

# When Grace Pushes In

---

## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>35</sup> As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. <sup>36</sup> And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. <sup>37</sup> They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." <sup>38</sup> And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>39</sup> And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>40</sup> And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, <sup>41</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight." <sup>42</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." <sup>43</sup> And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

<sup>1</sup> He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. <sup>7</sup> And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 18:35–19:10)

### One for the Loss Column

- A. In our study of Luke, we finished up last time with that story of the rich ruler that began back up in [Luke 18:18](#).
1. There, you remember perhaps, a man comes to Jesus inquiring what he must do inherit eternal life. He thinks himself on the right path, keeping the commandments of God and things from his youth.
  2. But Jesus sees through the externals of the man's activity and behavior and into his heart. He knows this young man, rich as he is, loves his money more than anything else in all the world—more than God. He knows that money, not God, sits on the throne of his heart. And so Jesus puts His finger on it. "If you want eternal life, there is one thing you still lack: sell all you have and give it to the poor and come follow Me." In other words: "If you want eternal life, I, not money, must be your God. Let go of that, and come grab hold of Me."
  3. And the man can't do it. His attachment to money and stuff is just too strong. So he goes away "very sad" we're told ([v. 23](#)).
- B. From the standpoint of the kingdom of God and the gospel, I suppose you could mark this story down in the loss column.

1. There was no repentance. There was no faith. There was no salvation. There was just a rich man turning away from Christ with a self-destructive, even suicidal, love for stuff: “I don’t want eternal life if it means I can’t have this!”

## Two Big Wins

- A. Well, in our text for this morning, we move now from a story we’d mark down in the loss column to a couple of significant wins. For here we come to see how a blind beggar and a chief tax collector are both brought into the kingdom of God and set on new footing in Christ—salvation, eternal life, joy!
  1. And, while there are indeed two stories here, I should say that I am going to quickly fly over this first one (which shows up in the latter part of [Luke 18](#)) and come to land there in [Luke 19:1-10](#) in particular with the story of Zacchaeus.

### Win #1: A Blind Beggar

- A. So let me at least say a few things regarding this story of the blind man before we go any further. By locating this story immediately following the story of the rich ruler, I think Luke intends for us to notice the stunning contrast that is developed. Let me just rifle off a few of these details for your consideration here now.
  1. The rich ruler was, of course, “[extremely rich](#)” (v. 23). As far as he was concerned, he didn’t need anything from anyone.
    - a. But this blind man, we’re told, is a beggar (v. 35)—he’s in a desperate place, on the side of the road there, with his hands held out for pocket change.
  2. The rich ruler asks Jesus what he must “[do](#)” to inherit eternal life (v. 18).
    - a. But this blind beggar simply asks for mercy: “[Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!](#)” (v. 38)—“I can’t do anything for You! I need You to do everything for me.”
  3. The crowds are surprised that the rich ruler would be excluded from the kingdom—“If not him, [‘then who can be saved?’](#) (v. 26).”
    - a. But the crowds are equally surprised, we could say, that this blind beggar could actually be included in it. That’s why initially, if you noticed, they’re rebuking this poor man as he’s crying out and telling him to be “[silent](#)” (v. 39)—“Jesus is too busy for the likes of you.”
  4. The rich ruler, as we’ve already mentioned, goes away “[very sad](#)” (v. 23).
    - a. But this blind beggar, at the end of his story—he doesn’t go away, he follows, and he isn’t very sad . . . on the contrary, he is filled with joy: “[And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God](#)” (v. 43)!

5. It's a study in contrasts. The one is big in his own eyes and as a result God seems to him to be quite small and unattractive. The other is small in his own eyes and as a result God is discovered by him to be big and glorious. The one begins with it all, but ends with nothing. The other begins with nothing, and ends with it all!

