

## A BIG STORY ABOUT A LITTLE MAN

Notice with me please Luke 19:1-10: **“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner’. 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.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.’”**

I am short. I always have been short. I was short when I was born. Zacchaeus could relate. According to some experts, he may have only been around five feet tall, give or take an inch or so. But, believe it or not, being short was not his biggest problem.

### ZAC AND TAX

Zacchaeus was the chief tax-collector in Jericho. As a result of his position, Zac was very rich and important. This was one instance though when being rich and famous did not make one well-liked. Tax-collectors worked for the Roman government. They were considered crooks, renegades, and traitors! In today's terms, they squealed and ratted on their own countrymen. They were inside men. They might say to a Roman official, "My sources tell me that old man Benjamin over in Bethlehem has 90 sheep hidden in the mountains." Or, "I've known Jacob and his family for years. You'd never know it by looking, but the guy's loaded." As a result, Rome would go after Old man Benjamin or Jacob and his family and tax these individuals all the more. The tax-collectors would then, of course, get their usual cut. Is it any wonder that Brother Zac was most likely the #1 hated individual in all of that region?

Lets now look for a moment at the Roman tax system:

All men ages 14-65, all women ages 12-65, had to pay simply for the privilege of living.

- Taxes consisted of 1/10th of all grain grown, and 1/5th of all wine and oil.
- There was the income tax.
- Carts were taxed per wheel.
- Another tax was charged for the animal that pulled the cart.
- There was the sales tax.
- Import and export taxes.
- Finally, the people were required to pay a toll or duty for using the roads, harbors and markets.

A tax-collector could legally stop a man on the road and have him unpack his bundles and then charge him whatever he liked for whatever that man was carrying.

If a person couldn't afford to pay up, then the collector could loan him the money at whatever rate of interest he felt the fellow could afford to pay. Needless to say, such rates were usually very

high. The tax-collector was paid largely by what he charged **above and beyond** the stated taxes and duties.

Literally, robbers, murderers and tax-collectors were classified together. A tax-man was so bad in fact, he was literally barred from attending church. People, that's bad.

A Roman writer once noted that he had seen a monument to an honest tax collector. An honest person in this profession was so rare that when it occurred the people erected a monument in his honor.

Zacchaeus was the Commissioner of Taxes. In other words, he was the overseer of the tax collectors; the head man. He was boss dog.

### **ZAC WANTED TO SEE JESUS**

Why? The Bible doesn't really say.

- Maybe it was due to the **influence of Matthew** who, too, had been a tax-collector prior to Jesus' calling him to be a disciple.
- Maybe it was due to **our Lord's reputation**.
- It is possible he was **only interested in seeing a miracle** of some sort.
- But, then maybe, **he was lonely** and thus he was seeking a savior.

Whatever the reason; he sought to see Jesus. He would allow nothing to stop him.

For Zacchaeus to mingle in a crowd was risky. Rome had soldiers garrisoned in Jericho and throughout Israel to protect these most hated of men. Many people would have given nearly anything to get a chance to get in a shove, or a push, or even a kick at this evil tax-collector. Regardless of the risk, Zacchaeus obviously thought it was worth it to get a glimpse of Jesus.

Then remember Zacchaeus' other problem? **He was short**. The Bible indicates that the brother really worked to see the Lord.

- He jumped,
- He stood on tiptoe,
- He stood on his billfold, but it was all to no avail. The crowd was too tall for him to see over. Do you think anyone would let him get in front of them? I don't think so!

Speaking from experience, short people tend to think ahead. The Bible says that he took off running down the street in order to get ahead of the crowd. As he was running, he saw a sycamore tree near the road. The sycamore is known for its low hanging leafy branches. Forgetting his pride, Zac climbed the tree and hid among the leaves. According to the customs of that day, such behavior was not proper. It certainly was not proper for the chief officer of the IRS! Short little rich tax collectors simply did not run down the street much less climb trees in their business robes any more back then than they do now.

