

Amazing Grace

Rich Nathan

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Evangelism: The God Who Seeks and Saves

Luke 19:1-10

Some of you are familiar with the name John Newton. Almost all of you would be familiar with the song he wrote that is perhaps the most loved and popular hymn ever written called Amazing Grace. John Newton was born way back in 1725. His mother was a Christian. She taught her only son, John, the hymns of Isaac Watts, who wrote such famous songs as “Joy to the World the Lord Has Come,” “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” and “Alas and Did My Savior Bleed.” John learned these hymns by the age of six. He was also taught the Westminster Catechism by the age of six. And then his beloved Christian mother died.

His father’s second wife had no spiritual interest. He only went to formal school for two years. All of his education was entirely self-taught. At the age of 11 he began to sail the high seas with his father.

Later, in his journal, he wrote, “I am persuaded now that my father did, indeed, love me. But he seemed not willing that I should ever know it. I was in a constant state of fear concerning my father. His sternness broke my spirit.”

When he was 18, he was pressed into naval service against his will. The older men on board the ship basically ruined John’s morals. He tried to desert, but was caught and put in irons, stripped naked and publicly whipped.

When John Newton was 20, he was put off of his ship onto a small island. He was kept for a year and a half as a slave in Africa. He was beaten, destitute and nearly starving. He was rescued by a passing English ship that had a captain who knew John Newton’s father and managed to free John from his slavery.

On the way back to England, there was a terrible storm. The captain sent John below deck to fetch a knife. And while he was below deck, the man who had taken his place was washed overboard. During the storm, John began to pray. He didn’t even have enough faith to call God “Father.” His guilt about his life and his spiritual condition overwhelmed him. When the storm at sea settled down a little bit, John found a Bible and began reading. By the time the ship anchored off of Ireland, John had acknowledged his need for Christ, but still didn’t see how much he needed Jesus to change every aspect of his life.

He went on to become the captain of a slave trading ship, which forever filled him with deep shame and remorse. In later years he became one of the great

outspoken opponents of English slave trading. He was forced to end his career at sea at the age of 30 because of epileptic seizures.

From the perspective of a mature, Christian faith, John Newton wrote *Amazing Grace* when he was 54 years old. He looked back at the condition he had been in, losing his mother at the age of 6, a very distant and cold relationship with his father, being enslaved at the age of 19-20, being himself a slave trader for five years. He was a blasphemer, a drunkard, immoral and yet, Christ broke into his life and changed him. So he wrote, *Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind, but now I see.*

This morning I want to talk with you about life change. We've heard two stories about life change. I've called today's message, "Amazing Grace." Let's pray.

I want to read to you from Luke 19:1-10:

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.'

So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.' But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.'"

I want to look at vv. 1-2 with you. It says, "Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy."

The name Zacchaeus literally means "righteous one." It is very similar to Zechariah. This man's name means righteous one, but at this point in his life, he is anything but a righteous one. There is nothing righteous about him at all in terms of his relationship with God or with people. In fact, we read that he was the chief tax collector. And though it may be hard to believe, tax collectors were hated more back in Jesus' day than the Internal Revenue Service is hated today. People in Jesus' day despised tax collectors. The rabbis classified tax collectors along with murderers and robbers as people who would certainly be eternally

cursed by God. Here is a guy who every one says, “You are just despised and cursed.”

You see, the way tax collection worked back then was, of course, Rome ruled the entire Mediterranean world back in the 1st Century, including the portion of the Middle East that today we call Israel. Back then it was called Judea and Samaria. And Rome had no civil service, no full-time governmental workers to perform official functions like tax collection. So the way that the Roman government collected taxes was that they would sell the right to collect taxes to people called “publicani.” We can then publicans in the English Bible. These publicani, businessmen who would pay the taxes of a particular region up front to the government, and the government would get their money right away. And then the publicani would go to the particular area that they had been assigned and they would collect the taxes that they had paid up front. Of course, the publicani, for their efforts and energy would add to the collection of taxes, a healthy profit.

Now, if people couldn’t pay what the publicani said they owed, then the publicans were more than happy to loan them the money at a healthy interest rate. So the publicans were hated for their greed because of the exorbitant profit margin they charged on the taxes they collected. They were also hated because of their loan-sharking activities, in which they charged ridiculous interest rates to loan folks the money they needed to pay on their taxes.

