

**Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. <sup>3</sup> He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.**

**<sup>5</sup> When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup> So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.**

**<sup>7</sup> All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’ ”**

**<sup>8</sup> 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.”**

**<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (NIV84)**

### Overwhelming Gratitude Leads to Overwhelming Generosity

Everybody hates the tax man. If you came up with a list of the most hated and despised professions the IRS agent would make it on the list every time, along with politicians, lawyers, and used car salesmen. But why is that—why do people hate the IRS agent so much? Often it’s because we think we have to pay too much taxes, or we are upset about how the government is using our taxes. But really, an agent has nothing to do with that. The problem is that there is no such thing as a good meeting with an IRS agent—they don’t just stop by to say ‘hi’ or to thank you for paying all of your taxes on time. They are coming to investigate, to do an audit; you might be taken to court and forced to pay more. That’s why everyone hates the tax man!

If you think people hate tax collectors today—you should have seen what it was like during Jesus’ day. Tax collectors were considered traitors of the Jewish people. They were Jews, hired by the Romans to collect taxes from the people on behalf of the Roman government. They were charged with collecting a certain amount from each individual, but they collect as much as they could get away with and

then pocket the rest. It was a system set-up for corruption. On a regular basis tax collectors extorted money from the people—they were known as lies, cheats, and criminals. They were considered the scum of society. They also weren’t allowed to go into the temple in order to worship God—they were essentially shunned by society and by their religion.

And Zacchaeus—he was the head tax collector in his region. He is the leader of the corruption, the head honcho—he oversaw it all! Pretty much every tax collector became rich by stealing money from the hard-working people; but Zacchaeus became filthy rich. And he only had himself to blame, it was a choice he made—by becoming a tax collector, he chose wealth and power over respect, honor, and God.

Zacchaeus it seems, had it all—he was rich and powerful. But no one liked him—he was considered an outcast, and many people hated him. Perhaps you’ve feel like Zacchaeus—maybe not so much rich and powerful, but rejected and hated by others. Maybe your family wants nothing to do with you; or you simply don’t have that many friends. You don’t feel as if you belong anywhere. You have no one to connect to, no one to lean on, no one to laugh with or to share good times.

Perhaps it’s because of your political views—no one agrees with you or seems to understand where you are coming from. Maybe it’s because you’re religious. They are offended by what you believe about homosexuality; they mock you because you believe that someone could rise from the dead and do all those miracles. They simply can’t understand that you reject evolution for what the Bible says about the creation of the world. You feel as if society has left you behind, rejected by your peers.

Or maybe it’s because of your own doing. Maybe no one wants you around because of something you did or didn’t do. You made a bad choice, you said something you immediately regretted, you betrayed someone, spoke behind their back, let them down. Perhaps it is some public sin that you committed, embarrassing not only yourself but also your family and all who are connected to you.

And you may then think to yourself, “Is it ever going to get better? Will I always be hated? Are people ever going to like me or will I be an outcast forever? Will they ever forgive me, or forget about what

I've done? Will God forgive me for all the pain and sorrow I have caused others?

As Jesus was entering Jericho he gave sight to a man who was born blind. The already large crowd became larger. The people of the Jericho heard that Jesus, this prophet from Nazareth, had come to their city and everyone filled the streets. Zacchaeus joined them—he wanted to see what exactly this Jesus was all about. But since he was short, little man, he had to climb a tree in order to see Jesus. But as Jesus and they crowd was passing by, he suddenly stopped, looked up at Zacchaeus and said, “come down; I’ve got to stay with you today.” Imagine how ecstatic Zacchaeus must have been—out of all the people in town, Jesus had picked him and was going to stay at his house.

But Jesus had other things in mind. Now, we are never told what Jesus and Zacchaeus talked about, but we can assume that Jesus shared God’s word with him—the law and the gospel, sin and grace. That is what Jesus always talked about! That is the reason why Jesus stopped to talk to Zacchaeus, so that he could share God’s Word with him. Jesus said that he came **to seek and save the lost**. That is what he did with Zacchaeus. He sought him out personally—not because he needed a place to stay the night; but because he was seeking his soul. And so he sought him—he went after his heart with the gospel. And, as it often does, the gospel worked—the Holy Spirit worked faith into his heart and led him to repentance. And Jesus gave him the sweet comfort of forgiveness. He said, **Today salvation has come to this house**. Today, that very day, Zacchaeus had salvation! Salvation, is God’s act of saving us, which we receive through faith. Salvation is Christ giving us the forgiveness of sins by his suffering and death on the cross, and giving us the sure hope of the eternal life by his resurrection from the dead. Salvation now belonged to Zacchaeus. He was forgiven and he would enjoy eternal life with the Lord! Jesus went on to say, **this man, too, is a son of Abraham**. Remember that Zacchaeus was rejected by society. He wasn’t allowed to go into the temple and worship because he was considered a traitor. They didn’t consider him a Jew—but Jesus did. He too was a child of Abraham. But Jesus wasn’t talking about physical descent, but spiritual. He was a spiritual descendant of Abraham through faith in

Jesus—and it is by that faith that salvation had come to him and his house!