They didn't; Zacchaeus did!

It was while Zacchaeus was up there, trying to catch his breath from his run, that Jesus passed by. **“When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”**

Jesus could have ignored this wee little man up in the tree. He could have directed his gaze straight ahead or down at the ground. People were everywhere. The windows, roofs and streets were all filled with sightseers; with nameless onlookers. He could have stopped and talked with any of them. The Pharisees were there. The Sadducees. The scribes were there as well. If Jesus wanted to collect points, if He were into politics, He might well have asked one of these more acceptable people for a place to stay.

But no! Jesus, as usual, saw what others missed. The crowd looked at Zacchaeus with scorn, hatred, and prejudice. Jesus saw him with love, acceptance and forgiveness!

Verse seven then records the muttering of the crowd. Murmuring! I believe that this is the only place in the New Testament where they **ALL** muttered--or murmured. In some places the scribes and Pharisees murmured. Sometimes it was the Sadducees. But here its **ALL** of them:

- Scribes,
- Pharisees,
- Sadducees,
- Greeks,
- Zealots,
- Disciples
- Dogs, cats, donkeys....

Mutter, mutter, mutter!

Everybody was muttering! Everyone was indignantly complaining. The word translated "mutter" actually means, "grumble, murmur, mutter, complain. To crumble loudly." One of my Bible dictionaries says that this means that they were "Grumbling dissatisfaction over disappointing expectations."

Why? Again, because Jesus stopped to talk to Zacchaeus. Listen to verse 7 from *The Message* translation, "**What business does he have getting cozy with this crook?**" Simply, Jesus refused to be a part of their hatred and bigotry. He purposely passed by each and every one of them so he could be the house guest of a no-good, down and out, publican-sinner! A tax-collecting, **can't even go to church**, SINNER!!! The word sinner as used in this passage is also interesting. It literally means, "A sinner. Someone that is devoted to sin. A person that is pre-eminently sinful, especially wicked. Tax collectors, heathen."

### **JESUS WANTED TO SEE ZAC**

Not only did the Lord stop to talk to the fellow, He went on to say, "**I must stay at your house today.**"

Others had invited Jesus over for a meal, for a night, or for a visit. Lazarus had done this. Mary and Martha had also extended friendly invitations. Even some of the Pharisees had been so gracious on occasion. This is, however, **THE VERY FIRST RECORDED INSTANCE WHERE JESUS EVER INVITED HIMSELF TO ANYONE'S HOME!**

Again, they were grumbling their dissatisfaction over disappointing expectations. It seems as if Jesus enjoyed violating their expectations.

- He washed the feet of His disciples.
- He visited forbidden Samaria.

- He ate with the publicans and sinners.
- He changed the law of **“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”** to **“love your enemies and bless those who curse you.”**
- He taught that one's neighbor was anyone who was in need.
- He refused to stone an adulterous woman.
- He went home with Zacchaeus the tax-collector!!!

#### **FOUR THINGS RESULTED FROM THIS VISIT.**

##### **1. THE TAX-MAN WELCOMED JESUS GLADLY**

Other translations use the word, **“joyfully.”** The passage literally means that he rejoiced exceedingly. He was thrilled to death to have Jesus as his guest. Joy is one of the key themes of the New Testament. It is found nearly 20 times alone in Luke's Gospel. Coming to Jesus produces joy.

I like Acts 3:19. It says, **“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord....”**

Receiving salvation is refreshing. Inviting Jesus in is a joy-filled experience. The song writer wrote:

Oh, say but I'm glad.  
Oh, say but I'm glad.  
Jesus has come and my cups over run  
Oh, say but I'm glad.

Hear me, the initial physical evidence of salvation is the JOY of a changed life!