But mostly the publicani were hated for their collaboration with the Roman oppressors. These guys were Jewish brethren. They were fellow Israelites and they were working for the enemy. They were like people during WWII who were collaborationists with the Nazi occupation in France or in Norway – just going along with the enemy.

Before we consider some other characteristics of this man Zacchaeus, what I would like to do is to skip down to vv. 3-4, where we read that he wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

What I see in Zacchaeus is a profound resourcefulness. Indeed, people who want to see these lives changed, people who want to feel God’s amazing grace, would be well advised to imitate Zacchaeus in his resourcefulness. Here is a man who applied his business savvy to his relationship with God. He has a problem. He is boxed off by the crowd from being able to see Jesus. He is short. I can see him jumping to see over the taller folks – not that I could identify with him at all, or have ever been in that situation. But I could imagine someone who was short being frustrated because they couldn’t see over the taller people in front of them.

He has a problem. He wants to see Jesus. Obviously, he has heard of Jesus and, perhaps, he has heard of Jesus' reputation for healing and teaching, since Jesus had attracted large crowds all through Judea and Samaria, what we today would call modern Israel. Jesus had thousands of people following him for several years. Everywhere he went crowds were attracted. When Jesus was there, there was always the problem of crowd control. The disciples were always trying to rope off areas and protect Christ.

Just outside of Zacchaeus' city, the ancient city of Jericho, Jesus had performed an incredible miracle. You can read about that at the end of the 18th chapter of Luke, right before this story. But Jesus healed a man who was blind named Bartimaeus.

As I said what I love about Zacchaeus is how resourceful he is; how he used whatever was available to him to further his relationship with God. I have observed over time that some of the most driven people in business become totally passive when it comes to their relationship with God. Maybe you are a high-powered executive, a financial genius, a person who is driving, driving, driving all day long, and making decisions costing tens of thousands of dollars. You are able to make major personnel decisions with a quick phone call. You are regularly involved in long-term strategic planning and you are good at it. You've opened up new markets and are involved in international deals. Or you are regularly litigating multimillion-dollar cases. Maybe you absolutely busted your tail when you were in school and you have a graduate degree.

But when it comes to God or spiritual things, you are completely passive. You would never use the "go with the flow, do the absolute minimum, take things a day at a time and see how life deals with me" approach, or just show up to your business or your professional work. At the office you are a wild person. You are pushing, cranking and achieving. The same thing could be said of many of you in school, your professional life. You are really going for it and pursuing excellence.

But I have noticed something. Many, many of you don't use anything like the same kind of ambition when it comes to involvement in a Small Group, or learning your Bible or growing in your relationship with Christ or undertaking a ministry.

Let me speak personally to you. I share this with all affection, some of you spend an enormous amount of energy fixing up your houses. I mean your car is trained like a horse heading for a barn to pull over to every single antique store and every garage sale. You don't even need to steer any more. The car just goes there of its own accord. You know all the sales people at The Pottery Barn by name. You get birthday cards from the Great Indoors. You dream about the folks from Trading Spaces coming to your home. If you took even half the

passion you take watching Christopher Lowell and put it toward your spiritual life, I guarantee you that your relationship with Christ would just zoom forward.

For some of you, your whole life is your family. You would do anything for your kids. You drive all over the universe to watch them play sports. You are a taxi service, dry cleaner, laundress, tutor, substitute paper boy or girl, janitor – not to mention you are an anytime bank for your children – all rolled up into one. Just stop for a moment and ask yourself what your kids really need from you, not to mention, what your kids need from themselves in order to lead a successful life.

Isn't it the case that your kids need clear, moral guidance to live successfully in this morally confused world? What do you think is more important to the long-term success of your children, playing one more sport, or having the time to develop their relationship with Christ by being able to participate in one of the church's middle school groups, teen groups, or conferences?

Parents, those of you who are going at 5000 rpm to serve your children, let me speak personally to you and say that there is nothing you can do better for your children than to develop your own spiritual life with Christ.

There are many of us who confine our resourcefulness and our drive to only one narrow area of our lives – business, making a buck, fixing up our homes, watching football, achieving in school, or achieving in athletics. But it never spills over to the spiritual part of your life.

I have talked with many wives who have told me, "When it comes to devotions in the home, praying or reading the Bible, and leading the kids spiritually, he is just a big bump on a log. At best, he's willing to go to church, and that is after a fight, particularly during football season. I have to carry the entire spiritual load, and I am tired of it."

