

## #25 - Zachaeus, the tax collector - Luke 19

### Engage:

“It is now the final week of Jesus’ earthly life. In Jerusalem—a city astir with the excitement of the feast days—some are prepared to welcome a King, while others prepare for an execution. Jesus Himself draws the battle lines by driving the moneychangers from the temple. From then on, the religious leaders doubt their efforts to trap Him in a treasonous statement. Though His hour of anguish draws near, Jesus continues the activities that have characterized His earthly ministry: teaching, healing, confronting, consoling!” *DW*, Oct. 2003

Our story comes from Luke 19. It is a story about a Jewish man who was despised by his fellow Jews. Zacchaeus was a “chief” tax collector (Luke 19:2), which meant that he was over other lesser tax collectors. He had gained this right from the Romans to tax his own people. Tax collectors were viewed as thieves and traitors—and with good reason. They were free to assess taxes of people as they saw fit. Their only obligation was to give the Roman government its due. It is no wonder the people “muttered” (grumbled) when Jesus made Himself available to have a meal at the home of Zacchaeus!

Note: Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus associated Himself with “questionable” people: adulterers, tax collectors, the sick, poor, and disadvantaged. Why? So that He might “seek and . . . save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). One of the messages of this story is that His followers need to have the same purpose as Jesus did.

### Thoughts about the story:

Luke 19:1-4 - Zacchaeus must have known that something was missing from his life! Maybe he had learned that there was more to life than making money! Maybe he knew Levi, a former tax collector (Luke 5:27-32). Most likely, he knew that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44) or that blind Bartimaeus had received his sight (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). For whatever the reason, he was determined to see Jesus! So he found a tree that he could climb that would be beside the road that Jesus was traveling. Note: Climbing trees would be beneath the dignity of a tax collector. But that didn’t matter to Zacchaeus. It is also possible that he did not expect to be seen by Jesus. If so, he was certainly surprised!

Luke 19:5-7 - Next, Jesus enters the story. When Jesus arrived at the spot where Zacchaeus had climbed the tree, He looked up at him and told him to come down “immediately.” He told him that He “must” (Greek *dei* - a word used to emphasize a point) stay or go to Zacchaeus’ house. Jesus told Zacchaeus that He was going to his house—period! Note: This is the only time recorded in the gospels where Jesus invited Himself into another person’s home.

Zacchaeus had to be just as surprised as the crowd was that Jesus would pay attention to a man like him. Point: You should be just as amazed that Jesus would do the same for you—if you are genuinely wanting to follow Him. Each of us are just as undeserving as any “tax collector” or any other sinner for that matter. Every follower of Jesus has the obligation to care for people in our culture like the “tax collector”—just like Jesus did.

Point: “What a contrast between the attitude of our Lord toward Zacchaeus and the attitude of the crowd (Luke 19:7). Jesus came to seek and save the lost; they could only stand by and criticize (see Luke 15:1-2).” Wiersbe

Point: May you determine to never respond like the people did (“mutter”) when a person like Zacchaeus comes to Jesus.

Luke 19:8 - Once Zacchaeus recognized that Jesus had accepted him, he did what all of us should do. He responded in a humble and repentant way. His response was two fold:

- He offered half of his possessions to the poor.
- He offered to pay back anyone he had cheated by 4 times the amount. Note: Zacchaeus’ Jewish background enabled him to understand the principle of restitution. See Exodus 22:1-15; Leviticus 6:1-7).

There is no question about it. The heart of Zacchaeus was truly transformed. Repentance was definitely demonstrated—as it always is when it is genuine. Note: His response to Jesus could have been similar to that of the rich ruler (Luke 18:18-25), but IT WASN’T!

Luke 19:9-10 - Jesus blessed Zacchaeus by saying that “salvation has come to this (his) house” and by calling him a “son of Abraham.” Note: This man who was small in size, became large in the eyes of Jesus—and no doubt, those who knew him.

Lesson: When Jesus “passes by,” you must not hesitate to submit to His bidding. The text tells us that Zacchaeus “ran ahead” (Luke 19:4) to climb the tree so as to see Jesus. Just like Bartimaeus (Luke 18:35-43; Mark 10:46-52), we do not know what another day will bring. We may never have the same opportunity again!

Jesus ended this story with a purpose statement: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). This is one of the key verses in Luke’s gospel. Throughout the earthly ministry days of Jesus, He sought out the rich and the poor, the famous and the infamous, the male and the female, the Jew and the Gentile, and the educated and the uneducated.

In this story we see both the lost (Zacchaeus) seeking the Savior (Luke 19:3) and Jesus, the Savior, seeking the lost! It is when humankind is willing to be on the “same page” as Jesus that life, and it more abundantly, is experienced!

### **Discussion Starters:**

- Where did Jesus first find you? Up a tree or out on a limb? How did He get to you follow Him? A big scare or an invitation you could not refuse or ??

- Who are the despised and disrespected people in our community?

- Who do you know who has a bad reputation or who has low status in the community with whom you could share the good news of Jesus? If you don’t know of someone, ask God to place this person in your life. He will, if you will!