



**Zacchaeus**  
**August 18 2021**

## Luke 19:1-9

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 because he was short he could not see over 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.



## **Meditation:**

Jericho, surrounded by palms and scented with balsam groves. Dates, palm-honey, myrrh, and balsam comprise a continuous caravan of exports to the East. For the Roman government, it is a lush center of taxation. Plump. Ripe. Fragrant with revenue.

And knee-deep in the harvest are the tax collectors, making sure the proper due is rendered unto Caesar and, in the process, a denarius or two rendered unto themselves.

It is early spring in Jericho. And a chill clings to the yawning shadows that stretch across the city. For many the eastern sun is a freshly minted coin of opportunity. But commerce is far from the minds of the crowd that mingles with the morning's shadows.

For this dawn brings with it something more than the promise of commerce. It brings the promise of a Messiah.

Jesus has come to Jericho.

The crowd swells. Eddies of anticipation swirl about and gather in strength. The squeeze of the multitude grows claustrophobic as the more curious elbow for position

But for one man, elbows aren't enough. He is Zacchaeus. A short man. So short he can't see over the crowd. So short he has to climb a tree to catch a glimpse of the rumored Messiah.

Somehow this short man has survived growing up in a tall world. Growing up the object of stares. Growing up the brunt of jokes. Growing up the kid who got pushed around.

In the jostled process of growing up, a part of his childhood was trodden underfoot. And that tender part of him died. Crushed under the callous and often cruel feet of the tall. And yet he carries that stepped-on part of himself everywhere he goes. Even up the stout trunk of that sycamore tree.

But somewhere along the way to adulthood Zacchaeus learned to compensate - first, to laugh at the jokes, and later, to fight back. And so, as he climbed the professional ladder, he stepped on anyone who stood in his way, anyone on the next rung up. He would show them, show them all. Someday they'd look up to him.

At last, he made it to the top – chief tax collector. King of the hill, controlling commerce. King of the hill, greasing his greedy little palms with sweat of the businessman’s brow. King of the hill, looking down over Jericho.

But the hill he rules is a dung hill, at least in the eyes of the people. For tax gatherers are despised as little more than ruthless bill collectors for a corrupt government. Even the Talmud looks down on them, allowing a Jew the sanction of lying to a murderer, to a thief, and...to a tax collector.

True, Zacchaeus has power. And he has wealth. But the stature he sought among others has eluded him. And so has friendship.

But Zacchaeus has heard stories about this Jesus who was a friend of tax collectors. Who ate and drank with them and stayed in their homes. Who changed the life of Levi, the tax collector at Capernaum. For whom Levi left a lucrative career, left everything. And not for higher wages, but for not wages at all. This Jesus must be some man. There’s even talk of him being the Messiah. The thought captivates Zacchaeus: a Messiah who’s a friend of tax collectors. And with a schoolboy’s eagerness he shinnies up the sycamore to see him.

Zacchaeus crawls out on a limb for a better look. He marvels at the total lack of pomp and ceremony surrounding Jesus. Nothing like a king. And yet...and yet everything like a King.

People are draped over windowsills like laundry hung out to dry, watching. A thick fringe lines the rooftops and looks down. On the street are huddles of curiosity – holly men and housewives, shopkeepers, teachers, traders, businessmen, bakers – elbow to elbow.

Suddenly Jesus stops. He looks up at Zacchaeus. Shafts of the Savior’s love filter through the branches. A long-awaited dawn shines on a despised tax collector. And a warmth begins to stir in the cold darkness of his soul.

All eyes follow Jesus as he parts the sea of spectators on his way to that sycamore. Zacchaeus feels the darkness of his soul shrinking back. For years he has rendered unto Caesar, and now he must render unto Christ an account of himself.

And his soul knows that the account isn’t good. The ledger is filled with entries of money extorted...money under the table...money skimmed off the top...money, money, money. That’s the bottom line for Zacchaeus. The bottom line of a bankrupt life.

But the Savior isn't looking for an adult. He is looking for something else. He searches Zacchaeus' eyes to find that stepped-on part of his life. And on it he sees every footprint, every heel mark. Jesus is moved with compassion for the little boy who had to grow up in a big man's world. "Zacchaeus," he calls him by name, and asks for a place to stay.

Zacchaeus locks onto the eyes that search the far reaches of his soul. They are the eyes both of a King and friend.

Ripples of contempt work their way through the crown. "Going where to stay? His house? Eating with a sinner?"

But the whispered innuendoes can't intrude on this intimate moment.

And in the same way you would welcome a friend you have yearned to see for a long, long time, Zacchaeus jumps down and welcomes Jesus into his home.

As his feet hit the ground, a flood of repentant feelings burst forth. Feeling that had been dammed up for years. Zacchaeus goes out on still another limb. What took a lifetime to accumulate, one sentence of devotion begins to liquidate. And not by a token ten percent. Half to the poor. Fourfold to the defrauded.

Look closely. Witness the miracle - a camel passing through the eye of a needle.

Another dawn, centuries earlier, the walls of Jericho came tumbling down at the shout of Joshua's men. Today another wall comes tumbling down in Jericho. This time, at the offer of a King's friendship. This time, the wall of a rich man's heart.

And amid the rubble, that crushed, stepped-on part of this little man's heart springs to life. And later, with each gracious gift to the poor and with each payment of restitution to the defrauded, this little man's stature begins to increase. First in the eyes of Jesus. Then in the eyes of all Jericho.



## Questions:

1. Who is God to you?
2. Zacchaeus didn't know who Jesus was but Jesus knew Zacchaeus (even calling him by name). How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus knows you - even if you don't know everything about Him?
3. Zacchaeus had a few things going against him, spiritually. What were they?
4. Based upon what action by Zacchaeus did Jesus grant him salvation?
5. What did you find interesting or insightful in this scripture or meditation?



## Prayer:

Dear Jesus, I confess to you that I am short in spiritual stature. To even see you it seems that I'm always needing something to stand on.

But I want to see you. See you for who you really are. See you for myself, with my own two eyes. Not just through the eyes of a pastor. Or a teacher. Or an evangelist.

I've heard so much about you. How much is opinion? How much is hearsay? How much is truth? I want to know, for myself. I want to hear with my own ears. Not simply from a book. Or television. Or radio.

I'm tired of secondhand experience. I want to feel with my own heart.

If I have to climb a tree awkwardly, and without dignity, to do so - I will gladly do it. Please come near, Lord. I'll be the one out on a limb, waiting.

Forgive me for trying so long to compensate for my stunted growth. I have expected my work to increase my stature. Along with my wealth. I confess I have sought these things like a child on a playground looking for shiny pennies. But shiny pennies don't add up to much in your kingdom. Help me to see, as Zacchaeus saw, that true wealth is giving and giving back. Giving back to those I have taken from. And giving

to the poor what they have never received. When I thus begin investing my life for your kingdom, then, and only then, will my stature increase. Help me to see that, Lord. And give me the grace to thus invest my life.

And, most faithful of friends, overwhelm me with the awesome wonder that it is not I who seek you in the streets nearly as much as it is you who seeks me in the sycamores...