

61 million! Since 1973 and the landmark case of Roe v. Wade, there have been 61 millions abortions just in the States! The woman behind that Supreme Court ruling was Norma McCorvey (**picture**).

In June of 1969 21-year-old Norma McCorvey discovered she was pregnant with her 3rd child. Friends advised her to falsely claim she'd been raped so she could obtain a legal abortion (Texas allowed abortion in cases of rape and incest). The scheme failed. There was no police report documenting an alleged rape. Texas law only allowed abortion "for the purpose of saving the life of the mother." Norma attempted to obtain an illegal abortion, but the unauthorized facility had been closed down by law enforcement. Eventually, she was referred to attorneys, Linda Coffee and Sarah Weddington, who filed suit on her behalf, though McCorvey would end up giving birth before the case was decided and her baby was put up for adoption.

61 million abortions! So, do you hate her? Do you think that there should be a special place in hell reserved for her? Do you think that someone like her is unredeemable? Are there others you think are unredeemable? Child molesters, drug dealers, mass murderers, rapists? ISIS or Islamic radicals? That co-worker who mocks your faith? Be honest. Who do you hate or at least struggle to not hate? I have my list. No doubt you have yours.

Of all the accounts in the New Testament, the one we're looking at today is one of the best-known and best-loved. Of the four Gospel writers, only Luke records it. Prior to going to Jerusalem and the cross, this is the last one-on-one encounter Jesus has in Luke's Gospel. Jesus stops everything to talk to this man. Please turn in your Bible to Luke 19:1-10 (p. 878).

Of all the people Jesus could have talked to and taken time with, couldn't He have found someone a little more worthy, more needy? Weren't there orphans or poor people, or a few blind or lame Jesus could engage? Zacchaeus is **The last person that we'd think would come to Jesus.**

This story rebukes us. I know it rebukes me. If I had been Jesus, I'm not sure that I'd have stopped for Zacchaeus. He's a rat! Hospitals discharge patients who are incurable. From a human perspective, Zacchaeus, is incurable. He's the worst of the worst...but we too easily forget that God's love, grace and forgiveness knows no limits. Jesus not only loves and saves the Zacchaeus's of the world, He loves and saves people like you and me.

There are powerful truths in this familiar account that we need. It's vital that we take the truths and use them like a scalpel to cut away the cancer within our own souls that keeps us from having Jesus' heart.

If you're taking notes...

Truth #1: The most unreachable are often the ones Jesus reaches. *"[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich."*

Zacchaeus is the worst scoundrel in Jericho. Apparently though, he'd had godly parents who'd had high hopes for him. His name, *Zacchaeus*, means *clean, pure* or *innocent*. His parents had visions of him being a man of ethics and integrity. When we meet him, he's the polar opposite of his name.

He's not just a tax collector, he's *"a chief tax collector and was rich."* You didn't become rich back then as a tax collector, unless you were a crook. Zacchaeus is the godfather. He's at the top of this pyramid of crooks.

This isn't Gary, Indiana or Detroit. This is more like San Antonio. Jericho was one of the most important cities of ancient Israel and a very wealthy one. Located in the tropical plain about six miles west of the Jordan River (**picture/map**), it was a center of trade, commerce, industry and agriculture and had been an important city for generations. Well before the time of Christ, the Romans valued Jericho. Marc Antony once gave the city to Cleopatra as a gift. She promptly turned around and sold it, but that's another story. King Herod built a hippodrome (**picture**) there and a summer palace.

Jericho was known for two things; balsam wood and dates, which were shipped throughout the ancient world. Being a chief tax collector in Jericho was big business and very profitable. Humanly speaking, Zacchaeus had it made. But because he's a crook and a pawn of Rome, he's despised. Zacchaeus wouldn't be safe in the midst of a crowd waiting to see Jesus.

Who's the most hated person you personally know? Who's the neighbor everyone detests? The employee everyone trash talks? That's Zacchaeus. If Zogby took a poll, "Name the most hated man in Jericho," He'd be at the top of the list. Everyone would have said, "He's the worst guy in town."

But then if you asked the second question, "Who is the least likely person to want to see Jesus?" Zacchaeus would again have been at the top of the list. People wrote off this evil man long ago. That brings us to Truth #2...

Truth #2: The greatest sinner is often the greatest seeker of Jesus. *“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.”*

Zacchaeus doesn't just want to see Jesus. This isn't morbid curiosity. He's desperate to see Jesus. But being part of a crowd wasn't safe. Then, he's short and can't see past the mob. Everyone had left their homes and were lining up along the street to see this great Prophet.

Zacchaeus is wealthy. No doubt he's dressed as befitting his position. But he's desperate, so he does two things rich men never did back then and don't do today. He *ran* and then *climbs* up a sycamore tree (**picture**). Obviously, it had some low hanging limbs that he could hoist himself up on.

