



## “Friend of Sinners”

Luke 19:1-10

**Idea:** Jesus is a friend of sinners.

**Intro:** There is nothing quite like a good friend. There is nothing like knowing a person who also knows you, and together you share a bond of mutual affection.

I heard a story of two friends with this kind of love and care for one another. These two young men were inseparable. They were childhood friends that had enlisted in the Army together during World War I. They attended boot camp together. Afterward, they were shipped overseas together and fought side-by-side in the trenches. During an attack, one of the men was critically wounded in a field littered with barbed wire obstacles, and he was unable to crawl back to his foxhole. The entire area was under a withering enemy crossfire, and it was suicidal to try to reach him. Yet his friend decided to try. Before he could get out of his trench, his sergeant yanked him back inside and ordered him not to go. “It’s too late! You can’t do him any good. You’ll only get yourself killed,” the sergeant said.

When the sergeant turned his back, the man went after his friend. After a few minutes, he staggered back, mortally wounded, with his friend, now dead, in his arms. The sergeant was both angry and deeply moved. “What a waste,” he blurted out. “He’s dead and you’re dying. It just wasn’t worth it.”

With almost his last breath, the dying man replied, “Oh, yes, it was Sarge. When I got to him, the only thing he said was, ‘I knew you’d come, Jim!’”

Friendship...One of the true marks of a friend is that he is there when there is every reason for him not to be, when to be there is sacrificially costly. As Proverbs 17:17 put it, *“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”*

Today, is a special day here at Red Lane. It is Friend Day. This is a day that we have set aside on our calendar to focus our attention and energy on our friends. Today, is all about sharing with our friends the one thing that is most meaningful to us...Jesus. He has changed our lives. He has become our friend. And we want you to experience what we have experienced. Jesus is a friend of sinners.

[Read Luke 19:1-10.](#)

**Inquiry:** Zacchaeus’ name in Hebrew means “righteous one.” As a chief tax collector, however, he was not living up to his name. History reveals that tax collectors in the Roman Empire during this period were notorious for collecting more taxes than required. They lined their pockets with the extra money and became wealthy. Zacchaeus was a Jew, which made him even more deplorable to the Jewish community. In their eyes, he was a renegade and traitor to Israel. He was a sinner.

Here in Luke 19, we find Jesus journeying toward Jerusalem (13:22; 18:31-33). His earthly ministry would soon be coming to an end. On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples entered Jericho. The news of Jesus’ arrival quickly spread throughout the city, and a large crowd gathered around Him. Hearing the news, Zacchaeus also went to see Jesus. Luke tells us that the tax collector was a short man, so he could not see over or through the crowd. And so, he ran ahead of everyone and climbed a tree in order to see Jesus and the spectacle taking place.

Why would this “sinner” want to see Jesus or have anything to do with Jesus? Well, at the very least, I believe it is safe to say he was curious. Jesus’ reputation preceded Him. He was very popular around Palestine. Most likely everyone had heard stories of the blind receiving sight, the deaf being made to hear, the lame being able to walk, the sick healed, and the dead raised. Jesus was a celebrity, so Zacchaeus curiously wanted to see the celebrity in the news. It is also safe to say that God was working in his heart. The Bible makes it clear that lost sinners do not seek after God on their own (Rom 3:11). Dead sinners have no ability to come alive to God (Eph 2:1, 4-5). Therefore, it was God’s Spirit that was drawing Him to Jesus.

We don’t know exactly how God worked in Zacchaeus’ heart to prepare him to meet Jesus. Perhaps, he knew Matthew who was one of Jesus’ disciples. He had been a tax collector. Maybe Matthew had shared his testimony of meeting Jesus with Zacchaeus. Maybe Matthew had been praying for Zacchaeus as they approached Jericho. Perhaps, Zacchaeus had become weary of wealth and was seeking greater purpose in life. It is impossible for us to know exactly because the Bible doesn’t say. We can know that a seeking Savior will always find a sinner who is looking for a new beginning.

This truth is evident in the fact that Jesus walked up to the tree that Zacchaeus had climbed. He not only came to the tree but He also invited Himself to the tax collector’s home. *“I must stay at your house.”*

Zacchaeus was honored by the request. The crowd, however, grumbled because Jesus dared to enter the house of a sinner such as this. They could not understand why Jesus would do such a thing. Zacchaeus, on the other hand, became eternally grateful for this experience. At some point, there in his home, he was moved by the Person and message of Jesus. He was moved to acknowledge his sinfulness and rebellion against God. He was moved to repent from his sin and turn toward Jesus. He was moved to place his faith in Jesus for forgiveness of sin, receiving Him as both Lord and Savior. And he was moved to demonstrate this new life he found in Christ by giving back money he had wrongfully taken from others.

Today, this story of Jesus and Zacchaeus is the kind of story Jesus desires to be told about you. He is a friend of sinners.

