

## Zaccheus Encounters Jesus Luke 19v1-10



**Tom Wright** says of Zacchaeus:

“Nobody in Jericho liked Zacchaeus. They would have been horrified to think that, of all the inhabitants of the town, he would be the only one known by name to millions of people two thousand years later. He was exactly the kind of man everybody despised. Not only a tax-collector but a chief tax-collector; that is, not only did he make money on the side, in addition to his legitimate collections, but he almost certainly made more money from the tax-collectors working under him.

Wherever money changes hands, whether across a grubby table in a tin shack in a dust small town or across a sparkling computer screen in a shiny office on the ninety-ninth floor of a Wall Street skyscraper, the hands all too easily get dirty. Whenever money starts to talk, it shouts louder than the claims of honesty, respect and human dignity. One can only imagine

the reaction of neighbors and even of friends and relatives, as Zacchaeus' house became more lavishly decorated, as more slaves ran about at his bidding, as his clothes became finer and his food richer. Everyone knew that this was their money and that they he had no right to it; everyone knew that there was nothing they could do about it.

Until Jesus came through the town. He had met enough tax-collectors already to know exactly what life was like for them, and how, even though they couldn't resist the chance to make more for themselves than they should, there was a sickness at the heart for which he had the remedy.

So once again Jesus finds himself relaxing in the company of the wrong sort of people. And once again the crowd outside grumble. But this time, instead of telling a parable – Luke no doubt wants us to think of similar stories he has already given us – the tax-collector himself speaks to Jesus in public, and give evidence of his extravagant repentance. Repentance here isn't just a change of heart; instead, as in Judaism in general, repentance involves restoration, making amends. Zacchaeus is determined to do so lavishly. He doesn't offer to sell all his property, nor does Jesus demand it. But by the time he'd given half of it away, and made fourfold restitution where necessary, we can imagine that he would find himself in seriously reduced circumstances.

He doesn't care. He has found something more valuable. 'Today I have to stay at your house' becomes 'Today salvation has come to this house'; where Jesus is, there salvation is to be found, for those who accept him as master and reorder their lives accordingly. Once more Jesus links a former outcast back into the true family of Abraham.

Zacchaeus isn't going to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, escaping the puzzled and probably still angry looks of the neighbors. He is going to live out his new life and re-establish himself as part of the renewed Israel right where he is.”

– **Tom Wright**, *Luke for Everyone*.

### Discussion Question

Have you ever felt a desire or yearning for something, but didn't know what it was?

### A. Context and Background Luke 18v18-30

The story of Zacchaeus is found only in Luke, and marks the end of the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. Jesus announced the beginning of this journey in Luke 9v51. The conclusion (19v10) functions as a summary of Jesus' ministry in the travel narrative.

1. Compare this story to Luke 18:18-30, the story of the rich man who came to Jesus. What was the question posed to Jesus by the rich man? (see v18)
2. What was the one thing lacking for the rich young ruler? (see v22)
3. How did the rich young ruler respond to Jesus?

Why was Jesus' response so hard for him to hear? (see v23).

4. How did Jesus react to the response of the rich young ruler? (see v24-25).

### **B. Zacchaeus Luke 19:1-10**

Jericho was one of the wealthiest cities of Palestine, situated in the most fertile part of Judea. The "chief" tax gatherer or toll collector would be the one who contracted for sales and customs taxes and hired collectors to work under him. Zacchaeus could have become rich without cheating; but it is not very likely.

1. What do we know about Zacchaeus?
2. V3 says that Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. Luke mentions some other people who wanted to see Jesus. Herod (Luke 9:9, 23:8) wanted to see Jesus, as did the crowds that followed Jesus (see Luke 11:16, 29).

Why did they want to see Jesus?

3. The word translated **see** in v3 (and v4) means more than to *look*, *view*, or *notice*. The word often means *recognize* (e.g., "their faith" in Matt 9:2; *test* or *examine* (Acts 15:6, cf. Luke 2:15), *to find* or *discover* (e.g., Matt 2:11), *meet* (e.g., Matt 11:8f), and to *experience* (e.g., "...see the kingdom of God..." (John 3:3).

Why do you think Zacchaeus wants to "see" Jesus?

4. What does Zacchaeus find? (see 19:9-10).
5. In v7, Luke says that the people began to grumble and complain. Why were they complaining?
6. Jesus has dealt with the issue of Tax Collectors before. Read Luke 5:27-32; what Jesus says about Tax Collectors?

<sup>27</sup> After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." <sup>28</sup> And he got up, left everything, and followed him. <sup>29</sup> Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. <sup>30</sup> The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>31</sup> Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; <sup>32</sup> I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

7. Most Jewish people believed that salvation belonged to all Israelites by virtue of their descent from Abraham. Notice what John the Baptizer tells the people who came to him for baptism:

"Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Luke 3:8).

Compare this to what Jesus says about Zacchaeus in 19:9. How is Zacchaeus a true child of Abraham?

8. Read Luke 4:18-21. Notice that Jesus uses the word *Today* in v21.

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus also uses the word *Today* in Luke 19v5 and 19v9. Compare how Jesus uses this word in both stories, and how these passages demonstrate the mission and ministry of Jesus.

### **C. Zacchaeus and the Rich Young Ruler**

Compare the story of Zacchaeus with the story of the rich young ruler.

- a. What similarities and differences can you see between the two men?
  
- b. Read Luke 18v24-27; How do you understand the story of Zacchaeus and the rich young ruler in light of what Jesus has said here?

### **D. Application**

1. The encounter with Jesus with the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus meant that they would have to give up something in order to follow Christ. Have you ever had a similar encounter with Christ? Has he asked you to give up something and follow him?

2. Money and possessions often stand in our path and may hinder us as we try to follow Christ. In Luke 12v13-21, Jesus tells the story of a rich man who had a bountiful harvest.

- a. What is the problem that confronts the man because of his harvest? (see v17-18)
- b. After storing his harvest, what does the rich man want to do? (see v19)
- c. What are God's plans for the rich man? (see v20)
- d. God calls the rich man a fool. According to Psalm 14v1, what does the fool say?
- e. Is the rich man a fool? How does this relate to his possessions?
- f. What warning does Jesus give about wealth and possessions? (see v15 and v21)
- g. Is it a sin to be rich? (Compare 1 Timothy 6:10)

3. Jesus says in Luke 19v10 that that he came to seek and save that which was lost. This image is that of a shepherd. The background for this is found in Ezekiel 34, especially 34v11-16. God fulfills this promise to search for his sheep through the person of Jesus. The promise is passed on to us to fulfill as followers of Christ, and to carry on his mission to his "lost sheep."

Read through Ezek. 34v11-16, and identify some of the marks of a shepherd, and think about ways that you can be a *shepherd* as you step out of your door tomorrow morning.