

## Beginning With the End in Mind

From the series, *Encountering Jesus: The Gospel of Luke*

Luke 19:10

By Dr. David H. McKinley

There is a popular trend and technique used among movie directors and television writers called, *flash forward*. The more technical term is *inverted narrative*. It's where they take you to a time, place, and moment in the future of a film or series and give you a glimpse of what's happening. The character is older. The plot seems to be fully developed. The action is in full motion. And then they give you just enough of the story before they turn around and bring you back to the beginning when the actor is younger and the conditions are different. They tell you the back story as to how characters got to the conclusion of their story. In many ways that method—the flash forward, inverted narrative—stimulates our minds and captures our attention by seeing the end from the beginning or beginning with the end in mind.

As we begin this new series in the Gospel of Luke, we're using some of the "flash forward" approach to this study and story. Most of you are aware the beginning chapters of Luke 1 and Luke 2 are the quintessential chapters of the Christmas story about the birth of Jesus. You don't have to be a Bible scholar to know a good portion of Luke if you've been to a Christmas service or listened to anyone read the Christmas story.

Last week, we talked about the fact that Luke's primary focus—the way he zoomed in the camera on the life and ministry of Jesus—was on the humanity of Jesus. Luke wanted us to understand the wonderful miracle of how this One who came from heaven, the Son of God, was born through a virgin's womb, only to be the same One who, by His power and authority, walked out and left behind an empty tomb. That's exactly what we see as we begin to read the story of Jesus and this entire experience in the Gospel of Luke.

Of course, it is the empty tomb—the message of the resurrection—that is the birthmark of the church found in the book of Acts. Page after page and story after story echoes one great reality—Jesus is alive!... He's alive... He's alive... He's alive!

So when we talk about encountering Christ, I'm not simply trying to make you aware of the facts and story of a virtuous man who lived an exemplary life and died a martyr's death. No. I want you to know and understand from the very beginning, encountering Jesus means meeting and ultimately being impacted and changed by the One whose power and authority transforms lives. Encountering Jesus is not informational; it's a transformational reality because Christ is alive now!

All of what Luke wrote—as we read last week in the opening verses—was to provide evidence, assurance, and credibility to the testimony of the story of Jesus. Luke added his voice and his details—certainly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—to help us see and know about the reality of Christ!

As strange as it may seem, we're going to save Christmas for Christmas and come back to the beginning at the end. We're going to start at the end, and then we'll go back to the beginning.

No matter how you look at it, the four gospel accounts begin to converge in the last week in the life and ministry of Jesus. The gospel accounts may introduce different characters, stories, parables, and the miracles Jesus did, but they all converge around that last week, and in particular, the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem as we see in Luke 19.

One of the things I struggle with every year here in Augusta is the fact that whenever we get to Palm Sunday and the triumphal entry, we either have Masters® Championship Sunday or the beginning of Masters® Week. Somehow it hits Palm Sunday and Easter every year. Thankfully, we're able to do a great job with Easter, but Palm Sunday sometimes gets lost in the middle of all the activity.

Today we begin to look at Jesus' final journey to the city of Jerusalem—the final days of that week traveling to Jerusalem, Good Friday, and then finally, Easter Sunday morning.

Let me give you just a quick map to help you understand how we're getting to where we're going and what's happening. The Bible tells us in Luke that there was a moment in time when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51b).

Jesus had been in Galilee, living in the northern region of Israel. But Jesus began to move from the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee toward the area of Jordan and Samaria. After crossing over the Jordan River, He came down the valley and crossed back over the Jordan River to the city of Jericho—a very significant city at that time. It was the city in the Old Testament where the people of Israel—after 400 years of slavery in Egypt and then wandering in the wilderness—came through to enter into Canaan, the Promised Land. They were led by Joshua whose name means *God saves*.

In the same way that Joshua—the one who saved the people—delivered them to the land of promise, so it is that Jesus (*Joshua* in the New Testament) is the One who saves. Jesus came to the city of Jericho and began to make His way to Jerusalem. But before we get to Jerusalem, we need to stop and see what happened in Jericho.

Interestingly enough, Luke alone gives us this story and introduces us to the person we meet at the beginning of Luke 19:

"He [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when

Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.' And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. **For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost**'" (Luke 19:1-10, *emphasis added*).

Last week, I gave you a macro view of the book of Luke. I took you through the background, the key themes, and ultimately, to the final chapter in the book. But today, we're going to bring that down to a micro level, and look at this critical verse in Luke 19:10. In studying this gospel, most Bible commentators stand in agreement that Luke 19:10 is the key verse of the entire book. It is the "mission statement" of our Savior, Jesus. What is that verse?

