

Introduction -

Its a simple story that probably has been talked about more with children than with adults. I, for one, do not ever recall preaching this story until today. There are some interesting things about the story, and yet I intend to have a little bit of fun with this, as well.

The title to today's message is: "Zacchaeus Meets Jesus."

Text: [Luke 19:1-10](#) (NKJV)

Republic, March 16, 2025

Title: "**Zacchaeus** (*Zack-kee'-us*) **Meets Jesus**"

[Luke 19:1-2](#) (NKJV)

¹ Then *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho.

The first we hear of Jericho in the bible is when Joshua conquered it in the Old Testament. Jennie Sheetz preached a sermon about it last November 3rd, during the Women in the Bible series. Her story was about Rahab the harlot & her involvement in helping Joshua and God's people to conquer Jericho.

Jericho was later rebuilt in New Testament times by Herod more than a mile south of the Old Testament location. Today, the modern city of Jericho includes both sites.

Show map of Jericho

Barclay's Commentary says this about the Jericho of Jesus' day:

Jericho was a very wealthy and a very important town. It lay in the Jordan valley and commanded both the approach to Jerusalem and the crossings of the river which gave access to the lands east of the Jordan. It had a great palm forest and world-famous balsam (fir) groves which perfumed the air for miles around.

Its gardens of roses were known far and wide. Men called it "The City of Palms." Josephus called it "a divine region," "the fattest in Palestine." The Romans carried its dates and balsam to world-wide trade and fame.

So, it is in this setting, this city called Jericho, that our story takes place:

[Luke 19:2](#) (NKJV)

² Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus (*Zack-kee'-us*) who was a chief tax collector, **and he was rich.**

We are told 3 things here: 1. Zacchaeus' (*Zack-kee'-us*) name 2. He was not just a tax collector, but a chief tax collector. 3. He was rich.

Tax collector's in those days were known to charge a little too much and keep the extra for themselves. So, they were rather despised by the people.

Tyndale Bible Dictionary says this about Zacchaeus (*Zack-kee'-us*)

"Jewish tax collector who collected taxes for the Romans at Jericho. He probably secured this position by purchasing the exclusive right to collect revenue in that region or by working as a subcontractor for another affluent official. In either case, Zacchaeus himself accrued great wealth (largely by illegitimate means) from his customs enterprise. Jericho, a significant center of commerce, was situated along a major trade route connecting Jerusalem and its environs with the lands east of the Jordan.

In his Gospel, Luke records Zacchaeus's encounter with Jesus ([Lk 19:2-8](#)). Seeking Jesus, but unable to see him over the crowd because of his small stature, Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree to get a better view when Jesus passed by. To his astonishment, Jesus stopped under the tree and after calling him down, invited himself to the publican's house for the night.

Barclay's Commentary says this about Zacchaeus:

(i) **Zacchaeus was wealthy but he was not happy.** Inevitably he was lonely, for he had chosen a way that made him an outcast. **He had heard of this Jesus who welcomed tax-collectors & sinners, and he wondered if he would have any word for him. Despised and hated by men, Zacchaeus was reaching after the love of God.**

(ii) Zacchaeus determined to see Jesus, and would let nothing stop him. For Zacchaeus to mingle with the crowd at all was a courageous thing to do, for many a man would take the chance to get a nudge, or kick, or push at the little tax-collector. It was an opportunity not to be missed. Zacchaeus would be black and blue with bruises that day. ... So he ran on ahead and climbed a fig-mulberry tree. A traveller describes the tree as being like "the English oak, and its shade is most pleasing. It is consequently a favourite wayside tree.

It is very easy to climb, with its short trunk and its wide lateral branches forking out in all directions." Things were not easy for Zacchaeus but the little man had the courage of desperation.

Luke 19:3 (NKJV)

³ And he (*Zack-kee'-us*) sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.

Jesus' reputation had gone before Him to the point Zacchaeus wanted to know more about Him.

Our reputation needs to go before us, so that people who are not saved want to get to know us better. It goes back to what Jesus said in His final prayer before the cross: "Father, glorify your Son that Your Son may glorify You."

Zacchaeus (*Zack-kee'-us*) ... "sought to see who Jesus was..."