I wonder what would happen if you, and many other people, used even 10% of the ambition you use to make a buck, to build your business, and to achieve in your profession or your school, or the ambition you use to fix up your house – I wonder, if you use even 10% of that drive for the kingdom of God, what would happen in your life and the life of the world around us.

I find Zacchaeus to be a very unique person, at least in my experience. He is a man who used his savvy, his resourcefulness, his drive, his energy and his time not only to make a buck, to build a great house, but to advance himself spiritually. He is a guy who runs ahead and climbs a sycamore-fig tree, one of these trees that has a short trunk and wide branches that are great for climbing, in order to meet with Jesus Christ.

And Zacchaeus didn't let the fear of others keep him from starting a relationship with Jesus. Trust me on this, but you know this Jesus business certainly didn't fit

Zacchaeus' social circle. It certainly didn't fit into his family's expectations for his life. But he didn't let that stop him.

I wonder how many of you have really been stopped from going forward with Christ and allowing his grace to change your life because it simply doesn't fit your social or family circle. People in your family or your professional circle, your friends – all of them take their religion in small doses. They certainly are not the type to get all worked up about some church meeting in another city or taking a whole weekend to deepen their spiritual life. They are not like the Zacchaeus' of the world who climb a tree to see Jesus. I mean, you get all these awkward questions from your social circle and your family.

"What's this I hear about you planning to go to Mexico with your church? What resort are you staying at? Are you going on a cruise? Are you going to be stopping at Cozumel? I know some great spots there. What? You aren't staying at a resort? You slept on a mat on a floor?"

That's something your social circle thinks is reserved for holy rollers, or for Bible thumpers, not people you hang around with. Yes, your social circle would say, "We're Roman Catholic, or we're Jewish, or we're Lutherans, whatever religion your relationships are, but we believe religion is a private thing." In other words, your family and friends believe that their religion should essentially touch anything in the real world. It should be kept in a religious building for about an hour a week, but it shouldn't affect the real world, areas of your vacation time or your wallet. I mean, let's not get fanatical here.

And yet, Zacchaeus is willing to violate social expectations. Perhaps there are some of you here today that are coming from a religious background in which your parents or family are not devoted followers of Christ. Many of you know that I was raised in a Jewish family. And I can tell you as a Jew that one of the major hurdles for me in discovering the life changing power of Christ and his amazing grace was being willing to deal with all of the pressure coming to me from my Jewish family and my Jewish friends and my entire social circle. I had to initially be willing to experience a high degree of disapproval, taking the risk that Jesus was indeed worth the disapproval.

One of the costs of becoming a Christian is, in fact, being willing to lose the respect of someone whose respect you really value. Maybe people think of you as a certain kind of person. You are not the religious type. You are very logical or independent. You are not a joiner. You've got a certain image or persona. Maybe you've been respected for those qualities. Now for you to come out of the closet, as it were, and declare yourself to be a person of faith, will blow that image.

Maybe you have been an outspoken critic, and you are going to be forced to eat some of your skeptical words. You've made fun of Christians in the past.

Declaring your allegiance to Christ is going to require you to admit that you were wrong and you are going to have to be humble enough to admit that you need something beyond yourself after all.

For a few of you who have been part of church for years, it is incredibly humbling to come to the recognition that you've never experienced God's amazing grace for you. And that the kind of transforming experience that other Christians talk about has never taken place in your life. It's easy to just pretend, "Of course, I've always had this." It is quite humbling to have to admit to your parents, to other people you know and love, that up until this point you've been on the outside looking in. You are church-ed, but you are not yet Christian.

But Zacchaeus was not only insignificant, but as I said before, he would have been viewed by people as cursed by God because of his tax collection. He would have been totally given up on by other people. And maybe Zacchaeus had given up on himself years ago.

Let me underline this business of being a chief tax collector for a moment. As a tax collector, the general public would have viewed Zacchaeus the way we view a drug addict that keeps failing in recovery. They have gone to the residential treatment centers. They have gone through several 12-step groups. They have gone to counseling on repeated occasions and yet they keep failing. They keep returning to drug or alcohol abuse. Zacchaeus would have been viewed as that type of person – someone you just give up on and say, "Forget it. You permanently have lost."