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

That is the critical issue! But in context, all of this happened during a specific time and in a place called Jericho.

Josephus, the first century historian, described Jericho this way:

"Now here is the most fruitful country of Judea, which bears a vast number of palm trees besides the balsam tree, whose sprouts they cut with sharp stones, and at the incisions they gather the juice, which drops down like tears." —Josephus, *The Judean War*, Book 1, Niese section 138

"This country withal produces honey from bees... so that he who should pronounce this place to be divine would not be mistaken, wherein is such plenty of trees produced as are very rare, and of the most excellent sort." —Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, J. BJ 4.469

Josephus said that this city of Jericho in the ancient world was literally like an oasis in the desert, which it is still today. On one hand, Jericho is situated on the edge of going out and down to the Negev desert and down to the Dead Sea. But on the other hand, there's this incredible, fruitful metropolis, if you will, with variations of plants and beauty.

A number of years ago, I took a group to Jericho and while there, several of our people did some shopping. Jericho has date palms everywhere. They're known for their dates and provide them all over Israel. I had a senior adult lady in my group, a precious silver haired lady, who purchased several boxes of these dates and put them in her luggage to take home and give as gifts to her friends. I will never forget what happened next.

We landed in Atlanta and got off the plane. She had her luggage, and a security dog tramped over to where she was, sat down, and turned its nose to look directly at her luggage. The next thing I knew, an officer was there and said, "Ma'am, do you have something in your case I need to see?" Sure enough,

my sweet little lady had to give up her dates, and they were all thrown away. The dates were considered illegal in America because we don't receive that produce, at least not in that fashion. But it serves a marker moment and a memory about just how beautiful and amazing Jericho is.

Chuck Swindoll said that Jericho was a retreat for royals who built enormous palaces. They had swimming pools, gardens, and bath houses. Caravans would travel nearby and crisscross through Jericho, going from the east to the west and through the Middle East.

Jericho also had all kinds of commerce and tourism. Given the commerce, desirability of the location, and the crowds, Jericho provided something the government wanted to get their hands on—taxes! *"We'll make money off of it!"* So the Roman government began to collect taxes.

*"To finance their great world empire, the Romans levied heavy taxes on all nations under their control. The Jews opposed these taxes because they supported a non-religious government and its pagan gods, but they were still forced to pay."* —*The Life Application Bible*, commentary

So in Jericho—this very beautiful, fast flowing city with all kinds of commerce—we have the Roman government's presence and their demand for taxes. In this setting, we see this little man named Zacchaeus, a Jewish man who is a part of the nation of Israel. But the Bible tells us that he was the chief tax collector, and he was rich, meaning he used his office to levy taxes against his own people, his own citizens, his own race and nation. As a result, it made him one hated man! Boys and girls, Zacchaeus was the original "Despicable Me." He was a man who would do anything to get a buck for himself, no matter what it cost others.

Some of you may have gone to Bible School or learned a little song in Sunday School about Zacchaeus:

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

*And as the Savior came that way,  
He looked up in the tree, and said,*

*"Zacchaeus, you come down!  
For I'm going to your house today.  
For I'm going to your house today."*

That's the story of Zacchaeus—this very unique character who Luke alone introduces and tells us about. But it is through this story that Luke gives us the bottom line, the essential truth, the mission statement of Jesus that He "came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10)—not the religious, not the righteous, not the good, not the moral.

So knowing that statement in the context of Scripture, let me take it and talk about some critical things we need to understand about what the Bible means when it says,

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

## **1. Salvation is God’s Gracious Initiative**

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus is seen as the One in pursuit of Zacchaeus.

The Bible says that Zacchaeus heard Jesus was coming. Zacchaeus was curious. He wanted to get a glance and climbed up in the tree to see Jesus better. While it may seem that Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus, Zacchaeus just wanted to see Jesus. But it’s unequivocal, Jesus was looking for Zacchaeus. Jesus came searching and looking, and this is the message of the Bible! It’s seen in the Old Testament and revealed and affirmed in the New Testament: God is a God who seeks sinners—sinners who are broken, who are lost, who are wandering.

In the book of Genesis—after the fall of Adam and Eve who had eaten the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden—the Bible says that in the cool of the day, the LORD came walking and calling out, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9b).

Do you think God was asking where they were because He couldn’t see them and didn’t know where they were? No. God sees. God knows. God knew what they had done that had caused them to hide themselves from Him. When God asked, “Where are you?” He was exposing them. In fact, in reality, they hid themselves because they were naked and ashamed. They had become self-conscious. They were all about themselves. Instead of being God-conscious, they became self-conscious. The result of that was shame and guilt and separation, but God came seeking.

