

The Gospel According to  
**Luke**

**“Savin’ Safari”**  
Chapter 19:1-10

Introduction

There’s an outfit in Arizona called the *Treed Guide Service*. Hunters pay about \$500.00 per day to go after either bear or cougar. *Treed Guide Service* hunts with hounds that ‘tree’ the animal, so that you can shoot it. For a lot less – about \$175.00 per day – they’ll tree a bear or cougar for you to ‘shoot’ nothing more harmful than photographs.

**I can’t help but think of Zacchaeus as being treed!** Even though he climbed the sycamore tree voluntarily, by the end of the story you get the idea that Jesus was hunting for him, hounding after him. After all, Jesus said of the episode, **the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.**

You may be familiar with a poem, titled *Hound of Heaven*, written by Francis Thompson after his conversion to Jesus Christ. The poem portrays Jesus as a hound in relentless pursuit of its prey. It’s opening lines read like this:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears...

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbed pace...  
They beat - and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet...

Halts by me that footfall...  
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?  
"Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He Whom thou seekest!"

Without taking anything away from the poem... Jesus is more the Hunter who utilizes certain means as His hounds. His prey is sinners. He's after them to set them free from their sin. Once found, they realize they were also seeking Him.

We'll use the *hunter* and *hound* analogy to organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Gets You Treed, and #2 Jesus Sets You Free.

## #1 Jesus Gets You Treed (v1-4)

You can go on all kinds of safari's in Africa – to hunt, to photograph, to camp, to explore, etc. Jesus was on safari for sinners; He was on a **savin' safari**. Zacchaeus was His prey.

Luke 19:1 Then *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho.

Luke 19:2 Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

Normally the Jews believed wealth was a sign of God's blessing; but not in his case. The Roman government sold tax franchises. Jews who purchased a tax franchise, and collected taxes from their fellow Jews for their oppressors, were despised. The tax collector added his commission to the taxes that were due; he could charge you whatever the market would bear. Add to this that Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector; he was a **chief tax collector**. That means he had acquired other lesser franchises in Jericho and had tax collectors working under him. He was a tax-cartel!

Luke 19:3 And he sought to see who Jesus was...

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. His fame had preceded Him to Jericho. You would have heard amazing things about Jesus – that He had healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, the tongue of the mute; that He had cast out demons; that He had raised the dead. You would have heard He was hated by the religious authorities, because He was claiming to forgive sins.

And you probably would have heard a lot of weird things, too. You know how a story gets changed every time it's told. Or think of how tabloids today take a story about a celebrity and add to it; or how they simply make up stories.

What is interesting is that God was able to use all of this to prompt a curiosity in Zacchaeus. From the very beginning we want to be reminded that the Lord was seeking Zacchaeus - on safari, looking for him. It's an encouragement for you to remember that God is doing the same thing today (and every day) in the lives of all the unbelieving family and friends, co-workers and fellow students, that you are praying for. You may not see God at work; or the information unbelievers have may not be accurate... But God can use it to draw them to Himself.

Luke 19:3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.

I'm not going to do it. I know you expect me to; you expect me to make fun of short people. **But I'm bigger than that!**

Zacchaeus was a short person. *He had little hands, and little eyes; he walked around telling great big lies; he had little baby legs and stood so low, you had to pick him up just to say Hello.* You probably recognize those lyrics. They are from the most famous ridicule of short people, at least in our culture - the 1978 Randy Newman song, *Short People*. The songwriter has since gone 'on record' as regretting its impact. He intended the song as a satire to poke fun at all types of prejudice – *never* as something to poke fun at short people.

If you want to visualize this scene as it unfolds, think Danny DeVito in robes, and you'll be on the right track. I was on the Short Persons Support website (really) to gain a greater sensitivity for my vertically challenged friends. It's [shortsupport.org](http://shortsupport.org). It listed a bunch of short people, and posted Danny DeVito at an even five-feet tall.

Something more is suggested by his short physical stature. Like everyone who is not a believer, Zacchaeus fell short of the glory of God in his spiritual stature. Sure, he had everything this world could

offer, because he was rich and could purchase anything he wanted. But there was a problem in his stature he could do nothing about; and it was intended to illustrate for him (and us) the problem of sin in our spiritual stature that we can do nothing about.

Luke 19:4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.

Wealthy chief tax collectors didn't run; and they didn't climb trees. Something had gripped his heart; something was prompting him; to get into that tree. Zacchaeus didn't know it, but he was being hunted by the hound of heaven.

There's something else fascinating happening in this story. Zacchaeus is illustrating three previous points Jesus made about eternal life:

1. In Chapter Eighteen, Jesus said, **whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it**. Tree climbing is something children do. I submit to you that a grown man climbing a tree to see Jesus is evidence of a childlike desire to enter the kingdom of God.
2. By the end of our story, Zacchaeus will be giving away most of his wealth. Earlier Jesus had told a rich young ruler to do something similar – but he had refused. Hard as it was for a rich man to enter heaven, it was not impossible, and Zacchaeus showed that what is impossible with man is possible with God.
3. Jesus encountered blind Bartimaeus. Though not blind, Zacchaeus could not see Jesus either.
4. Then we saw Jesus heal blind Bartimaeus. The blind beggar had his particular spot along the Jericho road, where he would all day beg the passersby. Tax collectors also had spots along the Jericho road – tax booths that they manned all day to extort from the passersby. It's an interesting contrast, isn't it? Who would you rather have been – Bartimaeus at his begging spot or Zacchaeus at his extortion booth? Both were in the same condition as far as Jesus was concerned.

