and was 5' tall. Olga Korbut, a Russian girl, was chosen to be a gymnast because of her height (4' 11") and won three Gold Medals at the Olympics. Andrew Carnegie, a good businessman who donated money so that many libraries could be built, was 5' tall.

There is even a story in the Bible about a short person. Zacchaeus was "short" and he could not see Jesus who was passing through his town so he climbed a tree for a better view. When Jesus came by he saw Zacchaeus up in the tree and he said, "**Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house**".

Zacchaeus hurried down and was very happy to welcome Jesus. No matter what our size, no matter that we are children or adults, we all have an opportunity to welcome Jesus into our lives. We all have the same opportunity to receive God's love and use God's love to accomplish great things that will help others. ,,,

How would you like it if someone cheated you—not once, but repeatedly—and then you picked up a newspaper and saw that one of the town fathers had hosted a dinner in the cheater's honor? You probably wouldn't like it much. In fact, you would be furious. These days, so many scoundrels get rich and famous. Sometimes it seems as if there's no justice. ,,,

Something like that happened in our Gospel lesson today. Zacchaeus was a tax collector—not only a tax collector, but a CHIEF tax collector. Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was RICH. ,,,

How did a tax collector get rich? It depended. A chief tax collector would have ordinary tax collectors working for him, and each of them would give the chief tax collector a cut of their collections. It's conceivable that a chief tax collector could get rich honestly.

But the system was rife for abuse. A tax collector would pay a fee to the Romans for the privilege of collecting taxes. He could pad the tax bill and put the extra money in his pocket. Tax collectors were known to look out after Number One—meaning themselves—and not to worry about the burden that they placed on other people. ,,,

Tax collectors usually did quite well for themselves—financially speaking. Of course, they didn't have many friends—but that went with the territory. ,,,

By the time of our story, Jesus had become a celebrity—a young and upcoming rabbi known for his teachings and miracles. Wherever he went, people flocked to see him. ,,,

That's what was going on in our story today. Jesus had come to Jericho—not far from Jerusalem. He was just passing through, so people came from hither and yon to see him before he left town. Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector, was one of them. ,,,

We should be surprised that Zacchaeus came to see Jesus. People who do dark things don't usually come to the light. Crooks don't usually come to preachers—or to anyone else who might point an accusing finger. ,,,

But Zacchaeus came to see Jesus. Perhaps there was something in his heart that wanted a new kind of life. Maybe he was just curious. We'll never know. ,,,

But when Zacchaeus came to the street where Jesus would be passing, he couldn't see a thing. Crowds of people had gotten there earlier, and you can be sure that no one was going to step aside to let Zacchaeus see better. ,,,

The problem was compounded by the fact that Zacchaeus was short. Most of us know how it feels to have our view blocked by a tall person—or someone wearing a hat—or someone standing when they should be sitting. I hate it when I go to a show, only to discover that I have to look between the two people in front of me to see anything. Every time they shift positions, I have to try to figure out a new way to see. ,,,

But Zacchaeus was a can-do sort of fellow—a man who knew how to solve problems. His solution was to climb a tree where he would have an unobstructed view—where he could easily see as Jesus came down the street. ,,,

That can't have been easy for Zacchaeus. People might not like him, but they knew him as a man of authority. Zacchaeus had to be careful. If he appeared ridiculous, people might begin to laugh at him instead of fearing him. Then where would he be? ,,,

But Zacchaeus really wanted to see this young celebrity rabbi, so he took a chance on climbing a tree. If he got lucky, people would be so focused on seeing Jesus that they wouldn't notice the important tax collector climbing a tree. ,,,

But no such luck. When Jesus came along, he spotted Zacchaeus sitting in that tree—and blew Zacchaeus' cover to smithereens. He looked upward and shouted, "Zacchaeus, come down out of that tree, because I must stay at your house today". ,,,

Pay close attention to what Jesus said: ,,,

- First of all, Jesus said, "**I MUST.**" Jesus says "I must" four times in the Gospel of Luke, and once more in the Gospel of John. In each instance, he says "I must" in such a way as to mean "I have this mission" or "I have this God-given duty." ,,,

- And then Jesus said, "**I must STAY at your house.**" The Greek word for stay is *meno*, which is usually translated "abide" or "dwell" or "remain." That word suggests something more than a casual visit. It has the ring of permanence. When Jesus says that he must STAY at Zacchaeus' house, it sounds as if he intends to set up housekeeping there. ,,,

But, of course, Jesus doesn't intend to stay at Zacchaeus' house permanently. In fact, before the day is out, Jesus will leave Jericho to go to Jerusalem. He is going to Jerusalem to die. ,,,

But in another sense, Jesus DOES intend to stay at Zacchaeus' house permanently. To be specific, Jesus intends to dwell forevermore in Zacchaeus' heart. ,,,

