

Zacchaeus

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Jesus seeks the people everyone else has written off, and real repentance shows up in what we do.

Bible passage: Luke 19:1–10, with Luke 18:18–27. Students read Luke 19:1–10 out loud themselves.

Memory verse: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." *Luke 19:10 (KJV)* and "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." *Luke 5:32 (KJV)*

You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.

Before class: read Luke 18:18–19:10. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room a few verses each.

1. Opening game: Who Gets Picked? (5–10 minutes)

Read each short situation and have students vote with a thumbs up (would invite) or thumbs down (would not). 1) A new kid at school sits alone at lunch every day. 2) A kid who was mean to you last year asks to sit with your group. 3) Someone everyone says is "trouble" wants to come to youth group. 4) A classmate who got caught cheating says they're sorry. Talk about the votes. Ask: *Why is it hard to welcome someone with a bad reputation?* Say: "Today we'll see who Jesus picked out of a whole crowd in Jericho."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Set the scene in your own words: just before this, a rich ruler asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all he had, give to the poor and follow Him, and the man "was very sorrowful: for he was very rich" (Luke 18:22–23). Jesus said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" and then, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (18:24, 18:27). Then Jesus came near Jericho and healed a blind man by the road (18:35–43). Watch what happens to the next rich man.

Read out loud: Luke 19:1–10. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **chief among the publicans** (19:2): the head tax collector
- **sought to see Jesus who he was** (19:3): tried to see which one was Jesus; **press**: the crowd; **little of stature**: short
- **ran before** (19:4): ran ahead; **sycomore**: a kind of fig tree that grows in that land (Amos 7:14)
- **make haste** (19:5): hurry; **abide at thy house**: stay at your house
- **murmured** (19:7): grumbled
- **goods** (19:8): everything he owned; **false accusation**: lying about someone to get their money; **restore him fourfold**: pay back four times as much
- **a son of Abraham** (19:9): one of Abraham's family, God's people Israel



Talk through what you read: Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector, and he was rich (19:2). Earlier, John the Baptist had told publicans, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you," which means don't collect more than you're supposed to (Luke 3:12–13). Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus badly enough to run ahead of the crowd and climb a tree (19:3–4). Jesus stopped under that tree, looked up and called him by name, and said He must stay at his house that day (19:5). Zacchaeus hurried down and received Him joyfully (19:6), while the whole crowd grumbled that Jesus was the guest of "a man that is a sinner" (19:7).

Then Zacchaeus stood up and made two promises: half of his goods to the poor, and fourfold back to anyone he had taken from by false accusation (19:8). Notice the word **if**: Zacchaeus doesn't list what he did, and the Bible doesn't either. But compare it with God's law. A person who wronged someone had to pay it back and add a fifth more (Numbers 5:7), and a thief who stole and sold a sheep had to pay back four sheep (Exodus 22:1). Zacchaeus offered fourfold, far more than adding a fifth. Jesus answered, "This day is salvation come to this house" (19:9), and told everyone why He came: "to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:10).

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. The rich ruler went away sad (18:23), but rich Zacchaeus gave half away gladly (19:6, 19:8). What made the difference? How does Luke 18:27 fit here?
2. Zacchaeus did something a little embarrassing for an important man: he ran and climbed a tree (19:4). What might you have to set aside to get closer to Jesus?
3. Jesus picked out the one man the whole crowd looked down on (19:5, 19:7). Who are the people around you that others write off? How could you treat them the way Jesus did?
4. Nobody in the story told Zacchaeus to pay anyone back. John the Baptist told people to "bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). How is Luke 19:8 an example of that?
5. "If I have taken any thing from any man" (19:8). Is there something you need to make right with someone? What is one step you could take this week?
6. Jesus said He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:10). How does it change things to know Jesus came looking for you before you went looking for Him?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: **Son of man** is a name Jesus called Himself; **is come** means has come; **seek** means look for; **lost** means far away from God. In Luke 5:32, **the righteous** means people who think they are already good enough, and **repentance** means turning away from sin to God. Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Luke 19:10 this week; keep working on Luke 5:32 next week too.



5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "Jesus came looking for Zacchaeus, and He is still seeking the lost today. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). After Jesus rose again, Peter preached how to obey the gospel: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). Like Zacchaeus, real repentance changes what we do. We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water.

Remission means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."

Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Is there anything I have taken, said or done that I need to make right? What would making it right look like?
2. Who is someone others look down on that I could welcome the way Jesus welcomed Zacchaeus?
3. Write a short prayer thanking Jesus for seeking you, and asking Him for a heart that is quick to make things right.

If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: make one thing right that you have been putting off, and be kind to one person others leave out.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and that He knows each of us by name. Give us hearts that turn from sin and are quick to make things right, and help us welcome the people others leave out. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks, "Did Zacchaeus cheat people?": answer honestly. The crowd called him a sinner (Luke 19:7), and he said "if" he had taken anything by false accusation, he would restore it fourfold (19:8). The Bible doesn't list his wrongs, so we don't add to it. What it does show is that Jesus came for him and that his response was to give and to make things right.

