

**THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THE LOST - Biblical Commentary
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Luke 19,1-10

He 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."

The Gospel of Luke opens with the affirmation that nothing is impossible for God. There are no desperate cases, there are no people who, whatever their situation or condition, can be excluded from the love of God. Yet in the Gospel there are two categories that seem to be excluded from the love and salvation of God, the first is that of the publicans, the tax collectors, who were considered transgressors of all the commandments; impure people for whom there was no hope of salvation. And the other exclusion comes from Jesus who strictly excludes the presence of the rich in his community. Jesus said it clearly *"It is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than a rich man enters the kingdom of heaven"*.

Jesus' community is composed of gentlemen and not of the rich. What is the difference? The rich are those who have and hold for themselves, the gentlemen are those who give and share with others.

Well the evangelist presents us in the first ten verses of chapter 19, a desperate case, which seems to have no solution. But let's see.

"He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus." Ironically, in Hebrew Zaccai means pure, but we will see that he is the most impure person. *"He was a chief tax collector and was rich."* Here, he has the two characteristics that exclude him from salvation. Not only is he a tax collector, but he is also the chief tax collector. And he is also rich. Therefore from the point of view of the religious society he is excluded from God, but also for Jesus he cannot belong to his community. So it's a hopeless case.

"And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature." The evangelist does not want to give us a folkloristic indication about the height or not of this character, the term he uses for small "micros", meaning that he is not on the same level as Jesus. Why is he not at the same level of Jesus? For his activity, an activity that leads him to deceive and rob others, to do harm but above all because he is rich. The rich are not up to Jesus' level.

. *"So he ran on ahead..."* Here is the first of the changes in this person. He is a leader of the publicans, a person who was despised, feared and revered. And he starts to run. Running in that culture is something dishonourable because you must never run. *"..and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way."* The sycamore is a typical plant of the area, It is

a large plant. Well, Zacchaeus thinks that to see Jesus he must climb up, instead Jesus will invite him to come down.

“And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down...” He thought that according to the religious mentality to get closer to God it was necessary to go up, instead Jesus invites him to come down. *“...for I must stay at your house today.”*

The verb " must " used by the evangelist is a technical verb with which the evangelists affirm the divine will. So this having to stay at the home of Zacchaeus is part of God's will, of the plan of salvation, God came to propose his love to all.

“So he hurried (first he ran now he hurries)and came down and received him joyfully”. What is the reason for this joy? It is not only about welcoming the person of Jesus. Joy comes from what he is about to do. Jesus, in an expression that is contained in the acts of the apostles, will say: *“ There is more joy in giving than in receiving”.* And Jesus had blessed those who make the choice of poverty, of sharing. Here is the reason for Zacchaeus' joy.

But, to the joy of Zacchaeus, the others respond grumbling. *“And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”* Sinners must be warned, they must be scolded and above all they must be avoided. It is unthinkable that a pure person can enter the house of an impure person because he is infected by this impurity. Jesus shows that it is not true that the sinful man must purify himself in order to be worthy of welcoming him, but it is welcoming the Lord that purifies him.

“And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.” so he, who was rich, was no longer rich, because half of what he has he gives to the poor. It is the acceptance of the beatitude of Jesus.

“ And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” Zacchaeus does much more than was required by the law. In fact in the book of Leviticus, in chapter 5, we read that the culprit had to give back what he stole with the addition of a fifth. He does much more. It says "I return four times as much". What happened? He was rich, now he is no longer rich, but now he is full of happiness and joy.

And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house,..” Jesus at the beginning of this gospel as the saviour and for the first and only time, the term "salvation" appears.

“...since he also is a son of Abraham.” People thought that, by his conduct, he was an excluded, impure, and cursed person, No, he is a son of Abraham *“ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

The Son of Man does not wait for sinners to repent, but it is he who goes to meet these sinners to communicate life. Why does Jesus say: "Save what was lost?" Because wealth destroys people. Life is obtained by giving and not accumulating. This is the good news brought by Jesus, so for him there are no impossible and desperate cases.