Can you picture Warren Buffet (**picture**) running or climbing up a tree where everyone might see him? CEOs don't run. Suits don't climb trees but Zacchaeus did. I have to think that he got himself in a place where he could see everything, but hid amidst the leafy branches where no one could see him. He takes a great risk to see Jesus.

It would be like Jeff Bezos (**picture**), Joy Behar (**picture**) Bill Maher, (**picture**) or Nancy Pelosi (**picture**) desperately seeking Jesus. Now I can hear you, and unfortunately I have the same doubt of the power of God, “That'll never happen!” But they'd have said that about Zacchaeus. We have such little faith. I continually pray, “Lord, help me grow in faith.” We know so little of the gospel's power because we have such small faith.

I'd surmise that there's someone in your life, and if you're honest, you think – “They'll never come to Christ!” Before that glorious day in Jericho, no one would have thought that Zacchaeus would come to Christ.

Perhaps Zacchaeus knew Levi. Maybe he'd been at the big dinner Levi threw after he became a Christ-follower. It's not too big of a jump to think that he'd heard about Levi and how Levi left his tax collector table to follow Jesus. Maybe that was the birth of his curiosity.

My friend, someone is watching you. Someone who you think has no time for Jesus or the gospel. They want to know if you're real and if your Jesus is real. What message are you sending? Are you praying for them? Have you ever talked to them about spiritual things? Invited them to church? Or, have you written them off as a Zacchaeus, that they want nothing to do with Jesus. What if you're wrong? John Calvin said, *“Curiosity and simplicity are a sort of preparation for faith.”*

We wrongly assume that those who are rich, powerful and famous are unreachable. But read their stories. They're some of the most miserable people on earth. Why would someone who seems to have it all commit suicide? Because all the things that we think make life worthwhile can't plug that huge hole in your soul. That's Zacchaeus. He's so desperate that he'd do nearly anything just to get a glimpse of Jesus.

Truth #3: Jesus' love knows no prejudice or preconceptions. *“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.’ So he hurried and came down and received Him joyfully.”* Have you ever done this? Maybe ducked down a grocery aisle because you didn't want to see someone? I love this **video**. Most of us have done this.

What Jesus does here for Zacchaeus is so unnatural. If you're in a crowd – walking, talking, teaching – where are your eyes? Level, around you or straight in front of you. It'd be unusual to look up. But Jesus doesn't just look up. No, Jesus is looking! Because unbeknownst to Zacchaeus, Jesus has a lunch appointment at his home that day. It's a divine appointment. So Jesus looks for Zacchaeus, makes eye contact and who does Jesus see – in my mind I picture a Danny DeVito (**picture**) – up in the branches.

What Jesus does next is so socially wrong. He doesn't accept a lunch invitation from a guy who's a social pariah. No, it's far worse. Jesus initiates and invites Himself for lunch at the home of the worst guy in town.

Sometimes we get caught by an “invitation” and to be polite, we go. Not Jesus. He wants to go. He has business that He must do with Zacchaeus. He doesn't see someone vile but a lost sheep, Satan's victim. What do we see?

Zacchaeus just wants a glimpse of Jesus, but he gets a house guest. This is so cool! Jesus knows Zacchaeus' name. Jesus had ever met Zacchaeus but He knows his name and He loves Him, My friend, He knows your name and He loves you, too! You don't need a name tag. God said in Isaiah 43:1: *“Fear not for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.”* You may think you're all alone, that nobody knows you or cares. But the God who created the Universe knows you and He loves you!

Don't you think Jesus was busy? Weren't there countless others clamoring for His attention? But He stops for one lost man. *Why?* Jesus always has time for you. Please let that soak into your soul. Maybe that's why we don't reach more for Christ. We're too hurried and harried. Unlike Jesus, we don't take time to stop. We're “too busy.” Yet, what are we doing that really matters, that has true significance, that will count in eternity?

The gospel is not for “good” people. It's not just for sweet little church kids. No, the gospel is for the outcast. It's for those in the gutter spiritually. The ones no one else wants. It's for those Paul writes of in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, *“Or do*

*you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

A few years ago there was a rumor that Jane Fonda, when she was married to Ted Turner, had trusted Christ as Savior. Reportedly, she was led to Christ by their chauffeur and her conversion led to her and Ted’s break-up. I don’t know. I do know this. In the Church we’re great at reaching down to the down and outer BUT forget that the up and comer needs Jesus just as much.

We must grow in our compassion for those who seem to have it all and be very aware, that if they don’t have Jesus, they’ve got nothing. We must pray for opportunities and have more loving boldness to reach out to them as easily as we do to those who are economically on our level or below us.