Zacchaeus would be viewed the way many people view Art Schlichter, the former great OSU quarterback, who we keep hearing stories about every couple of years being arrested again on theft and fraud charges. Stealing from his friends. Passing bad checks. Trying to hide out in a little bar in Southern Ohio. Or Randy Moss, the great receiver for the Vikings – what stupid thing did he do this time? What other dumb thing did he say that will absolutely enrage? Zacchaeus was one of the guys like Art Schlichter or Randy Moss that society just throws on the scrap heap, one of the million of Americans that people have given up on.

We all know people like that, don't we? You just throw up your hands, finally, and say, "Forget it. How many times do we have to go around the same track with you?" We hit the same hurdles. We all know people who have given up on themselves. Maybe you aren't Art Schlichter or a chronic drug abuser. A few of you are HIV positive. Some of you have sexually transmitted diseases that chronically recur in your life. You know there are a lot of people, who if they knew about your situation, would have given up on you. You were an exotic dancer. You have hit your mate or lost it with one of your children. Maybe you have given up on yourself. Maybe you have 2 or 3 or more failed marriages. You are a person who got divorced or you had an abortion even though you

knew what God thought about those decisions and you knew they were wrong. But you said, "I am just going to do it anyway."

Maybe there was a time in your life when you were really an active Christian. Perhaps you are a person who, in the past, led Bible study and you were held up as a model for other Christians. You challenged your Christian friends to greater loyalty and devotion to Christ. You talked with your non-Christian friends about Jesus. You went to all the meetings. Maybe in the past you were even a person who sensed a call on your life to some kind of Christian service, but something happened. Life took an unexpected turn. Maybe work or family problems ate you up. Something got in the way. Perhaps through a series of unintended circumstances, as well as some of your own choices, you have not felt close to God in a very long time. Maybe you've given up on really ever being able to regain what you had years ago in terms of your closeness to God.

I want you to know something. Jesus has not given up on you. No matter how far you feel from God today, Jesus has not given up on you. Amazing grace!

Maybe you are a person who has failed at almost everything you've tried in business. You have gone from one thing to another. Maybe you have been forced to go bankrupt. Maybe you have gone bankrupt more than once. Maybe you are an unwed mother and your family has turned its back on you. Or you made a bad marital choice, or at least one that your family disapproved of and they turned their backs on you. Maybe you used to be in Christian ministry, but because of a moral failure or because of a failure in your family, or church politics, you are no longer a leader or no longer involved in ministry.

I wonder how many of you sitting here today have at one point in your life been given up on by other people? I wonder how many of you have given up on yourself? You have bought the idea that says: Well, I can sit here in a church, but given my history and track record, there is no way that God has any future use for me.

But Jesus doesn't give up on anyone. Not the Zacchaeuses of the world, the tax collectors, not the chronically addicted and not you.

I love the statement by the former Nazi Concentration Camp inmate Corrie ten Boom who wrote the wonderful book that became a movie, "The Hiding Place." Corrie ten Boom once said, "There's no hole you can fall in so deep that God's love is not deeper still." Amazing Grace!

I don't know what kind of hole you have fallen into – whether you have fallen into the hole of depression or divorce or homosexuality or a long-term affair or just confused and broken thinking. I don't know what kind of hole you have fallen into. I don't know what kind of hole you jumped into. But I can tell you, in looking

at the way Jesus related to Zacchaeus, that God knows the hole you are in, and His love is deeper than the hole you have fallen into.

INSERT – Tell the story about Hank.

Zacchaeus was insignificant to everyone but Jesus, and he was given up on by everyone but Jesus. He was utterly lost and could not be found by anyone but Jesus. Jesus says in v. 10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Lost is the way that Jesus usually describes people who have not yet found Christ, or rather, they have not yet been found by Christ. We are in the Bible described as lost sheep who wander away from God. We nibble our way away from God and get into all kinds of danger. We are lost sons and lost daughters who don’t just nibble our way away from God, but we rebelliously run away from God. We slam the door in God’s face. We say no to God and willfully leave God’s presence.

Jesus said his mission in the world was to seek and to save that which was lost. And when you think about lostness, don’t just think about the guy who lives under a bridge or a person whose last known address was the open shelter or the local YMCA, the drifter who is sitting on a Greyhound Bus with all of their possessions in a backpack next to them, just movin’ on to the next town looking for their next meal. There are lots of lost people attending OSU or working in some businesses who live to party on the weekends. Listen to their conversations.

“I got so wasted Friday night.” Or “I drank so much beer last night.”

