

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 2: What He Came For

Luke 19:1-10 • about 60 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight the students meet the problem Jesus came to solve. They meet it first the way the Gospel presents it, through a man Jesus went looking for, and then the session flashes back to Genesis 3 to see where being lost began. The flashback is the only long one in the study; read it in parts and keep it moving.

Where we are in the story

Last week the students met Jesus through his first followers and heard his invitation, Come and see. Tonight they watch what Jesus does with that invitation when he meets a man the crowd has written off, and then they flash back to the garden to see the disease Jesus came to cure. This is where sin, and original sin, enter the study.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that Jesus goes looking for people who are lost, and that sin is what makes a person lost. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say, in their own words, that Jesus came to seek and to save people who are lost, and that no one is too far gone for him.

The passage in plain terms

Luke tells us three things about Zacchaeus: he is a chief tax collector in Jericho, he is rich, and he is short (19:2-3). Tax collectors worked for the Roman occupiers and were widely resented, often for good reason; the crowd will call him a sinner, and his own words about paying people back suggest he knows why. Luke does not spell out his record; he lets Zacchaeus own it. When Jesus comes through town, Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree to see him over the crowd. Jesus stops under the tree, calls him by name, and invites himself to dinner: Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today (19:5).

The crowd is scandalized. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner (19:7). Then Zacchaeus does something no one told him to do. He pledges half his goods to the poor and promises that if he has defrauded anyone, he will pay it back four times over (19:8). Jesus announces the result: Today salvation has come to this house, and gives the sentence that names the whole study: For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost (19:9-10).

A detail for the students: Jesus never lectures Zacchaeus. He does not list the man's sins. He invites himself over, and the change comes from the inside. The order matters. Jesus goes first; Zacchaeus answers.

What the Church teaches

Sin is real, and the Church does not soften it: sin is an offense against God, a failure of love (CCC 1849-1850). Genesis 3 shows its anatomy: distrust of God's goodness, disobedience, hiding, and blaming. Because of our first parents' sin, we are born without the original holiness God intended for humanity; this inherited condition is called original sin, and it is not a personal sin a baby committed (CCC 404-405). Baptism removes it and gives new life in Christ, though our struggle against sin remains; Session 7 returns to that. Zacchaeus does not deny the crowd's charge; his promise of restitution admits it. But the Church also teaches that Jesus came precisely for sinners. He invites sinners to the table of the kingdom, and he tells the self-righteous that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners (CCC 545). Being lost is the reason he came, not a reason he stays away.

Keep the two halves together all night. If you only say sin is serious, the students will hear that God is disappointed in them. If you only say Jesus loves everyone, they will hear that nothing they do matters. The Gospel says both: your sin is real, and he came for you anyway.

Saints who said yes

St. Matthew

A tax collector like Zacchaeus, sitting at his booth when Jesus walked by and said two words: Follow me (Matthew 9:9). He got up and followed, and he threw a dinner for Jesus and a house full of other tax collectors and sinners. He went on to write the Gospel that carries his name. The man who collected money for Rome ended up recording the words of God.

St. Augustine

As a young man in the fourth century he chased pleasure and success and ran from God for years while his mother, St. Monica, prayed for him. In his book the Confessions he tells how God kept seeking him the whole time, and how his life turned around in a garden in Milan in the year 386. He became a bishop and one of the greatest teachers the Church has ever had. His story is Zacchaeus stretched over thirty years.

Questions students may ask

- Were Adam and Eve real people? The Church teaches that our first parents really did turn away from God at the beginning of human history, and that Genesis tells it in figurative language (CCC 390). She does not fight with science about how human bodies came to be, and tonight is not the place to try. What the story tells us for certain is what sin is and what God did next: he came looking.
- Why did people hate tax collectors? They worked for the Roman empire that ruled Israel, and many charged extra and kept it, so they were seen as cheats and traitors. Luke does not list what Zacchaeus did; the crowd calls him a sinner, and his promise to pay people back suggests they had a point. What they were wrong about was what Jesus would do with him.
- Did Zacchaeus have to give his money away to be saved? He could not buy salvation, and Jesus did not name a price. Jesus went first, Zacchaeus received him, and the giving flowed out of that.