In Isaiah 53, we read about the coming Christ:

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

We’re wandering. We’re moving away. But the LORD laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all because God bore the weight of our sin, seeking sinners.

“No one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Romans 3:11b-12).

Not even one!

You may have heard people in our world talk about the goodness of humanity. But the Bible talks about the badness of humanity because we are sinners—we are separated, we are fallen, we are broken. And we need a Savior! That’s why Jesus “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

It's very interesting that when Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus, He said, "I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5b). It's the only time in Scripture when Jesus invited Himself in. But it was very clear Jesus was laying it down and saying, *"I'm here, and I'm extending an initiative to you that I'm going to be with you."*

This man to whom Jesus was extending this initiative of grace was a man who had anything but grace with the people. The people hated him. They couldn't believe Jesus would go be with *him!* He was the despicable sinner. No one could understand why Jesus would associate with Him. Jesus didn't affirm the greed, dishonesty, and thievery of Zacchaeus. Jesus went to expose Zacchaeus' sin and his need for a Savior. And that is God's gracious initiative to us too. Salvation always begins with God and not with us. It's not that we seek Him; He seeks us! I want you to remember this. I don't care who you are or how far you may think you are from God or how much you think you have fallen. Jesus is seeking you today!

## **2. Salvation is Jesus' Generous Invitation**

Jesus came to make a provision for us to be right with God. I love the fact Zacchaeus had to respond. Jesus said, *"I'm here and I want to go to your house."* But look at what it says in verse six:

*"So he [Zacchaeus] hurried and came down and received him [Jesus] joyfully" (Luke 19:6).*

There was something going on in Zacchaeus' heart just as Jesus made the initiative to identify and call Zacchaeus out, and ultimately, to disclose Himself to Zacchaeus. In the same sense, Zacchaeus was willing in that moment to receive Jesus. That's the other part of salvation. There's the Divine part of God's initiative and grace, and there's the human part of response and responsibility toward God. The Bible is very clear, Zacchaeus hurried down and received Jesus.

*"But to all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).*

The word, *receive*, is much more than just opening the door without anything changing. At that moment, Zacchaeus surrendered to Jesus. This is such a beautiful picture. Jesus isn't waiting for you and me to clean up our lives or desires, and fix ourselves. Instead, Jesus steps right into the middle of our sin, our pain, our brokenness, our need, and in that moment, He gives us the opportunity to respond. He extends to us the wonder of God's mercy and grace when we are lost and in need of a Savior.

*"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved... For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9).*

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6, 8).

The generous invitation of God is not for you to fix your life before coming to Him, but to understand that He has initiated a work of grace that can change and transform your life, and for you to be willing to receive Him, to trust Him, to believe on His name and what He has done. Life transformation occurs because of what Christ has done. He extends an invitation to any and every one! Jesus is calling just as He called Zacchaeus. How will you respond?

### • **Salvation is Our Greatest Need**

Why is salvation our greatest need? Because the Bible identifies our problem:

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save **the lost**” (Luke 19:10, *emphasis added*).

If you do not know and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are lost! The interesting thing about being lost is that it’s not a moral statement in the sense of people who outwardly appear to be better than other people. When you are lost, there’s an equality in the same condition.

The Bible teaches the reality of human depravity. We’re not all as bad as we could be, but we’re all as bad off as we can be. You don’t have to be bad to be lost. You can be a good person in the eyes of the world and still be lost. There are plenty of good people, religious people, moral people, virtuous people, but they’re lost because they don’t have a relationship with Jesus Christ. It’s only through Him that you are made right with God. When Jesus says, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham,” Jesus wasn’t referring to the fact that Zacchaeus was Jewish by race. Jesus was referring to the fact that Abraham was made righteous by faith.

No gospel writer put more emphasis on the truth of us being lost than Luke. Luke 15, one of the most incredible chapters in the Bible, is about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. Being “lost” is not about bad behavior; it’s about living apart from God! Zacchaeus realized this, and he surrendered his life to Jesus. And Zacchaeus did it in a very interesting way.

We don’t have a lot of background as to what else was said or done in this moment. What we do know is that after Jesus went into Zacchaeus’ house—while the people were outside grumbling and complaining and saying, “*Why would Jesus be here?*”—something miraculous happened:

“And Zacchaeus stood” (Luke 19:8).