God used a slave named, Daniel, to reach not one, but two world emperors. Your boss needs Jesus as much as the janitor. Are you praying for their salvation? Are you looking for opportunities to share the only truth that’ll fill the hole in their soul? *“But what if they fire me?”* Don’t you think that if you obey God and share the gospel, God can get you a new, even a better job?

What’s the first thing that happens to this scoundrel after He accepts Jesus – **joy!** Notice the phrase, *“received Him joyfully.”* One of the first radical changes that happens when you accept Christ is that He gives you joy! Joy is a key theme in Luke. The word is found in one form or another over 20 times in Luke. One of the first fruits of salvation in a believer’s heart is joy. When a believer doesn’t have joy, something is seriously wrong.

Please also notice that important word – *today*. Salvation is always offered in the present tense. If you don’t accept the gospel *today*, you may not have *tomorrow*. If Zacchaeus had said, “Today won’t work, Jesus. I’m busy. My schedule is full. What about next week?” Then, I don’t believe that we’d see Zacchaeus in heaven. Friend, if Jesus is asking to come into your heart *today*, please let Him in *today*. None of us knows about tomorrow.

Truth #4: The church crowd is the biggest barrier for the lost. *“And when they saw it, they all grumbled, ‘He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner’.”* This should break our hearts. It’s so sad.

Be honest. Are you like the “church crowd?” Who do you NOT want in our church? Who are the *sinner*s for you? I have a pastor friend who was shocked to discover a group of parents in his church were holding their own youth activities. They didn’t want their kids to be with public school teens.

Think about the people you complain about, probably in the privacy of your home or in your clique. What if they walked in the front door of our church? Would you whisper a prayer, “Lord, please don’t let them sit by me...and please don’t let them stay in our church.” The church crowd is unwilling to let the deplorable find Jesus. For three years, Jesus has made clear that His mission is to seek and save the lost, but they still don’t get it. Do we?

What if someone pulled up to our church with bumper stickers like this plastered all over the back of their car? (**picture**). Would you whisper about them? Make snide remarks. Poke a friend and chuckle.

The first Sunday that Rosaria Butterfield went to church that was what her truck looked like. At the time Rosaria was a professor at Syracuse University, a lesbian with a butch haircut...she was looking for Jesus when she showed up at church. And she was gloriously saved! Today she’s a pastor’s wife and author (**picture**). One of our women’s Bible studies is going to work through her book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*. ”

The church crowd hates Zacchaeus because he was a big sinner and they despised Jesus because He reached out to Zacchaeus. The bottom line is that you’re either a *bridge* or a *barrier* to Jesus. Which one are you?

We often think that our message is a turn-off, but more often we’re the turn-off. Jesus was Zacchaeus’ friend before He became His Savior. Maybe your spouse or children, family, friends or co-workers don’t want anything to do with Jesus because of you? We need to do some serious soul-searching. If you don’t live like Jesus, if you don’t love like Jesus, please don’t talk about Jesus. You’re a barrier to the gospel. Mark it down. When people start getting saved, when there’s spiritual movement, when the church starts growing – the **church crowd** always grumbles.

Mahatma Gandhi (**picture**) famously and sadly, said: *“I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”* The problem with many non-Christians isn’t that they don’t know any Christians. The greater challenge is they do, but they’re the grumbling church crowd.

Truth #5: When there is salvation, there is repentance. *“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.’”*

Zacchaeus powerfully demonstrates that unlike the rich young ruler, a rich man can go through the eye of a needle. Scripture knows nothing of “easy-believism” that’s often passed off as salvation in contemporary Christianity.

If you've really met Jesus, it shows. There's no such thing as someone who's become a Christ-follower and remained unchanged. There's a radical change. Zacchaeus is now free to live up to his name: the pure and righteous one. His salvation evidenced itself in two ways...

Restitution. If you stole under the Law, you were required to make full restitution plus a 20% penalty. Zacchaeus didn't return a 120%, but 400%.

Generosity. The gospel makes little men big. "*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.*" Before he was a thief, now he's a philanthropist.

When your life has been changed, when you get it – that you were headed to Hell and now that you've met Jesus, you're headed to Heaven, generosity isn't something that you struggle with. You're so overwhelmed by God's love that what you struggle with is you just can't give enough in gratitude.

But if you hate giving, maybe you don't really know Jesus. When you meet Jesus, generosity is normal. Instead of a passion to *get*, he has a passion to *give*. That's salvation. But if you're figuring how much you can give so you don't feel guilty. Or, if you ask if you should give based on the net or gross, you don't understand God's generous grace.

Jesus went to lunch at the home of the littlest man in Jericho and he left the home of the biggest man. Zacchaeus is a new man. That's why he gave away his fortune. This is critical! Generosity is not an *amount*, it's an *attitude*. The most generous giver in the Bible only gave two pennies.

