





Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

Life of Jesus

If your audience enjoys a drama presentation, this would also be a good story to act out.

The story begins with Jesus entering and passing through Jericho.

The main character in the story is introduced and his name is Zacchaeus.

The first thing we learn is that Zacchaeus is a publican, or tax collector.

Not only is he a tax collector, he is the chief tax collector; this means that all the other tax collectors reported to him.

Tax collectors were despised. The only person more hated than a tax collector would have been the chief tax collector. At the time of Christ, the Roman Empire ruled over much of the civilized world, including the land of Israel. The Romans enlisted Jews (Israelites) who were willing to collect taxes from their fellow citizens for the Roman government. The Romans would offer bonuses to the tax collectors to entice them to betray the Jewish people. Tax collectors were allowed to extort money, and most of them had become rich through their dishonest practices.

Jewish people saw tax collectors as traitors, as corrupt men who collaborated with the Roman Empire. Tax collectors were not allowed to go to the temple or synagogue, and their money was considered tainted. They were not allowed to serve on a witness stand in a court of law.

Zacchaeus must have heard about Jesus.

Jesus was a well known celebrity at the time. He was passing through Jericho, and it was probably the big news of the day was Jesus was coming to town. Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. He went to the place where he knew Jesus would be, but there was a huge crowd.

The second thing we learn about Zacchaeus is that he is very short.

Some scholars think it is possible he had the condition of dwarfism. The reason he could not see Jesus is because he was so short. However, he was determined to see Jesus. He *ran ahead* of the crowd and climbed up into a tree to wait because he knew Jesus was going to come that way.

Discuss:

Have you ever been somewhere that there were so many people you could not see through the crowd?

Zacchaeus had to plan this out. He had to figure out where Jesus would be walking and the path he was going to take.

He could not run through the crowd; he would never get ahead. If he ran ahead, he probably had to run around the crowd. He would not have been able to go through the crowd to get ahead, so he probably took another route to get around.

Then he climbed a tree that was in the path that Jesus was going to walk down. This meant he was there before Jesus, before the crowds. Instead of trying to see Jesus from behind, he would have seen him coming.



Zacchaeus

The tree that he climbed was a sycamore-fig tree, which was a very common tree in Israel. It was similar to a mulberry tree, and had fruit on it that looked very similar to a fig. But the fruit of this tree was very bitter; it did not taste like the figs, and it was only eaten by very poor people. The branches of this tree grow very low to the ground, making it easier to climb. The irony here is that Zacchaeus, a very wealthy man, uses a poor man's tree to see Jesus.

Discuss:

Zacchaeus is ahead of the crowd, in the tree, waiting for Jesus to come. If Jesus is at the head of the entourage, then probably most people would be following Jesus. When he looked ahead, it would have been easier for him to see Zacchaeus in the tree.

When Jesus reached the place where Zacchaeus was, he looked up and saw him.

He said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, because I must stay at your house today."

We do not know how Jesus knew his name. Perhaps Zacchaeus was well known in a negative way, or perhaps the Holy Spirit revealed it to Jesus, it does not say. But Zacchaeus quickly came down out of the tree and joyfully received him. Zacchaeus was excited! He was trying to see Jesus, he had done everything he could to get to him, and now he is coming to stay at his house!

It is interesting that Jesus said today he "must" stay at his house. Could it be that this fulfilled a prophecy? Possibly. There are some parallels here with what Jesus says and Ezekiel 34:11, 16.

It could also be that Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus.

Throughout the Bible, there are scriptures about seeking the Lord.

If we seek Him, we will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 69:32; Psalm 119:2; Jeremiah 29:13).

Draw near to Him, and he will draw near to you (James 4:8). The Lord will not push himself on you; He wants us to seek after Him. But when we seek him, he quickly responds.

We are told that Zacchaeus joyfully received Jesus.