B. So a quick question of application: Which man do you want to be? Which story are you in?

## Win #2: A Rich Chief Tax Collector

- A. As we move into [Luke 19](#), here now we come to see something quite interesting beginning to take shape. It seems to me that, in some sense at least, the two stories we just contrasted with the rich ruler and the blind beggar are here colliding and blending a bit in this one story about a man named Zacchaeus.
  1. For in Zacchaeus we have a rich man—a prominent, self-made man.
  2. But what we come to find is that he is starting to take on the attributes of this blind beggar. He is starting to feel the insufficiency of his wealth, the corruption of his own heart, the desperation he has for mercy. And he too will, in the end, find joy, not in his stuff, but in Jesus.
    - a. We have in Zacchaeus, if you will, a man who is in motion—he is being brought from the place of that rich ruler to the place of this blind beggar. It's beautiful!
- B. And it is quite significant. You remember, perhaps, that striking statement Jesus made back up in [Luke 18:27](#). Jesus had just said that it would be easier to get a camel through the eye of a needle than to get a rich man into the kingdom of God. And the people, hearing this, naturally assume, therefore, that it must be impossible for the rich to be saved. But to that notion Jesus responds with this: "[What is impossible with man is possible with God](#)" (v. 27).
  1. God can break the attachments our hearts have made with money and wealth. God can lift Satan's spell that has had us so enchanted with the things of this world. God can get the camel through the eye of the needle. God can do the impossible.
    - a. And He's about to do it with this man Zacchaeus. And maybe, I pray, He's about to do it even with some of you . . . and with me.
- C. I want to take [Luke 19:1-10](#) now and bring out what I would refer to as three "gospel movements". The gospel takes us from one place and moves us to another. And, in this story, I see it happening in three ways: (1) From Corruption to Curiosity ([vv. 1-4](#)); (2) From Stranger to Son ([vv. 5-10](#)); and, finally, (3) From Jericho to Jerusalem.

## (1) From Corruption to Curiosity (vv. 1-4)

### Discussing the Details

- A. As we come to [vv. 1-4](#) now, there are a few quick details that need to be discussed.

## Detail #1: “Chief Tax Collector”

- A. The first is that this man Zacchaeus was what Luke terms here a “chief tax collector.”
1. This is the only place in the Scriptures where this particular designation is used and, though we’re not certain exactly what it meant, we can reasonably assume it meant that Zacchaeus was in some singularly responsible to not just collect taxes, but to oversee, organize, enlist others in the work as well.
- B. Tax collectors, you may recall, were particularly detested at this time.
1. Jewish Tax collectors were understood to be collaborators with Rome, and, hence, traitors to their own people. They were working for these Gentile overlords and helping them fleece their Jewish brothers and sisters.
  2. And beyond even this, they were notoriously corrupt and would often resort to unsavory methods to get the money they wanted, pocketing a portion of it for themselves.
- C. Let me read you the words of one commentator on the matter: “Most of the local [tax collectors] were ethnic but not observant Jews, since Torah-conscious Jews could not be expected to transact business with Gentiles. Tax collectors made bids in advance to collect taxes in a given area, and their profit came from what they could extort from their constituents . . . The Roman tax system depended on graft and greed, and it attracted individuals who were not adverse to such means. An honest tax collector was, in principle, a starving tax collector.
- Tax collectors were despised and hated. Mishnah and Talmud [Jewish oral law] preserve scathing judgments of them from later periods, lumping them together with thieves and murderers. A Jew who collected taxes was a cause of disgrace to his family, expelled from the synagogue, and disqualified as a judge or witness in court (b. Sanh. 25b). The touch of a tax collector rendered a house unclean (m. T\_ehar. 7:6; m. H\_ag. 3:6). Jews were forbidden from receiving money, including alms, from tax collectors, since tax revenues were deemed robbery. . . . Tax collectors were tangible reminders of the Roman domination, detested alike for its injustice and Gentile uncleanness. Not a few Jewish extremists, including one of Jesus’ disciples ([‘Simon . . . the Zealot’] 6:15), considered submission to the Roman tax system an act of treason (20:20–26)” (PNTC).
1. And now, again, if that is what just your average tax collector was, what would it mean to be a “chief tax collector”?! Surely, it would include all of this, but to an even greater degree!