When there's salvation, there's repentance. Repentance means turning away from sin and turning toward godliness. If you've been lazy, you get back to work. If you've neglected your spouse or family, you reorganize your schedule and make them a priority. If you have a problem with sexual sin, you replace it with purity. If you've been living selfishly, you start serving. If you've been tearing people down, you begin to build them up. Where you've been bitter, you replace it with grace and forgiveness. That's repentance. It's what happened to Zacchaeus. He went from being a taker to a giver.

It's what Jesus wants to do in your life. Where there's salvation, there's change. Zacchaeus didn't stop being a tax collector, but now that he'd met Jesus, he became a different kind of one. It's what Jesus wants to do with you. Most of us don't have to leave a job, but we have to do it differently.

Truth #6: Jesus' mission to seek the lost is now our mission. "*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.'*" Zacchaeus is in real time the lost sheep, coin and son of Luke 15. It's why He came. It's what He's commissioned us to do. You begin as a lost sheep being rescued, then you become a rescuer. If we're Christ-followers, we must love the lost and seek to find them. God didn't call us to be a "holy huddle," doing our religious thing on Sundays. We're to storm the gates of hell and snatch lost sheep from the brink.

Most of us have seen a search and rescue effort on TV. One Search & Rescue Team describes their mission this way: "*Millions of people visit the mountains of Larimer County, Colorado, each year. A few will become lost, stranded, or injured...some will die. Our objective is to find and rescue these lost or injured people before it is too late...We are dedicated to saving lives.*" That's what Jesus has called us to, not saving physical life but spiritual life. In a world enslaved to sin and doomed to a Christless eternity, we're the search and rescue team that He's left here.

Are you like Zacchaeus? Have you been found? If you have, if you're a Christian, please STOP *just* attending church. Please find at least one seeking place or ministry. Maybe start taking lost folk at work to lunch. Take your kids to McDonald's on the same night and engage with other families. Look for newcomers at Grace to show hospitality to. God didn't call us to sit but to seek. Use one of our outreach ministries – i-Fit, Amped, Foundation or help start one (sports, addiction, divorcecare, griefshare, ministry to young moms with young children, a craft ministry, car repair ministry). God has called every believer to a rescue operation. Are you living our His purpose for you? Are you part of the team?

Conclusion: Zacchaeus was the last guy anyone thought would come to Jesus. Maybe you've come today needing to be rescued. If you're lost, Jesus is calling your name and inviting you to Himself. He wants to give you a new life. He sees you in whatever tree you might be in. But you need to respond now and receive Him as your Lord and Savior. Don't delay! Come to Jesus. Turn from your sin and receive Him today.

Maybe you're a believer and you need to start looking up in trees. You need to become part of Jesus' search and rescue team. Start today.

Remember Norma McCorvey? She became an abortion rights celebrity. For years she worked in a Dallas abortion clinic, but the unlettered alcoholic and addict had little in common with the wealthy, college educated women who also worked there. They shunned her, even the lawyer who took her famous case. The irony is who didn't shun her. For several years, Norma's abortion clinic shared an office wall with Operation Rescue that was run by a bartender-turned-Christian named Flip Benham. Every day he greeted "Miss Norma" with a cheerfulness that grated on her. Slowly, Norma realized that Flip didn't hate her. Her demons were her own. Almost against her will, she began to admire the way Flip and "the Christians" next door suffered so many legal and physical assaults as they fought against abortion.

The other person God used to touch her life was a little girl named Emily, the 7-year-old daughter of an Operation Rescue worker. One day, an abortion clinic employee deliberately tripped Emily and her sister, as they were playing on the sidewalk outside both offices. Norma came to their rescue. “Well, hello there, sugars. I’m Miss Norma. I work here at the clinic. I’m one of the counselors, so you’ll probably see me out here a lot. I like little kids, and I don’t like anybody mistreating them.” “Then why are you letting the little ones die inside?” Emily asked. Norma never answered her. She couldn’t. This little girl was the only person in the world who could have gotten away with saying something like that to her. Instead of spewing her usual obscenities, Norma walked back inside the clinic. But little Emily came back the next day and hugged Norma. She and her sister came regularly to the clinic to visit her in its front offices. Emily kept asking “Miss Norma” to join them for church. She finally did, after the shock of learning that Emily had almost been aborted before her mother Rhonda became a Christian.

God worked in her heart and Norma McCorvey (**picture**), Jane Roe, trusted Christ as her Savior and became one of the strongest advocates for the pro-life cause before her death in 2017. Norma McCorvey was the last person many would have thought would ever come to Jesus.

God loves to do the impossible! Who’s your Zacchaeus? Who’s your Norma? Who’s **the last guy that you ever thought would come to Jesus?**