And that happened, because Zacchaeus came down from the tree—Luke tells us that he came down QUICKLY. If you have ever climbed a tree, you know that you don't usually come down from a tree quickly—unless you fall. It's been a while since I climbed a tree, but I remember coming down carefully—very carefully. I was far more concerned with getting down in one piece than in getting down quickly. ,,,

But Zacchaeus came down from that tree QUICKLY—and he welcomed Jesus JOYFULLY—because he could see that things had turned in his favor. The young rabbi was honoring Zacchaeus, and Zacchaeus was grateful. ,,,

The people of Jericho had been forced to give Zacchaeus their money, but no one could force them to give Zacchaeus their honor. So Zacchaeus came down out of the tree QUICKLY—and welcomed Jesus JOYFULLY! ,,,

The people, on the other hand, were offended. They complained that the young rabbi had chosen to stay with a SINFUL man—had chosen to honor an UNDESERVING man. ,,,

I know exactly how they felt. I have seen undeserving people elevated to high office. I have heard "Hail to the Chief" played for people whose moral bankruptcy is public knowledge. How I long for GOOD leadership—for the chance to honor DESERVING people. ,,,

But when Jesus came down out of that tree, two things happened immediately: ,,,

- First, Zacchaeus showed that he "got it"—that he knew that he needed to change—and that he intended to do that. Zacchaeus promised Jesus that he would give half of his money to the poor—and would repay fourfold anyone whom he had defrauded. ,,,

- Second, Jesus validated Zacchaeus' promise, saying, "**Today, salvation has come to this house, because (Zacchaeus) also is a son of Abraham.**" ,,,

And then Jesus delivered the punch line. Listen carefully! Jesus said, "**For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost.**" ,,,

When you hear that, who comes to mind for you: ,,,

- Is it the person who has ruined his life with alcohol or drugs? ,,,
- Is it the criminal sitting in a nearby jail? ,,,
- Is it a business owner who takes advantage of the poor? ,,,
- Is it a politician whose focus is on self-enrichment rather than service? ,,,

Are those the people whom Jesus came to save? You bet! Those people need saving, and Jesus came to save people like that. ,,,

But what about the person sitting next to you in the pew? Is there any chance that Jesus was talking about that person when he said that he had come "to seek and to save that which is lost"? ,,,

And what about yourself? Do you ever think of yourself as a Zacchaeus kind of person? Do you ever think of yourself as a sinner—undeserving of God's favor? Do you ever worry about finding yourself in trouble on Judgment Day? ,,,

Many of us have felt that way—inadequate—unlovable—undeserving. Many of us prefer not to think too much about Judgment Day, because we doubt that we will measure up. ,,,

If that's what we think, we're right. We don't measure up. We won't measure up. We're inadequate, undeserving. We're sinners. ,,,

But that's just the first part of the story. Here's the rest of the story. Jesus said that he came "to seek and to save that which was lost". Do you know who he was talking about? He was talking about ME. He was talking about YOU! Jesus came to seek US and to save US—and he has done that. ,,,

Jesus has sought you and saved you. ,,,

- He started seeking you before the creation of the world (see John 1:1 to 5). ,,,
- He started seeking you before you were born. ,,,
- He started working out a plan to save you when the earth was still a formless void—when darkness covered the face of the deep (see Genesis 1:1). ,,,
- He has been seeking you forever. ,,,
- His purpose was never to condemn you, but to save you. ,,,

That's the point of the Zacchaeus story. If Jesus could save Zacchaeus, he can save you. If he has saved Zacchaeus, he has also saved you. ,,,

But I want to bring to your attention something more in the Zacchaeus story. When Jesus called Zacchaeus to come down from the tree, Zacchaeus did two things: ,,,

- First, he scrambled down that tree as fast as his little arms and legs could carry him. ,,,
- Second, he repented of his old behavior, and promised to do better. ,,,

I doubt that Zacchaeus became a pristine man who never did another bad thing. I doubt that you always do the right thing. I know that I don't always do the right thing. ,,,

So I'm grateful to Paul, the apostle, who recounted his own struggles with sin. He said: ,,,

"I don't know what I am doing.
For I don't practice what I desire to do;
but what I hate, that I do....

For the good which I desire, I don't do;
but the evil which I don't desire, that I (do)" (,, we see this in Romans 7:15 and 19). ,,

Those words give me hope. If the Apostle Paul couldn't get his act together, maybe there's hope for me. Maybe there's hope for you. ,,

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. ,,

What I'm here to tell you today is that there's no "maybe" about it. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. That's me. That's you. ,,

Furthermore, he has done that. He has saved us. So let's do what Zacchaeus did: ,,

- Let's climb down from the tree where we were hoping to observe Jesus from a distance. ,,
- Let's receive him JOYFULLY! ,,
- And let's do our best to live up to our high calling in Christ's service. ,,

-- 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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