Jesus truly did come to seek and save the lost. But who exactly is the lost? The Pharisee inside of us likes to think of the lost as the horrible sinners in this world—the prostitutes, the drug dealers, the rapists, the murderers, the politicians, and the thieves. And that is true—they are the lost.

But so are we. We are the lost. Or we were the lost. By nature we were born in spiritual darkness. We did not know God, we didn’t believe in his Son and we could do nothing but sin by nature. We all are the spiritually lost. We know this—we know that we the lost, and we will readily admit as such. But deep down inside of us, there is a part of us, our sinful nature, that tries to deny it. It is a self-righteous attitude that says, “I’m not like those other guys, I’m different, I’m better.”

And that is why Christ came to seek and save the lost. As he did Zacchaeus, Christ seeks us. He isn’t going to stop by our house and spend the night. Rather it is through the gospel that he seeks us. Remember that we are spiritual lost by nature, and it is only the gospel that can lead us out of this spiritual darkness as it points us to Christ. And so, God sent people into our lives—parents, friends, relatives, pastors, neighbors, complete strangers—and God worked through those people and the gospel they shared with us. He sought us through them. He didn’t want us to hang out in our trees of unbelief and sin, but he brought us down so that he could share the gospel with us and open up our hearts. And by the gospel he brought us to faith and brought us up out of spiritual darkness into the wonderful light! And so he sought us and he saved us. For through the faith, worked in our hearts by the gospel, we receive all the wonderful blessings of salvation Christ won and gives to us. That is why Christ came. He came to seek and save the lost—to seek and save us.

It was about a week after Jesus visited with Zacchaeus and promised him salvation that Jesus came through on that promise. Jesus knew it would take place in Jerusalem, so he set out for the 25 mile trek to his death. Jesus, the Son of Man, brought salvation to the entire world by dying on the cross. That is what he came to do—to suffer for our sins and the eternal damnation that we deserve. Not once did Jesus extort money or treat anyone unfairly. He lived a life without sin, a life that

he gave to us on the cross so that we would be considered righteous in the eyes of God.

And so he brought us, lost sinners, into his family. We are now children of God—heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ who will inherit his gift of eternal salvation. He made us his own and adopted us as his children through the waters of baptism—ripping us from the clutches of Satan and bringing us into his family.

We may be the outcasts of society, our family may reject us, and our friends mock us. Many people want nothing to do with us. But none of that matters, because God wanted us. He chose us and brought us to faith. We are part of Abraham's family—not his physical descendants, but more importantly, we are his spiritual descendants, along with Zacchaeus, whom Jesus promised salvation!

That is what we have here at Holy Cross, that is what we have as members of the Holy Christian Church—we have a body of believers. We have a close-knit family, brothers and sisters in Christ who love each other. We belong to Christ, part of his spiritual family. He brings us together and keeps us together through his beautiful gospel.

That is how gracious and loving our Savior is. And when we understand and believe just how sinful and lost we are, but how loving the Lord is, and how he adopted us as his own, we will be filled with the same sense of gratitude and thankfulness as Zacchaeus. He finally found something that money couldn't buy—his forgiveness and eternal life—a family of believers, people who loved him, and a Savior who would die for him.

Overwhelming gratitude leads to overwhelming generosity.

Zacchaeus was so moved by the Lord's love for him that he willingly volunteered to give half his money to the poor. And to show how sorry he was for his sins, he vowed to repay anyone whom he had extorted four times the amount he took from them. He did this without prompting from the Lord—it was something that flowed out of his heart as he was moved by Christ's grace.

The secret to overwhelming gratitude—the secret to the joy that Zacchaeus found—is opening our eyes and recognizing all the amazing things God has done for you, none of which, you deserve! God has been overwhelmingly generous with us. Sure, there are all the physical blessings, but start with recognizing how much Jesus gave you by seeking and finding you, a lost and condemned creature, with

the gospel. He brought you into his home and made you his own. He loves you and cares for you as his child. He forgives all your faults and promises you eternal life. Like Zacchaeus, you haven't earned any of it. You don't deserve it. You're not better than anyone else. Yet God has been overwhelmingly generous with you.

So now respond with overwhelming gratitude. Respond with overwhelming generosity. Respond like Zacchaeus and give generously. Not reluctantly or under compulsion, but cheerfully, because Christ loves you! We give generously from the heart. Be overwhelmingly generous with your family and friends. Be overwhelmingly generous here at church. Be overwhelmingly generous with complete strangers. Give as God has given to you—and he has given you something that is priceless: himself. Amen.