##### **2. HE ACKNOWLEDGED JESUS AS LORD**

Notice verse 8, **“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.’”**

Rome had been his lord prior to this moment. He was a servant to wealth and greed. Not any more. Now he boldly calls Jesus **“LORD”!**

Someone has noted that there are four ways men respond to the Lordship of Jesus Christ:

- Those who neither call Him Lord, nor do the things which He says.
- Those who call Him Lord, but do not the things which He says.
- Those who do not call Him Lord, but do the things which He says.
- Those who both call Him Lord, and do the things He says.

The word Lord speaks of ownership. It declares who or what is one's master. Zac was saying to one and all, **JESUS CHRIST IS NOW MY LORD, MY MASTER, MY OWNER!!!**

But notice, he doesn't just call Jesus Lord, he acts as if Jesus is His Lord. One of the best measures of a changed life – of true repentance -- is whether that change goes though the person's heart down into his or her pocketbook!

Imagine this greedy little man turning over one half of all he owned to the poor!

- One-half of his chariots.
- One-half of his houses.
- One-half of his clothes.
- One-half of his money.

Not, one-tenth. The Bible says, one half!

Then, he committed himself to make restitution to those that he had cheated. In fact, he obligated himself to repay his victims four-times the amount that he had taken dishonestly.

John the Baptist challenged the crowds that thronged him, in Luke 3:8, **“Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God.”** (*New Living Translation*) In other words, back up your cries of confession with acts of possession! Zac did exactly that. Money was no longer his God, Jesus was!

### 3. JESUS DECLARED SALVATION HAD COME TO ZACCHAEUS

- Like the thief on the cross,
- Like the Philippian jailer,
- Like the woman caught in the act of adultery,
- Like the woman at the well,
- Like Saul on the road to Damascus,

Zacchaeus found Christ!

Zacchaeus had spent his life looking out for old number one, but not any more. **“OLD THINGS WERE PASSED AWAY, NEW THINGS HAD COME!”**

### 4. HE WAS RESTORED

Jesus gave Zac back that which Satan had stolen from him. Notice, Jesus says **“this man, too, is a son of Abraham.”**

Jesus is the great restorer! Zacchaeus had given away the dignity of being a Jew. He had exploited his nationality for the sake of money, for the benefit of Rome and at the expense of his own people. He had been considered a traitor. Now, here, in front of everyone, Jesus restores him!

Zac thought all the time that he was the one who was doing the seeking, when, in truth, Jesus was seeking him! What have you lost that needs restoration this morning? What has Satan stolen that only Jesus can give back?

#### HE COMES:

- to give life in the place of death.
- Joy, in the place of sorrow.
- Companionship, in the place of loneliness.
- Light, in the place of darkness.
- Cleansing, in the place of guilt.
- Peace, in the place of the storm.

#### HE COMES:

- as He came to the Demoniac of Gadara,
- as to the disciples on the restless sea,
- as to the outcast lepers,
- as to the mother overtaken in sorrow due to the death of her son,
- as to the immoral woman of Samaria whom He met at a well,

### **HE COMES:**

- as the restorer of lost place,
- lost dignity,
- lost values,
- lost hope,
- lost people!

He comes---right now!

### **NOTICE NOW FOUR GREAT SURPRISES THAT STAND OUT IN THIS STORY.**

#### **1. THE FIRST SURPRISE HAS TO BE THAT JESUS WOULD NOTICE ONE SINGLE PERSON IN SUCH A LARGE CROWD.**

We don't expect famous people to take notice of us. However, I did have President Clinton wave at me a while back. He was at the White House. It was obvious that the man was in a hurry. He was getting ready to hop on to his helicopter when, all at once he stopped. He smiled real big and waved. Now granted, it was at a television camera, but I took that wave very personally. It was as if he was looking straight at me. Why, he even said something. I couldn't hear him, but it even looked like he said, "Hi Mike." It made my day. Hey, don't laugh. Has he ever waved at you?

