

Once we accept the friendship, forgiveness, and future that are ours through God's grace, it's time to celebrate! The party at Zacchaeus's house reached its climax as Jesus said: *"Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost"* (Luke 19:9-10).

Zacchaeus was lost but now he was found. He was short on a future until Jesus came into his life. John Wesley said, salvation is not only about being delivered from sin but also about restoring our souls to their "original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God." (A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," in *The Works of John Wesley: Vol. VIII* (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Bake Book House), 47.

"Today is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Will you say "yes"?

God sent Jesus from heaven to become a person like us. Jesus didn't get down on his knee to show us his love. He went down into a grave so we can find a friend, forgiveness, and a future. This is God's soul-saving love and God's saving grace. Our response is to say "yes" to Jesus!

Questions for Reflection

1. How did you become a follower of Jesus? Did you have a 'light switch' experience or a 'dimmer switch' experience?
2. Zacchaeus wasn't short in stature only. He was short on friendship, forgiveness, and future. What is your shortcoming in your life and faith?
3. God's soul-saving love and God's saving grace are available 'even now.' How do you respond to God's love and grace? Will you say "yes" to Jesus?

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A Grace-Full Life (2)

God's Soul-Saving Love

Luke 19:1-9

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How did you become a follower of Jesus? How did you say "yes" to Jesus? Did you have a dramatic moment or a conversion experience to follow Him? If you had this experience, it is a "light switch" experience. One example in the Bible was the Apostle Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). One moment Paul was not a follower of Jesus. Then in an instant, like a light switch being flipped on, the Holy Spirit reached him and he said "yes" to Jesus.

But, many of us became followers of Jesus because we grew up under the influence of Christian parents or grandparents. This is a "dimmer switch" experience. A dimmer switch allows us to slowly increase the brightness of a light. When we click the knob, the light is very dim. Then, as you turn the knob, the light shines brighter and brighter. The disciples on the Emmaus Road met a stranger, Jesus, as they walked with him. They wondered what their future held after Jesus' death on the cross. During the journey of walking and talking with Jesus, their hearts were warmed. It wasn't a moment. It was more like a season.

Some of us responded to God's justifying grace in a "light switch" moment while others responded in a "dimmer switch" season. I think it doesn't matter how and when we respond to God's proposal of grace in our lives. What matters is that we respond! Right now God is extending a hand of relationship in hopes that we would simply say "yes" to God's love in this moment or season of life.

God longs to be in a continually growing relationship with you. Long before we are aware of God's grace, God looks forward to the day or season in our lives when we will say "yes" to this proposal. 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, *"For God says, 'At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you.' Indeed, the 'right time' is now."* Today is the day of salvation.

Imagine, if you will, a huge ladder representing a scale of goodness from absolutely, perfectly good (at the top) to absolutely, utterly evil (at the bottom). Of course, God is at the top of this ladder as the only One who is perfectly good. Now here's the question to consider: Where do you fit on this goodness ladder? When it comes to the issue of

goodness, we all fall short. Paul had it right when he said, *“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard”* (Romans 3:23).

Instead of us trying to climb some “goodness ladder” to be in a relationship with God, here’s what God did: *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...”* (John 3:16). Here’s what that means. God sent Jesus down from heaven to meet us just as we are. We don’t have to climb our way into heaven. Heaven comes to us.

Today’s text is the story of a man who spent his life climbing and striving until he discovered Jesus’ salvation. The story begins in Luke 19:1-3: *“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd.”*

Often in the four Gospels, tax collectors are lumped in with “other notorious sinners.” These Jewish men were despised, not only by the Romans who used them to extort as much money as possible from their own Jewish kindred, but also by the Jews whom they extorted. Their only friends were other tax collectors.

Zacchaeus, a tax collector and a very wealthy man, got the news that Jesus was passing through his town of Jericho, and something about Jesus drew Zacchaeus to him. He didn’t know it, but it was God’s prevenient grace at work. Zacchaeus had spent his life climbing the ladder of success and found it was leaning against the wrong wall. He longed for a savior.

According to the text, Zacchaeus was short. But Zacchaeus wasn’t short in stature only. He was short on the experience of grace that Jesus wanted to offer him. In this story, we see three things that God wants to give us through his justifying grace.

1. God wants to give us friendship. Zacchaeus needed a friend but he was a hated, despised man. He had earned the title “chief” in the tax collecting business, yet not even that title could satisfy. Look at what happened next: *“So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”* (Luke 19:4-5) Two powerful, grace-filled things happen in these verses. First of all, Jesus called Zacchaeus by name. Jesus knew his name and called to him.

Another grace-filled event was when Jesus said to him, *“I must be a guest in your home today.”* Sharing a meal together was a big deal in that time and culture. So Jesus said to this guy alone in a tree, “Come down.” Zacchaeus had been short on friends until Jesus befriended him. Of all the homes in town, Jesus was coming to Zacchaeus’s home! Jesus was essentially saying, “Come down, Zacchaeus, from your attempts to earn my love by being good enough. Accept my love for you. I want to be your friend.”

2. God wants to give us forgiveness. A second gift God gives us through his justifying grace is forgiveness. Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector; he was a chief tax collector. He had a lot to be forgiven! He wasn’t only a chief tax collector; he was a chief sinner. That’s why Luke 19:6-7 tells us: *“So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.””* Jesus made himself the guest at the home of a notorious sinner, and that is very good news for us.

God loves us just as we are. This is God’s soul-saving, justifying grace that is ours right now, today and every day – no matter who we are or what we’ve done. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, rescuing us by grace. None of us has to live life trying to “measure up.” Grace means we don’t have to “try harder” to earn God’s love and forgiveness. We don’t have to earn it. Grace is God’s free gift through what Jesus Christ did on the cross. All we have to do is welcome Jesus into our lives. God’s justifying, saving grace is available “even now.”

3. God wants to give us a future. Zacchaeus was also short on a future. He had no sense of purpose or destiny except to grow richer. He became more and more lost in his loneliness, shame, and sense of meaninglessness. This one encounter with Jesus changed all of that. *“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.””* (Luke 19:8)

Zacchaeus was not trying to climb the ladder any more. He was not trying to earn God’s approval. Jesus’ presence empowered him to set new standards of honesty and enjoy a new beginning. His sudden act of financial generosity came simply out of gratitude.

Zacchaeus was not earning his salvation here. In response to amazing, unearned grace, he was putting his faith into action. The friendship and forgiveness that he had experienced through Jesus gave him a generous future. Zacchaeus was a new man! He had a new purpose, a new destiny, and a new future because he met Jesus. Zacchaeus now had hope and a future.