Luke 19:4 (NKJV)

⁴ So **he ran ahead** and **climbed up into a sycamore tree** to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.

A sycamore tree in America is a different tree than many of the sycamores in the New Testament days.

Bible Background Commentary says this about this sycamore tree:

"The kind of "sycamore" tree described here is related to the fig tree and was easy to climb; ..."

If that is true, it provides an interesting symbolism to this story.

See picture of a sycamore fig tree

Barclay's Commentary says this about fig trees:

The fig tree was the favourite of all trees.

The picture of peace & prosperity which is common to every part of the Old Testament is the picture of a time when every man will sit under his own vine and his own fig tree. ([1 Kings 4:25](#); [Micah 4:4](#); [Zechariah 3:10](#)).

The picture of the wrath of God is the picture of a day when he would smite & destroy the fig trees. ([Ps 105:33](#); [Jer 8:13](#); [Hos 2:12](#)).

The tree itself is a handsome tree; it can be three feet thick in its trunk. It grows to a height of from 15 to 20 feet; and the spread of its thick branches can be 25-30 feet. It was, therefore, much valued for its shade...Very commonly the fig tree grows overshadowing wells so that there is shade and water in the one place.

So, it is interesting that a tree that is well-loved, that is known for its food, shade, and many times located near wells so you get water and shade, is a symbolism of the new life that Jesus was going to offer Zacchaeus. A life much better than he ever had before. But, also represented a life where, like us today, he would be expected to produce fruit.

My thought:

This tree is wonderful because this tree was also a Fig Newton tree. The figs had like a cake type covering over them. Yes. And the custom even way back then was you have to eat your Fig Newtons dipped in milk. (*just kidding*)

[Luke 19:5](#) (NKJV)

- ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus (*Zack-kee'-us*), make haste and come down, **for today I must stay at your house.**"
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1st, notice that Jesus called him by his first name, Zacchaeus, yet He never met him before. *How did Jesus know his name? Have you ever thought about that part of this story?* Jesus knew him even before Zacchaeus knew Jesus. Jesus knows you even before you know Him. He is waiting and ready for you to come to Him for the life He will offer you.

2ndly, notice that Jesus was reaching out to a tax collector, who were known to be dishonest in their work. In other words, Jesus reached out to a sinner. He will reach out to anyone who has interest in Him. It does not matter how you have lived your life before this. He comes to offer us a new life, a better life to you.

Note that this was not the first time Jesus had a meal with tax collectors. Luke tells us another tax collector story in:

[Luke 5:27-32](#) (NIV)

- ²⁷ After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him,
- ²⁸ **and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.** (*Levi is the same person as Matthew, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, and writer of the book Matthew*)
- ²⁹ **Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of**

tax collectors and others were eating with them.

³⁰ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors & 'sinners'?"

³¹ Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

[Luke 19:6](#) (NKJV)

⁶ So he (*Zacchaeus*) made haste and came down, and received Him (*Jesus*) joyfully.

Noticed the words "made haste and came down and received Him." Notice that "Him" is capitalized, meaning Zacchaeus came down and received Jesus joyfully, and he was anxious to do so. Zacchaeus was glad to be able to spend time with Jesus.

[Luke 19:7](#) (N KJV)

⁷ But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, "**He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.**"

Zacchaeus came down, and Jesus ends up going to Zacchaeus' house. That is when the Judgers decided to judge Jesus. "*(Jesus)* He has gone to be a guest with a sinner."

So, once again ,we hear these same words that were said in [Luke 5](#) when Jesus hung out with a bunch of tax collectors.

The truth of the matter is you cannot win the lost if you do not spend time with them. You have to develop some friends that are not saved if you ever expect to reach the unsaved. But, the bible does warn us not to get out of balance with hanging out with more unsaved than the saved. ([2 Cor 6:14](#) - Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers) But, you have to spend some time around them or no one is ever going to get saved.

Ask yourselves this morning: "*Who am I hanging around with that needs to get saved?*" "*Do I look for opportunities to reach the lost and spend time with them to at least be friends?*"

Keep in mind that Zacchaeus' house was probably a very nice house that Jesus went to. After all, the bible did tell us that Zacchaeus was rich.