Jesus was often a guest in people's homes. But we know that many of the supposedly righteous Pharisees who hosted Jesus were grumbling and criticizing Jesus, and did not receive him with joy. And then the grumbling starts. People were watching what was happening here. Jesus was being followed by very large crowds, so everyone saw his interaction with Zacchaeus. Everyone was aghast, how dare he go to be the guest of this man - this *tax collector*, this sinner! What an outrage! Jesus should not be talking to him, let alone going to his house! But this man, this "sinner," received Jesus with joy and gave him more honor than those who were seemingly righteous.

Were the people who were upset also sinners? Yes, absolutely (Romans 3:23). Everyone is born into sin. But they thought they were righteous because they obeyed the law, and this tax-collector was a terrible sinner. This was scandalous.



Zacchaeus

Jesus is looking at the heart.

He is looking at the heart of a man who is seeking him. Zacchaeus ran ahead of the crowd, and climbed a tree to wait for Jesus to come by, then he welcomed Jesus into his home. Many of these people were critically judging Jesus, and the “righteous” Pharisees were not nearly as excited when Jesus came to their house, or as welcoming as Zacchaeus.

When you hear from the Lord, and have a relationship with him, it changes you. Zacchaeus tells Jesus that he gives half of his possessions to the poor. Not only that, he says he will restore four times the amount back to anyone whom he has cheated.

Jesus tells Zacchaeus, “Today, salvation has come to to this house.”

Jesus, or Yeshua, is the same as the name Joshua which means “**Jehovah is salvation.**” (Hebrew translation for Joshua) When he says salvation has come, it could mean that Jesus has come to this house and he IS God who is salvation. It could be a result of Zacchaeus’ response as he simply repented, and completely changed the direction in which he was headed. He did as Jesus has commanded before,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and might.....love your neighbor as yourself,” (Mark 12:30-31).

That is what the whole law essentially means. It comes down to loving God, and loving others.

Jesus continues, “He also is a son of Abraham.”

This means that Zacchaeus was a descendant of Abraham, and Jesus came to save the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24). Jesus then references Ezekiel 34:11-12 and says,

“The Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost.”

Jesus was the fulfillment of every prophecy in the Old Testament. It was his mission to fulfill everything that was prophesied. Zacchaeus was the sheep that was lost, the one that had been scattered and driven away by the teachings of the Pharisees (Ezekiel 34:12,16).

Jesus in the Story



Jesus came to bring salvation first to Israel, and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:16).

He was the material form of all the prophecies of the Old Testament and fulfilled everything that was spoken of the coming Messiah.

Because Zacchaeus was seeking Him, Jesus responded to him.

When we seek the Lord with all our heart, we will find Him.

Zacchaeus eagerly looked for Jesus and rejoiced when Jesus came to meet with Him. That is what the Lord wants from us; he simply wants a relationship with people who desire to know him.

Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

21. Zacchaeus

1. If you seek the Lord your God, will you find him? (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13)
2. You will find him if you do what?
3. You will find him when you do what?
4. What does Psalm 105:3 say about the hearts of those who seek the Lord?

Jeremiah 29:13

And you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

22. Forgiven Much

Read John 12:1-11

1. Why did the Jews come to this dinner?
2. What did Judas want to do with the perfume? Why?
3. Why did Jesus say the woman was doing this?
4. What did the priests want to do to Lazarus?
5. Why were they upset with Lazarus?

Luke 7:47

Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

23. More Than the Others

1. Who was putting money in the treasury, or offering that day?
2. What did the rich people do?
3. How much did this lady put in the offering?
4. Jesus said the other people gave out of what?
5. Why was what she gave more valuable?

Luke 16:15

...You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

24. How Will You Understand?

1. What happened to the seed that fell on the side of the road?
2. What happened to the seed that fell on the rocks?
3. What happened to the seed that fell on thorns?
4. What did Jesus say the birds were like?

Isaiah 55:11

So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.