Silly isn't it? The President didn't wave at me. He never has. He too busy with more important matters than that!

Jesus, however, proves in this story about Zacchaeus that He isn't too busy for anyone. He gave His full and undivided attention to the hated tax-man. One never gets the idea in reading the New Testament that Jesus is talking to someone and juggling oranges at the same time. Again, He gives His full and undivided attention to each and every man, woman, boy and girl.

#### **2. THE SECOND SURPRISE IS THAT JESUS WOULD ACCEPT THE HOSPITALITY OF SOMEONE WHO WAS AS HATED AS MUCH AS WAS ZAC.**

Revelation 3:20 notes, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If ANYONE hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

Jesus obviously delights in living in any heart that will make room for Him.

### **COLOR?**

- Red,
- brown,
- black,
- yellow,
- tan,
- or white.

**RACE?**

- American,
- Scandinavian,
- Korean,
- German,
- African,
- Hispanic,
- Native American,

It matters not.

Education?

Social standing?

Political persuasion? Right wing, left wing, broken wing.... Regardless, **“Whosoever will, let him come....”**

### **3. THE THIRD SURPRISE IS THAT ONE SO EVIL AS ZACCHAEUS COULD BECOME SO GENEROUS AND SO REPENTANT.**

But again, it happens all the time. Look at you.

- How many of you were drunkards?
- Immoral?
- Dopers?
- Thieves?

I've had two murderers confess and repent as I've shared Jesus with them! Truly, it is amazing grace! Wonderful grace!

Believe it or not, Zacchaeus does not rank as the worst sinner in the Bible to come to Christ, notice:

- Paul the Apostle had been, by his own admission, a **“blasphemer, persecutor and a violent man.”**
- Matthew, the disciple, had also been a tax collector.

And yet, both of these individuals made dramatic life changes after finding Jesus.

- The thief on the cross had also been a vial and wretched person.

The Lord receives and changes sinful people.

### **4. THEN THE FORTH SURPRISE IS THAT ZAC'S PAST IS NEVER BROUGHT UP AGAINST HIM AGAIN IN ALL THE BIBLE.**

Jesus doesn't berate the man because of his past. In fact, the Lord doesn't even bring it up. Zac does; Jesus again doesn't.

The Master wasn't so much concerned about the man's past as he was his eternal future.

Therefore Jesus wipes the slate clean. The tax collector is made to be just as if he had never sinned!

Thus, in the Scriptural account,

- Jesus **REVEALS** a **HIDDEN** Zac,
- **IDENTIFIES** with a **HATED** Zac,
- and **SAVES AND RESTORES** a **SINFUL** Zac!

I want to now bring this story up to the here and now. Suppose you were a disciple of Jesus and He were alive and well on this planet today. As the story unwinds, you find yourself in Las Vegas. A long black limo comes screeching to a halt just in front of you and the Lord. The car is equipped with dark tinted electric windows. I hate those things. I am always curious about who is inside. The vanity plates on the rear of the vehicle say, "BAD." Suddenly one of the windows starts to go down. It's about half-way open when two beady looking eyes peek out. Jesus walks over to the car and says, "Hey, Joe! I see you in there!" It turns out that this is Joe Capone, Mafia chieftain for Las Vegas. The Lord then continues, "Get out of your car Joe, I want to spend the night with you tonight in your hotel." Whoa!

Now you tell me, if you are one of His disciples, how are you going to fit this in with His being the Messiah?

How does it fit with His being good?

What will the press do when they get hold of the news?

What will the religious leaders say?

That is what Jesus did -- only He did it 2,000 years ago. Instead of Joe Capone, the man's name was Zacchaeus!

Simply, Christ receives sinful men! **"He is willing that none perish but all come to repentance."**

What grace.

What love.

- Love that comes along beside us.
- Love that is a life changing event.
- Love that loves even the unlovable.
- Love that is full of surprises!

That is the big story about a little man.