## Detail #2: “Rich”

- A. Which is why, I suppose, the next detail Luke draws our attention to is that he “was rich” (v. 2). He had a made a killing, we could say. He built his fortune on the backs of his own people.
1. Here Luke wants us to see that this man is in the same boat as the rich ruler was from the story before. And, hence, we are inclined to think at once that this man too will surely find it too hard to enter the kingdom.

## Detail #3: “Small in Stature”

- A. But, to our surprise, something seems to have begun to shift in his heart. Interestingly enough, it is at this point there in [v. 3](#) that something of the blind beggar’s story begins to break in.
- B. I have often wondered about this seemingly silly little detail Luke gives us there in [v. 3](#) that Zacchaeus is a man “[small in stature](#)”—so small, in fact, that he has to climb up a tree and things just to get a view of Jesus from over the crowd.
1. It sounds a bit funny, doesn’t it? Why include this? Was it simply to shame him or even poke fun at him.
    - a. I for one would not want to be remembered in this way. It is certainly not a flattering thing to have kids now all over the world in their Sunday school classes singing that song: “[Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see.](#)” Listen, no guy I know wants to be called “[a wee little man.](#)” That just doesn’t sound masculine.
- C. So, again, why this detail? Well, I think it’s to emphasize how this rich man is in more ways than one starting to resemble that blind beggar.
1. In the first case, in this crowd it seems he’s starting to feel small and insignificant, and people are just passing by without notice.
  2. In the second case, he literally can’t see Jesus—he’s blind in a sense.
  3. But third, because of all this we come to see something of his persistence—just like the blind man, unwilling to quiet down, so too Zacchaeus finds himself relentless in his desire to catch a glimpse of Jesus.
- D. My guess here is that something has been shifting in Zacchaeus’ heart. The corruption he’s long embraced is starting to give way to a sort of curiosity concerning this Man from Nazareth.
1. I imagine that somewhere along the way Zacchaeus has begun to experience something of a haunting emptiness. In one sense he has all he ever wanted, and yet in another sense, he’s still come up short.
    - a. So he’s begun to open to the idea of alternate options. Maybe money isn’t it. Maybe there is something more. Maybe there is something to this Jesus.
- E. I remember seeing an old interview where Matt Damon was reflecting on what it was like to win his first Oscar back at the age of 27 for his work on [Good Will Hunting](#). Graham Norton, who was interviewing him, clearly expected Matt to talk about how exciting, exhilarating, fulfilling that incredible accomplishment was. But instead Matt responds quite differently, even shockingly so. It’s profound to hear.
1. “[Graham Norton asks:] ‘[That night must have sent you into a tailspin. Did you go crazy—that actual night did you go nuts?](#)’ [And then Matt responds:] ‘[Actually, I remember very clearly going back . . . and I couldn’t sleep. I was just kind of still buzzing and I was sitting there. And I remember very clearly looking at that award and thinking—very, very clearly . . . I literally looked at it, I was alone with it, and I said to myself: “Thank God I didn’t \[screw\] anybody over for this.” And I suddenly had this thing wash over me where I thought:](#)

Imagine chasing that and not getting it, and getting it finally in your 80s or your 90s with all of life behind you, and realizing what an unbelievable waste . . . You know what I mean? . . . Because it can't fill you up. If that's a hole that you have, that won't fill it. And I felt so blessed to have that awareness at 27—to learn it. Because I wouldn't have known it [otherwise]. And my heart broke for a second. It's like I imagined another one of me, an old man, going like "Oh my [gosh] where did my life go? What have I done?" And then it's over."

- F. My sense is that Zacchaeus has probably come to experience something of this. But, unlike Matt Damon, he really has thrown people under the bus to get what he was after. He cut himself off from country and kin to amass his riches, but somewhere along the way, he's sitting alone in his room looking at all his stuff, thinking: "This is it? This is what I've been living for? What a waste!" So he's curious. And he's ready to look elsewhere.
1. And I wonder: Are you? Are you still chasing that dollar, that relationship, that job, that house, or whatever? Or are you, with Zacchaeus, saying: "Man, I've seen all that the world has to offer. Now, I think I'm ready to see Jesus."