But real change shows up in real actions: repentance includes making things right where we can. Grace comes first, and it changes what we do.

- What does lost mean? It does not mean worthless. A lost sheep is still the shepherd's sheep. Lost means separated from the one you belong to. That is what sin does, and it is why Jesus goes looking.
- Is anyone too bad for Jesus? No. That is the whole point of tonight. If Jesus went to dinner at the house of the man the whole crowd called a sinner, he will come to anyone who lets him in.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 19 and Genesis 3, pencils, name tents, and the students' reflection cards from last week.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 5. Reading Luke 19:1-10 in segments, 5. Discovery questions, 18. Flashback to Genesis 3, 12. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 6. Prayer, one step, and closing, 5. Total: 60 minutes.

If you are running long: drop discovery question 6 and let the Catholic connection carry its point. Never cut the reading, the flashback, or the prayer.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Jesus, you called Zacchaeus by name and went to his house. Tonight, call us closer to you, and help us welcome you. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *Last week we met Jesus and heard his invitation: Come and see. Tonight we find out what Jesus actually came to do by watching him visit Zacchaeus, a wealthy chief tax collector whom the crowd called a sinner.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine there is a kid at school with a reputation for cheating. One day someone invites that kid to sit with them, and another student says, Why would you want anything to do with him? Would you sit there? Does spending time with someone mean you approve of everything they do?*

Leader: Let a few students answer both questions. Keep it fictional; do not let anyone name a real classmate. Then say: Tonight, Jesus walks into that lunchroom.

READ LUKE 19:1-10

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator, Jesus, Zacchaeus, and the crowd. Read verses 1 to 4, then questions 1 and 2. Read verses 5 to 7, then questions 3 and 4. Read verses 8 to 10, then questions 5 and 6. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Luke 19 before you start.

***Leader:** Some students will know the Sunday school song about Zacchaeus. That is fine, but tonight we read the real story, which is sharper than the song.*

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 1 to 4

1. In verses 2 and 3, what do we learn about Zacchaeus? List every detail.

Answer • share after the discussion

He is a chief tax collector, he is rich, and he is small. Tax collectors worked for the Romans, and people resented them as cheats and traitors. He is the last person the crowd would expect Jesus to notice.

2. What does Zacchaeus do in verse 4, and why do you think a rich, important man would do that?

Answer • share after the discussion

He runs ahead and climbs a sycamore tree. He wants to see Jesus badly enough to run and climb, whatever anyone watching thinks. Something in him is already reaching for Jesus before Jesus says a word.

Read verses 5 to 7

3. Look at verse 5. Who speaks first, Jesus or Zacchaeus? What does Jesus say?

Answer • share after the discussion

Jesus speaks first. He stops, looks up, calls Zacchaeus by name, and says, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today. Zacchaeus has not said a single word. Jesus knows his name, and Jesus invites himself over. He goes first.

***Leader:** This is the point of the night. Make sure the group sees that Jesus acts before Zacchaeus does anything to deserve it.*

4. How does the crowd react in verse 7? Were they wrong about Zacchaeus?

Answer • share after the discussion

They grumble: he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. Zacchaeus does not argue with them; his next words admit he has wrongs to put right. What the crowd got wrong was Jesus, who came for exactly that kind of person.

Read verses 8 to 10

5. In verse 8, what does Zacchaeus say he will do? Did Jesus tell him to do it?

Answer • share after the discussion

He pledges half of everything he owns to the poor and promises that if he has defrauded anyone, he will pay it back four times over. Jesus never told him to. Meeting Jesus changed him from the inside, and the change showed up in his wallet. Real change shows in real actions.

6. Read verses 9 and 10 again. In your own words, what does Jesus say he came to do?

Answer • share after the discussion

He says salvation has come to this house today, and then he says why he came at all: to seek and to save the lost. That sentence is the whole study in one line. Jesus does not wait for lost people to find him. He goes looking.