Whatever happened, Zacchaeus got out of his chair and stood up as if to say, “*Lord, I’m guilty. Lord, I’m needy. Lord, I’m wrong. Lord, I surrender.*”

This is one of the most beautiful pictures of repentance in the Bible! We tend to think of repentance as being broken down, hunched over, and pouring out tears. But here’s an amazing picture of

repentance—a man who realized his guilt, who stood up to receive the verdict, and in that same moment, gave testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. How do I know that?

“Behold, Lord [I love the fact Zacchaeus said, “Lord,” in recognition of who Jesus is], the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Luke 19:8b).

Here’s the picture of what happens to a person when they encounter Jesus—not *informational* Jesus, but *transformational* Jesus—and what happens as we change our heart’s attitude toward God and toward others in addition to what we have, what we do, and how we live.

Suddenly, this man, “Despicable Me,” became a miraculous example of the incredible grace of God! Zacchaeus said, “Lord, I’m going to change everything in my life because I’ve done nothing but be a greedy hoarder. Now I’m going to become a generous giver.”

Real Christianity touches real life! It’s not just something you do on Sunday—wear a little mask, put on a little outfit, and parade back and forth in church. To know real Christianity changes everything about your value system, your virtue, and everything about how you live. To encounter Jesus is to be transformed. Conversion is at the very center of the gospel message.

People who encountered Jesus are changed! That’s why Christianity isn’t about affirming everyone in themselves and their story. Do we care about people—who they are, where they are? Yes. But we’re not here to affirm people; we’re here to see people converted and changed and become new people because of the power of the gospel of the living Christ! God loves you like you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way! He’s going to take you and transform you!

“A faith that does not purify the heart and life is not saving faith at all. Grace that cannot be seen like light and tasted like salt is not saving grace but hypocrisy. The man who professes to know Christ and trust Him while he cleaves to sin and the world is going down to hell with a lie in his right hand! The heart that has really tasted the grace of Christ will instinctively hate sin.” —Bishop J.C. Ryle

Have you ever heard Jesus calling your name... calling you to believe... calling you to surrender... calling you to be saved?

I really cannot explain the mystery of the Divine initiative of God’s choosing and calling, and the human responsibility of faith and receiving. But I can tell you that just as miraculous as the virgin birth of Christ is—where God took on humanity and Jesus is the God/Man, the one-of-a-kind, the one-and-only—it’s a miracle! It’s a mystery! Something I cannot explain, just as I cannot explain the wonder of the Scripture. Scripture on the one hand is all breathed out by God—every word, every detail—but it was recorded and written by men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is both human and Divine in God’s essence and work, but it’s the miracle of how God does things!



I can't explain to you how Jesus could take all the sin of the world upon Himself on the cross, and be the Divine substitute for you and me individually, across all time and all of history. But I'm here to tell you today, it is the miracle of who God is and what God has done in Christ. What God did in each of those ways, God does in a moment of salvation when you receive and believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is calling. God is working. He is moving. Zacchaeus had a divine appointment. He just didn't know it. He was just going through life and thinking, *"What's this about? I need to know more. I'm curious about Jesus."* Little did Zacchaeus know what that Divine appointment was in his life, but God had him there that day, and Jesus came calling.

Someone in this room may be here because of a Divine appointment. You may think somebody invited you to church, or you're curious, or you just came to church. However, there's something more happening here than what you see in flesh and blood; it's the power of the Spirit of God! Today if you hear His voice calling... well, let me say it in the words of Scripture:

*"Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart... Behold now is the favorable time; behold, today is the day of salvation" (Hebrews 3:15; 2 Corinthians 6:2).*

I love what Jesus said about Zacchaeus:

*"Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9a).*

Salvation can be real for you as you encounter the power of the living Christ!

*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).*

*Lord, only You can see and know the condition of our hearts today. So many are very sincere in their desire to know You, to hear from You, to surrender to You, to follow You. But Lord, I pray for that man or woman or teenager or child today who has never, until this moment, realized their greatest need in life is a Savior and the salvation Jesus gives. I pray there might be someone here who would quit trying to become a better person or just to know more of the Bible, but who would truly today take a stand and say, "Today, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I believe that He came and died on the cross for my sin, and I believe He is alive and is extending to me the gift of life. Lord, today I believe. Lord, today I receive."*

*Would You work a miracle in a heart as You did in the heart of this man, Zacchaeus. Would You take away all the pettiness and pretense that keep us from knowing and being what You would desire for us that we may lay hold of the power of the living Christ!*

*Lord, thank You for this time in Your Word and this testimony in Scripture. And now, Lord, as we move forward in these coming days, I pray You would show us how we might live and walk in a way to bring*

*glory and honor to Your name because we have been changed by the power of Your love. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

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