Verse 7 shows the attitude of some of the people. Godly people would be thrilled to see Jesus reaching Zacchaeus. But, Judgers don't look at life that way. Their mind is always looking for someone to judge. In other words, Judgers are going to judge.

So, there is a modern song writer who wrote words that I could easily turn into a new church hymn. Those who know this writer well, call her Tay-Tay. Not sure if you ever heard this part of one of her songs:

"Haters are gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate. I'm juat gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake. I shake it off. I shake it off." (hoo-hoo-hoo)

My version of those lyrics for a new hymn is:

"Judgers are going to judge, judge, judge, judge, judge. I'm just gonna shake, shake,

shake, shake, shake, shake it off. I shake it off." (hoo-hoo-hoo)
Wouldn't that make a great hymn? It would remind us to never become a Judger,
and what to do when people judge us.

But, while the Judgers are in the background judging, Zacchaeus is changing:

Luke 19:8-9 (NKJV)

- ⁸ Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."
⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;
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We do not know all the details here about what exactly happened that brought Zacchaeus to salvation. But, it was so life-changing to him that he wanted to make his life right. He wanted to live right. Jesus saw it & said "Today salvation has come to this house..."

Barclay's commentary says this about Zacchaeus' decision:

(iii) Zacchaeus took steps to show all the community that he was a changed man. When Jesus announced that he would stay that day at his house, and when he discovered that he had found a new and wonderful friend, immediately Zacchaeus took a decision. He decided to give half of his goods to the poor; the other half he did not intend to keep to himself but to use to make restitution for the frauds of which he had been self-confessedly guilty.

In his restitution he went far beyond what was legally necessary. Only if robbery was a deliberate and violent act of destruction was a fourfold restitution necessary ([Exo 22:1](#)). If it had been ordinary robbery and the original goods were not restorable, double the value had to be repaid. ([Exo 22:4, 7](#)). If voluntary confession was made and voluntary restitution offered, the value of the original goods had to be paid, plus one-fifth ([Lev 6:5](#); [Num 5:7](#)).

Zacchaeus was determined to do far more than the law demanded. He showed, by his deeds, that he was a changed man.

That is how salvation should work. If you have done people wrong, you need to correct it. People need to see and also hear of your change. Celebrate Recovery group emphasizes this as one of the 12 steps - make amends to those you have done wrong.

Jesus ends this little story with words that should be the same words we say for ourselves:

Luke 19:10 (NKJV)

- ¹⁰ **for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."**
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We should say to ourselves "For I have come, with God's help, to seek and save that which is lost."

Jesus did not hide in a church. He got out and mingled with people who did not know God.

Summary -

The story of Zachaeus (Zack-kee'-us) is the story of a sinner, with lots of wealth, yet still he was not happy. Somewhere in his life he heard about Jesus. *Could it had come from hearing about what happened in [Luke 5](#) about saving Levi and the party of tax collectors that came to Levi's house after Levi's salvation?*

Zachaeus wanted to meet Jesus. And, that meeting went well. It wasn't real long after this event that Jesus would go to the cross. *Is it possible this trip through Jericho had that as part of Jesus' purpose?* On this same trip through Jericho, a blind man was also healed by Jesus. So, the trip through Jericho reached at least 2 people.

The twins will lead us in the children's song:

Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a Sycamore tree because he wanted his Lord to see.
And as the Savior came that way he looked up in the tree
And he said "Zacchaeus, you come down from there!"
For I'n going to your house today. For I'm going to your house today.

Actions, along with the song, for 'Zacchaeus'

Zacchaeus was a wee, little man,

Place hands in front, right palm raised above left as if measuring

And a wee, little man was he.

Place palms closer

He climbed up in a sycamore tree,

Pretend to climb, alternating hands

For the Lord he wanted to see.

Shade eyes and look down

And as the Savior came that way,

Swing arms as if walking

He looked up in the tree,

Shade eyes and look up

And he said, "Zacchaeus, you come down from there,"

Gesture with hand "Come"

For I'm going to your house today. (repeat last sentence)

Clap to the beat

Closing prayer - Lee Conner