Leader: This is the question to drop if you are short on time; the Catholic connection carries its point.

FLASHBACK: WHERE LOST BEGAN

Read aloud: *Zacchaeus was lost. Where did lost begin? We flash back to the very beginning of the story: the man and the woman are in the garden God made for them, and a serpent starts asking questions. This is the disease Jesus came to cure.*

Read Genesis 3:1-13, in parts: a narrator, the serpent, the woman, the man, and God (give the page number)

1. In verses 1 to 5, what does the serpent get the woman to doubt about God?

Answer • share after the discussion

That God's word is true, and that God is good. Did God say? Then: you will not die. Then: you will be like God. The first sin begins with distrust, with believing that God is holding something back from us. Every sin since has started the same way.

2. What do the man and the woman do when they hear God coming (verse 8)? What is God's first question (verse 9), and what do they do when he asks what happened (verses 12 and 13)?

Answer • share after the discussion

They hide. God's first question in the whole Bible after sin is not What have you done? It is Where are you? He comes looking. Then each of them blames someone else: the man blames the woman, the woman blames the serpent. Distrust, hiding, blaming. That is the disease, and every one of us has caught it.

Leader: If a student asks whether Adam and Eve were real, use the answer in Part 1: a real turning away at the beginning, told in picture language, and no argument with science tonight.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to Jericho. In the garden, God called to people who were hiding. Here, Jesus calls Zacchaeus, who has climbed a tree to see him. The situations are different, but the same loving initiative is in both: God reaches out to bring people closer to himself. He has been doing it since the garden.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *Zacchaeus climbed a tree because he wanted to see Jesus but the crowd was in the way. What gets in the way between you and Jesus? Write one word on your reflection card. That card is yours to keep.*

Leader: Give a full minute of silence. Do not ask anyone to share. If a student writes nothing, that is fine.

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. Sin is real. The Church calls it an offense against God, a failure to love him and to love other people (CCC 1849-1850). And it goes back to the garden. Because of our first parents' sin, every one of us is born without the original holiness God intended for us. The Church calls that inherited condition original sin. It is not a sin you committed. Baptism removes it and gives new life in Christ, and we will talk about that in Session 7. Zacchaeus did not argue with the crowd; his promise to pay people back admits he had wrongs to put right.

But the Church also teaches that Jesus came precisely for sinners. He invites sinners to the table of the kingdom, and he says plainly that he did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (CCC 545). Being lost is not a reason Jesus stays away. It is the reason he came. If he went to dinner at the house of the man the crowd called a sinner, there is no one in this room he will not come to.

Leader: If a student asks whether that means sin does not matter, point back to verse 8: it mattered so much that Zacchaeus gave away half of everything. Grace comes first, and it changes what we do.

PRAYER

Leader: Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.

Read aloud: Let us pray. Talk to Jesus in your head while I say these words. Jesus, you knew Zacchaeus's name and you know mine. You came looking for the lost, and sometimes that is me. Come to my house today. Amen.

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: One thing this week. Zacchaeus made something right that he had done wrong. Pick one thing you owe someone, an apology, something you borrowed, a promise you broke, and make it right before we meet again.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you came to seek and to save the lost. Thank you for looking for us before we looked for you. Help us come down from our trees and let you in. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

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

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Luke 19:1-10 (read aloud in segments); flashback Genesis 3:1-13 (read in parts)

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- Matthew 9:9-13 (the call of Matthew)
- Luke 15:4-7 (the lost sheep, if a student asks what lost means)

CATECHISM

- CCC 1849-1850 (what sin is)
- CCC 397-401 (the first sin: distrust and disobedience)
- CCC 404-405 (original sin, an inherited condition)
- CCC 390 (Genesis 3: figurative language about a real event)
- CCC 545 (Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom)
- CCC 1996-2000 (grace comes first)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13)
- St. Augustine (Confessions, his conversion in 386; summarized)

MATERIALS

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