

# VBS Sunday ~ “Grace, Gratitude & Generosity”

*Luke 19:1-10*

Pastor James York

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**Prayer for Understanding** Good morning God. Please help us feel your love for us. Please help us understand that you want to be friends with each of us. Amen

Zacchaeus was a rich man. He had all the luxuries money can buy. Zacchaeus worked for the Romans, so he partook of all the high-class delights. Being a chief tax collector Zacchaeus had tremendous power. Zacchaeus was miserable searching for meaning, purpose, abundant life. Many assume that Zacchaeus had become a bully, using his power and position to get his way and add to his wealth. Scripture states that people viewed Zacchaeus as a “notorious sinner.”

Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus welcoming, healing, forgiving, eating with all people, the poor, children, women, people from other religions, people from other cultures. Most importantly, Zacchaeus heard that Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion and Jesus is **Luke 7:34 “a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”** Therefore, Zacchaeus thought there is a chance Jesus will love, forgive, and heal me. Maybe, Jesus can help me repent, change, turn, transform, from this life of misery to a life of belonging, gratitude, and extravagant love. Maybe, Jesus can fill this hollow void, hunger, and longing. Zacchaeus was searching for grace, gratitude, and generosity. Zacchaeus needed a friend.

A large crowd was greeting Jesus. Zacchaeus was unable to see Jesus. If the Romans noticed Zacchaeus was striving to see Jesus, he would be fired. At that time, running was considered undignified for a wealthy man of status. Climbing a tree was humiliating instead a person of means would summon servants to lift one up. Zacchaeus was overcome with a desire to see Jesus, so he ran ahead and climbed a tree. Zacchaeus needed a friend.

The gospel of Luke explains: **Luke 19:1-10 NLT “Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. Zacchaeus tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So, Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. “Jesus has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for Zacchaeus has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”**

Zacchaeus was permeated with grace. Jesus was his friend. God loved him unconditionally. Zacchaeus was embraced by Jesus’ loving gaze that assured him that he was loved, that he belonged to God’s family, that God was eager to give to him all he needed for abundant life. Jesus knew his name. In the speaking of his name, Zacchaeus felt the grace of God permeate his being. He was forgiven. His guilt was gone. His burdens were lifted away. Jesus declared that he would be a guest in Zacchaeus home. Immediately, Zacchaeus was filled with gratitude, excitement, and joy.

The crowd was stunned. Jesus was breaking the code of purity by stepping into the home of a tax collector. Jesus was honoring a man who had just humiliated himself by running and climbing a tree, a bully and notorious sinner. No matter what one does Jesus will always be everyone’s friend. Jesus will forgive everything and anything. God loves unconditionally.

An important aside here. If you are being bullied, please report the bully. Children if you are being bullied tell a parent, teacher, or adult. Keep telling adults that you are being bullied until the bullying stops. God loves bullies to change them into a loving person. God desires that all people live together in loving harmony. God is calling all of us to create a world where no one is bullied, oppressed, abused, or looked upon as a person of less worth than anyone else.

Anyone who sought Jesus found abundant life. Merely a touch of Jesus’ clothes healed. Even sending a message through others requesting healing was more than enough to receive God’s gracious healing. All who seek will find. All who desire to receive grace will be given abundantly more than they can ask or imagine. All who want a friend will have Jesus as a friend for eternity.

Zacchaeus was grateful to receive grace, God's unconditional love, and have Jesus as a friend which transformed his greed into generosity. Zacchaeus' outpouring of generous love made him a true son of Abraham. The agreement with Sarah and Abraham was that God will always bless them, in return they are to bless all people. Zacchaeus is now experiencing God's blessings and is eager to bless others. Having experienced true friendship in Jesus, Zacchaeus is striving to be a true friend. Receive grace. Nurture gratitude. Love generously. Amen