## (2) From Stranger to Son (vv. 5-10)

### Four Observations

- A. As we come now to [vv. 5-10](#), I simply want to make four observations and draw out application for us along the way.

#### Observation #1: Jesus Sees and Knows

- A. Look at [v. 5](#): "And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus . . ."
- B. Interestingly, though we thought all of this was about Zacchaeus getting a chance to see Jesus, truly what is far more important here is the reality that Jesus sees him . . . and He knows him . . . by name.
1. Here, I think, we have something similar to what Jesus does with Nathanael in [John 1:48](#), when Nathanael asks Jesus, "How do you know me?" And Jesus answers him: "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." "I had my eye on you. Before you ever see Me, I see you."
- C. This an important observation to make. So much of our lives, it seems to me, is given over to trying to be seen and known. I want people to notice me. I want people to know my name. I want to be significant, to matter, to know I am worth something.
1. Well, listen, Jesus sees you, Jesus knows your name, and you matter greatly to Him. You let that love in, and that starts to untangle things in your heart.

#### Observation #2: Jesus Must Stay

- A. This is interesting. Look at what Jesus goes on to say in the latter part of v. 5: “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”
1. Let that “must” there rest on you a bit. How does it feel to you? It sounds a little rude doesn’t it? “I must stay at your house today.” Why not: “May I please stay at your house today?” Certainly, that is the more gentlemanly way to approach it. Why “I must”?
- B. We hear that and think of someone forcing themselves on us like an unwanted houseguest. Have you ever had someone just kind of push their way into your home uninvited?
1. Maybe it’s because we just finished up the Christmas season, but immediately my mind went to Uncle Eddy in National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation. Do you remember that? The guy just shows up with his family and his RV unannounced and just begins to make a mess of stuff. Is that what this is?
- C. Obviously not. Two things, I think, are in play here:
1. First of all, I think it is likely that Jesus presses Himself upon Zacchaeus in this way because He knows, had He simply asked, Zacchaeus would have objected—though not in his obstinance, but in his shame.
    - a. There is something—perhaps you’ve experienced, perhaps you’re experiencing it even now—where you just feel like, in light of who you are, in light of what you’ve done, you are simply outside the bounds of God’s blessing and compassion and care and certainly of His salvation. To these folks the Savior must be forceful. Sometimes grace has to get aggressive. I must come in. I will not let you merely look upon me from a distance. I want to come near, to fellowship, whether you feel worthy of such a thing or not.
      - i. You see, it seems to me that the grace of God, initially at least, has two obstacles to overcome before it can really bring transformation to a person. The first is to convince you that you truly need it. The second is to convince you that you can truly have it.
        - (1) Zacchaeus likely is under the weight of conviction. But here Jesus is trying to convince him: “You can have salvation!”
  2. The second thing I think this “must” points to is the sheer matter-of-fact nature of the divine plan. When it comes to the plan of a sovereign God there is no “maybe”—only “must.” Zacchaeus, as it were, has been marked for grace. And He will be saved.
    - a. In the Greek, this language behind our English text is used throughout this gospel as a way of referencing the certain and unavoidable plan of God (Luke 2:49; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 21:9; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44). And it is no different here. “I must stay at your house today” (v. 5).

### Observation #3: Zacchaeus Is Transformed

- A. Look at v. 8. After Jesus had come into Zacchaeus' home, a symbolic gesture of His love for and acceptance of him: "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.'"

  - 1. Here is the camel making its way through the eye of the needle. Here is the rich man entering the kingdom of heaven. Here is God doing the impossible. The love, the welcome, the grace of Jesus satisfies Zacchaeus in a way that his stuff never could—and it changes him from the inside out. Suddenly, what he has fought tooth and nail for, what he had cut everyone in his life off for, he willingly, even joyfully releases.
    - a. The generosity and compassion of Jesus makes us generous and compassionate people. We love because He first loved us. That's the way the gospel works.