You can be lost, spiritually lost, in suburbia. There are millions of lost people who have 4-bedroom, 2.5 bathhouses, 2-3 cars, whirlpool tubs, great jobs, mutual funds, great retirement and pension plans and veterans benefits. You can be just as lost in suburbia, in New Albany. Living in an enormous house by some reservoir somewhere. You can be totally lost, as lost as anyone ever is in the inner city or sitting in a Greyhound Bus terminal.

What do I mean by lostness in suburbia? Try this statistic on. According to one study over 50% of Americans have absolutely no guiding philosophy of life. Over 50% of Americans can’t even begin to tell you what they believe. If you are a Christian and you talk with a friend over lunch, you talk with a friend as you are walking at OSU or over a cup of coffee about your beliefs and you say to them: “Tell me what you believe about life. What’s your guiding philosophy?” Most times what you will get is some totally vague, totally made up on the spot philosophy of life.

“Well, I believe in always trying to do your best.” Or “Always being good to others.” Or “Living my life in such a way so I can get up in the morning and look myself in the mirror, and know that I did my level best.”

“I believe in what Woody Hayes said about paying forward, although I am not sure what that means, but I believe that – in paying forward in life; giving back more than you take.”

Friends, over the last twenty seven years that I have been a Christian, I have had so many conversations with individuals where I will gently say: “Let me repeat back to you what you just said. This is your philosophy of life – that we are all basically one and that nature is this great cycle and the energy of our actions, good and bad, affects the whole balance of the universe. That’s your guiding philosophy? That we are all on some wheel and that our energy balance just comes back to us? That’s really, really interesting. I wonder – could you expand on that a little bit for me? Could you just accordion that out and tell me a little bit more and tell me what you mean about us all being one? And that there is this great energy balance in the universe. Could you tell me more about that?”

I have found that lots of times, as people actually begin to expand on their philosophy of life, that their guiding philosophy of life sounds hollow and empty even to them. You don’t have to say anything at all; it is obvious to them that they are just making it up on the spot, that they are coming up with something because they don’t have the courage to say, “I don’t have the vaguest clue when it comes to the really big issues in life. I might have a great house. I might be an expert in programming software. I know where to get the best deal when it comes to cars, jewelry, home furnishings or antiques. I may be great at my little job and all the little details of life.”

But frankly, lots of people would have to admit that they are completely lost when it comes to the really big questions of life. They don’t have a clue about why we exist, or what the ultimate purpose of life is, or how you find ultimate meaning, or how you have a relationship with God.

What about you? Be honest. Do you have a clear guiding philosophy of life? If you expanded on it for a few minutes, would it sound hollow and empty, like cotton candy in your mouth? I don’t mean that you can, by rote repetition, repeat some Christian formula, but something that you really live with that is genuine and real to you and that you live out of every day. Because I will tell you that you are lost, as lost as anyone could be who lives under a bridge, you are lost if you don’t have a guiding general philosophy for your life.

And if you are a parent, what do you have to offer your kids in terms of an overall guiding philosophy of life or a clear guidance system for their lives in a world that is filled with sex and drugs and parties? Why should your kids not have sex at age 13? Why not get involved with drugs? What in your life is so powerful, so compelling, and so real that it will keep your kids from really harmful stuff? Or, if they have rebelled and swung out there, what in your life is so compelling, so real, and so genuine that it will pull your kids back if they do swing out?

Jesus says in v. 10 that he *came to seek and save people that are lost*. People who are lost in the inner cities. People who are lost in suburbia. People who are lost in church and in religion. People who are lost because they have no guiding philosophy of life. People who are lost because they have no anchor.

I want you to notice that Jesus invited himself over to Zacchaeus' house, v. 6, *Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today*. Christians will often ask people whether there's ever been a time when you invited Christ into your life. And I know what Christians mean. I've certainly asked that question myself. But that's not an entirely accurate question. From a biblical perspective, it is probably more accurate to say that Jesus invites himself into your life. Jesus is rather bold here. He doesn't wait for Zacchaeus to invite him, he takes the initiative.

And this is always the way it is with Jesus. He looks at you, calling you by name, "I must come into your life today." And like Zacchaeus, we are faced with a choice. Will we respond to Jesus' invitation by welcoming him into our lives? Jesus says, "I want in." Jesus says to you, "I want in – into your heart, into your home, into your thoughts, into your dreams, into your marriage, into your values, into your love life, into your business plans, your school plans." Jesus says to you, "I want in."