Back to our story: **Zacchaeus was treed!** On the surface, it was mere curiosity that treed him. But you and I know that God was working within him as well:

1. First: The Bible, in Ecclesiastes 3:11, declares that God has set **eternity in our hearts**. We have an inward sense that we are eternal beings, created for a purpose. Outwardly we are perishing – getting old and experiencing time. It creates a spiritual dissatisfaction, an internal prompting that God uses to draw us to Himself.
2. Second: It's not going too far to speculate that Zacchaeus was dissatisfied with his wealth. It is the testimony of many a rich person that they would give everything for a deep and abiding sense of spiritual fulfillment.
3. Third: Jesus had once walked by the tax booth of Matthew and called him to follow as a disciple. It would have been big news among tax collectors. It would have been something Zacchaeus spent a lot of time thinking about.

Zacchaeus was being hounded for some time, by these and many other means. Now he was treed. Jesus moved in – but not for a kill!

## #2 Jesus Sets You Free (v5-10)

It must have been a hilarious sight, really. There was Zacchaeus, up the tree; Jesus suddenly stopped... Looked up... And began to speak to him, as if they knew each other.

Jesus knew Zacchaeus. He had known him from before the foundation of the world. He had known him from his mother's womb. But Zacchaeus did not 'know' Jesus. He knew who Jesus was; but he did not know Him personally. All that was about to change.

**Luke 19:5** And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, **"Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house."**

This is the only time recorded when Jesus invited Himself over to someone's house. It was a way of letting Zacchaeus know that the events of the day were a divine appointment.

Luke 19:6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.

I'm not a very proficient tree climber; and I find it harder to climb down than to climb up. If it were me, I would have waited until the crowd moved on. Not Zacchaeus; he had lost all sense of shame and embarrassment. He only wanted to obey the Lord.

For perhaps the first time in his life, Zacchaeus experienced joy. There was a deep, settled satisfaction in his heart that filled him in a way that nothing his wealth could purchase had ever done.

Luke 19:7 But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."

This was the standard criticism used against Jesus by the religious leaders of His day.

Unbelievers still have a standard set of criticisms that they use whenever they are confronted with Jesus:

1. "Christians are a bunch of hypocrites."
2. "Christianity is a crutch for the weak."
3. "If there is a God, why doesn't He stop evil before it happens."
4. "The Bible is full of errors."
5. "What about the pygmy in Africa."

God is working behind the scenes and below the surface – hounding the unbeliever. They say such stupid things about God because they are cornered or treed and – like a wild beast - they strike out.

Luke 19:8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

According to the Law of Moses, if a thief voluntarily confessed to his crime, he had to restore what he took, add one-fifth to it, and bring an offering to the Lord (Leviticus 6:1-7). If he stole something he could not restore, he had to repay four-fold (Exodus 22:1); and if he was caught with the goods, he had to pay double (Exodus 22:4).

Zacchaeus offered to pay the highest price demanded by the Law. It was a powerful evidence that he had been changed inwardly.

Notice, too, that he kept the Law as a result of knowing Jesus. That's the way it is for Christians. You don't need to try hard to keep God's Law. Motivated by His love, you find yourself keeping God's Law as a result, not as a requirement.

How does such a dramatic change occur? Jesus tells you:

Luke 19:9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;

The Jews were proud to be the physical descendants of **Abraham**. They thought and taught that they were saved and on their way to heaven because of their physical descent from him. The Bible makes it clear that physical birth cannot save anyone. You need a spiritual birth – and it can save anyone, Jew or Gentile.

Zacchaeus was saved because he was a spiritual descendant of **Abraham**. **Abraham** had left all to follow God; so had Zacchaeus. His outward behavior was evidence of his inward faith.

Listen: You can give everything away... You can dedicate your life to helping the poor or disadvantaged... But it will not save you. You must be born spiritually, born a second time, born-again, to be saved.

When you are born physically, you inherit sin from your parents. You're born with a short spiritual stature – you fall short of the glory of God. There's no way you can add to your spiritual stature.

Because He was God in human flesh, Jesus was without sin. He could represent you, and the entire human race. When you trust in Him as your Savior from sin, He takes upon Himself your sin and gives you His righteousness. He alters your spiritual stature before God. **You no longer fall short in God's estimation!** You are given a new nature – God's nature. To help describe what it's like, the Bible says you are born-again, born a second time, born spiritually.

Luke 19:10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Today most organizations have what's called a Mission Statement. You don't have to be a Church; most secular organizations have one. If Jesus had a Mission Statement, it might be what He said here: **To seek and save that which was lost**. Everyday, when He arose from either sleep or all night prayer, He knew what He was going to do: **Seek and save**. It kept Him on task.

As far as hunting goes, Jesus has a catch-and-release policy. (We might call it 'catch-and-regenerate'). We saw Zacchaeus as a treed sinner. Now we see him as a freed saint.

Applying God's Word:

If you are a Christian... Do you have a Mission Statement? *Sure you do!* You have a ton of them – one (at least) for every part of your life:

1. Generally speaking, all of us are to **Go and make disciples of all nations** (Matthew 28:19).
2. If you are a husband, you are **to love your [wife] just as Christ also loved the Church** (Ephesians 5:25).
3. Wives, you are to **submit to your husbands, as unto the Lord** (Ephesians 5:22).
4. Children are to **obey your parents** (Ephesians 6:1).

We could go on-and-on. I think you get the idea. Whatever situation or circumstance you find yourself in, there's a Mission Statement in God's Word to keep you on task. And you have the Holy Spirit living in you so that you can do what God asks.

If you are not yet a Christian; if you have not yet realized you fall short and need to be saved... God is hounding you, using many different means, both *internal* and *external*. He wants to get you treed; not to ruin your life. Jesus wants to set you free.

No amount of wealth... Or accomplishment... Or achievement... Can satisfy you and bring you real joy. Since God has placed **eternity in your heart**, only a relationship with Him will ultimately fill you and fulfill you.