- B. And there's something important to camp out on here: Do you clean up before you come to God or do you come to God to get cleaned up?
  - 1. So many of us get this backwards. We think: "Let me wash up and then I'll come to church, then I'll try to follow Christ." No! You come in a mess so that God can meet you there in that space and love you back to life. That's how this thing works.
- C. That's what's happening here with Zacchaeus. That's why one commentator, reflecting on Zacchaeus' words here, writes: "This vow is not made as a precondition of Jesus' acceptance, but as a result of it. Jesus does not require Zacchaeus to change before he takes up residence with him; Jesus takes up residence, and his presence evokes a transformation within Zacchaeus" (PNTC).

#### Observation #4: Salvation Has Come

- A. For this, look there at v. 9: "And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham."
- B. That Jesus refers to Zacchaeus here as a "son of Abraham" is significant for a couple of reasons.
  - 1. For one thing, it is marking him out as a being a man of faith, a member of true Israel, one who has begun to bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8).
    - a. Paul, would say, even we Gentiles, through faith in Jesus become sons and daughters of Abraham—we enter into the covenant community of God, and become part of His beloved people. So certainly that is in view here.
  - 2. But I think there is something even more underneath it. Jesus always has a way of speaking straight into the heart of a person, touching what matters most.
    - a. Think again of what this man has done with his life and what that has meant as far as his relation with others Jewish community were concerned. He had estranged himself. He had collaborated with the enemy, rubbed shoulders with the unclean Gentiles, forsaken the Torah. His family may well have disowned him. Certainly his country despised him—that's why they're outside grumbling even now: "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner" (v. 7).



- i. But, meanwhile, inside the house, Jesus speaks over him words of such life: “Who cares what the crowds are saying about you. You, my friend, are truly a “son of Abraham.” I don’t think we can overstate what such words would have meant to him.

(1) And He’d say words like that to you. “Do you feel like an outcast, like a stranger? I call you son . . . and daughter.”

### (3) From Jericho to Jerusalem

#### Just Passing Through

- A. Here is now the third and final gospel movement I wish to draw your attention to. And with this we really are brought back up to [Luke 19:1](#), where Luke begins this whole narrative with these words: “He entered Jericho and was passing through.”
  1. Now this may seem to us like a minor detail, but to Luke it is exploding with significance. Luke will not let us forget: The Son of Man is on a journey.
- B. “A journey?” you say. “Passing through?” you say. “To where? To do what?”
  1. Well, He’s just told us a few verses earlier. Do you remember from last time? [Luke 18:31-33](#): “<sup>31</sup> And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. <sup>32</sup> For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. <sup>33</sup> And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”
- C. That’s why He is merely passing through Jericho. He’s got to get to Jerusalem where He “must” (cf. [Luke 9:22](#))—according to the eternal plan of God—suffer and die!
  1. Don’t you see?! All that He is doing here in Jericho invariably connected to and dependent upon what He must accomplish there in Jerusalem.
    - a. He offers salvation freely to a sinner like Zacchaeus here knowing full well that the only way He can make good on that is if He soon picks up the tab Himself there on the cross at Calvary.
- D. Though it’s perhaps a crude analogy, it might help you to think of it like this: All the grace that Jesus offers weary sinners on the near side of the cross, can be likened to the idea of paying for something on credit. We pay for something on credit in advance, knowing that soon enough the bill will come due and we shall have to pay up for it ourselves.
  1. Listen, the Father, the Son, the Spirit, have been working redemptively throughout history, even long before the cross, but it’s all been with a view to the cross. It’s all been purchased on credit, as it were, with an understanding that the bill would come due and the Son would pick up the tab and pay for it with His own blood.

- a. At the cross, it's as if the creditors have finally come knocking. And the Son will not be late.
- E. Zacchaeus had made his riches cutting off his fellow Jews—thriving to their hurt. Well, One more Jew would have to be cut off if Zacchaeus were to know the true riches of the kingdom of heaven. But this One wouldn't have to be twisted and cheated and pushed into it.
- 1. He would willingly suffer it there in Jerusalem on the cross . . . for Zacchaeus . . . and for us!