Zacchaeus responded by welcoming Jesus in v. 6, *So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly*. Here's the key to experiencing God's amazing grace – welcoming Jesus. It's so simple, and yet it is so profound. You and I must welcome Jesus. And you and I must continue to welcome Jesus. Instead of slamming the door in Jesus' face today, instead of having these large areas of our lives where we post a sign saying, "No Entry Past the Point," instead of you saying today to Jesus, "I'm going to tackle this issue; I'm going to work out this relationship with this person; I'm going to handle this situation on my own with my ingenuity and my strategies," instead of living independently from Christ, why not just welcome Jesus?

Friend, I want to challenge you to practice this simple prayer. Simply say to Jesus, *Jesus, I welcome you. Jesus, I welcome you into my life. I welcome you into this area*. Wherever you need help, wherever you need an answer, wherever you are experiencing a conflict, disagreement or misunderstanding, wherever you experience a deep need, Jesus is knocking and saying, "Dear friend, I must come into that area." Just respond like Zacchaeus and welcome Christ.

And I want you to notice the order of life change. Zacchaeus' life is changed after he responds to Jesus' invitation and welcomes him. There is a verse for me that has always been like a spiritual mathematical formula for life change and really experiencing God's amazing grace. Sometimes I will talk to a person who grew up in a Christian home, the church home. They mastered the language at

an early age. They get some of the answers down in Sunday School. But they are like John Newton after the first storm on the deck. They believe in Christ, but there's not really very much change at all. They don't seem to be all the way in.

I meet people all the time who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Something like 90% of all Americans say that they believe that Jesus is the Son of God. But if I ask them if this belief has changed their lives, they will often say, "No, it hasn't." I want you to know that you can be immersed in church culture for years and never personally receive God's amazing grace for you or the kind of life change God wants to work into your life unless you understand a little spiritual equation that is laid out in the gospel of John 1:12.

John 1:12 describes better than almost any verse in the Bible what it means to become a Christian. I want you to listen to the verbs here. It says, *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* And here's the equation. *Believing in Christ + receiving Christ = becoming a Christian.*

To believe is to come to a point of acceptance that Christ really did sacrifice himself on the cross for the wrongs you have committed. Christ died to pay for your sins. Christ took on himself the punishment you deserved, and Christ did not stay dead, but rose from the dead. This same Jesus, who died on the cross, is alive today reigning as Lord of the universe. You need to believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And we need to add to that receiving. Or, in the words that we just read in Luke 19, welcoming. To receive, to welcome means I welcome Jesus into my life. I welcome and receive the forgiveness and eternal life that is offered to me through God's amazing grace. It's not just that I know about God's forgiveness, it's something I believe in my brain. Rather, I receive God's forgiveness, I accept it. And I receive Jesus by his Spirit. I welcome him.

And the third verb is to become. That's the life change that God works in us after we believe in Christ and after we receive him as our forgiver, as our friend, as our Lord.

The problem arises when people get the formula wrong. They think that the formula is "I must believe and become and then somehow I'll receive." I hear people all the time who say, "I believe in Christ, but I need to clean up my life. I need to deal with certain areas of my life. I need to change myself, make myself acceptable and then I'll really be able to receive Christ." I talk with people all the time who think, "If I don't make changes first, if I don't get my act together first, live up to Christ's standards first, I really can't receive him."

Jesus says to Zacchaeus, "Today, before you've made any changes, today I must come to your house." And Zacchaeus gets down, welcomes Jesus gladly,

and out of his relationship with Jesus, Zacchaeus is changed. We read in v. 8 that *Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I've cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.*

First, we believe in Jesus. Then we receive Jesus. And when you do that, Jesus says to you, "I will help you become a good follower of mine by transforming your life in ways you could never accomplish on your own."

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost
But now I'm found.
Was blind, but now I see.*

Christ wants to come and change many lives today. He's inviting himself into your life today. Will you welcome him? Will you respond and say, "Yes, Jesus, come in. Change me." Let's pray.

Amazing Grace

Rich Nathan

September 28-29, 2002

Evangelism: The God Who Seeks and Saves

Luke 19:1-10

I. Description of Zacchaeus

A. Resourceful (Lk. 19, 3-4)

B. Insignificant (Lk. 19:3)

C. Given Up On

D. Lost (Lk. 19:10)

1. No Guiding Philosophy

2. No Desire to be Found

3. No Request for Directions

II. Decision by Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:8)