What is a sinner? This term does not sound very appealing? It does not sound very nice. Though the term is not appealing, it is the correct description of every one of us. The Bible says, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23). Every single person has trespassed the righteous boundary God has set in place. We have missed the mark in our keeping of His righteous standard. All have sinned; therefore, all are sinners. We sin because it is our nature as sinners to sin. Like our first parents, Adam and Eve, we have broken God’s design for our lives. Sin has separated us from God our Creator. Sin has brought us under the just judgment and wrath of our holy Creator. Sinners, then, are those who have sinned against God. This is true of every person. We are all sinners who have sinned against God.

We may not like the term *sinner* in this story, but I hope you like the Friend of the sinner in the story. Jesus demonstrates three things toward sinners:

### **1. Jesus seeks out sinners. (vs. 5, 10)**

Zacchaeus thought he was seeking Jesus, but in reality, Jesus was seeking him! His very purpose for being born into this world was to seek and save lost sinners.

Today, you are not here by accident. You are not even here because your friend invited or brought you to Red Lane this morning. You are here because the God who created you and loves you is seeking you. He desires to be in relationship with you. You were created for this purpose (Col 1:16). You were designed to perfectly relate and to be in relationship with Holy God.

This is why Jesus seeks after you today. He loves you. He cares about you. And He is moving heaven

and earth to make that evident to you.

## 2. Jesus accepts all sinners. (vs. 7)

The crowd and religious leaders might have been appalled by the idea of going to Zacchaeus' home, but Jesus was not appalled. Zacchaeus' lifestyle and choices did not affect Jesus' acceptance of him.

Don't misunderstand acceptance and approval. Jesus accepted Zacchaeus the way he was, but He did not approve of his lifestyle and choices. These would be taken care of and changed upon salvation. Their removal was not the means of salvation. In other words, Jesus did not require Zacchaeus to clean himself up or get his act together before he could be forgiven.

Jesus simply said to Zacchaeus what he says to you and me, "Come down...come to me...get in here...I love you...I love you the way you are...I love you in your brokenness and mess...and I will remake you into something beautiful, but get in here."

## 3. Jesus transforms sinners. (vs. 8-9)

Jesus loves you where you are, but He will not leave you there. Aren't you grateful for that? He is a transformer.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Today, you may be a man who struggles with immoral thoughts and fantasies. You may be addicted to pornography. Ladies, you might have been in an adulterous affair at one time or living that out right now. You might have aborted your child. You might struggle with gender identity or have homosexual tendencies. You might be a thief, an alcoholic, or drug addict. You might be known as the biggest jerk and crook in the county. None of that matters to Jesus. For those of us who are in relationship with Jesus, none of that mattered. He never asked us to get clean before we got saved. He just told us to bring our brokenness to the cross and lay it down.

*"Such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."*

Jesus transformed Zacchaeus' life. He immediately wanted to live right because he had been made right with God. Today, if you claim to be a Christian, if you hold onto a prayer or a baptism or church membership but there has been no transformation in your life, I would not consider myself a follower of Jesus. I would not consider myself a disciple of Christ. If there has been no change, most likely there is no Christ in you.

**Conclusion:** Those two friends who went to war together loved and looked out for one another. They were friends regardless of the conditions. They were going to stand by one another's side even when there was every reason not to do so.

Today, we learn from this passage that Jesus in an infinitely greater way stands by your side as a friend. He is a friend of sinners. He seeks you. He accepts you. And He will transform you. Why?

Good News – You are loved by God. He designed you. You were made by Him and for Him (Col 1:16). You were designed to perfectly relate and to be in relationship with Holy God. God's design for your life was holy and perfect.

Bad News – Sin has broken God's design. The sinful nature that overcame Adam and left God's design in him

broken has been passed on to us. It has separated us from God. Today, in our sin, we are on the wrong side of the great chasm. Our sin condemns us before God, so that we are deserving of His judgment. This brokenness should not surprise anyone; because if we are honest with ourselves, we recognize it. We feel it in our anxiety, fears, and broken relationships. We know there is a deep need that we cannot meet ourselves.

Best News - The gospel declares that God the Son has paid the penalty for our sin so that we can be set free (Rev 1:5). He offered His life as a substitute for you and experienced the wrath of God the Father against your sin. So that now, you can experience forgiveness for sin by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You are given a choice to make?

As a follower of Jesus, you have experienced His grace and forgiveness. And thankfully you can never exhaust His grace. Forgiveness is always available if you will turn to Him in faith and repentance of all sin.

Zacchaeus received Jesus into his home, and then received Him into his life as Lord and Savior. Will you receive Jesus into your life? Will you turn from your sin and turn to Jesus in faith, receiving Him as Lord and Savior?

In just a moment we are going to have a time of response. You can respond in two ways. You can come forward publicly, and I will get you with one of our encouragers. Or you can text your response to the number on the screen, and we will follow up with you today. There are five responses today:

- Salvation – BELIEVE
- Rededication – REDEDICATE
- Baptism – BAPTISM
- Join the church – MEMBERSHIP
- Need prayer - PRAYER