

The Story of Zacchaeus

Today's story is about a man many people didn't like. They called him a sinner, which is funny because aren't we all sinners? Don't we all make mistakes and do things we shouldn't?

The story starts with Jesus entering a place called Jericho. These days Jesus had been going around telling parables and performing many miracles.

The word was spreading about this man named Jesus and the amazing things he was doing and saying. So it was common when Jesus came to a place people would rush to see him.

Just imagine if a famous person came walking into your town or down your street. People would be telling their friends and very quickly there would be a large crowd around them. This is how it was for Jesus.

In this town that Jesus was entering lived a man named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in this place and had lots of money.

If you've heard the word taxes before it's probably not because people like them. Everyone that works pays taxes to the government or the people that run the city and country you live in. In some countries, taxes help pay for doctor visits or to make or fix roads, pay for parks, or help those who can't work.

Taxes for the most part help us live better so they really are a good thing, the problem is that sometimes (and that includes the times in the Bible) people who got the tax money didn't always spend it properly or they took some of the money for themselves (which is stealing).

So, the people from Jericho didn't like Zacchaeus very much, especially because he had lots of money and a big house. They figured he had taken some of the tax money for himself.

Back to the story. Zacchaeus had heard a commotion and soon realized that Jesus was in Jericho, so he rushed like everyone else to see Him. When he got to the crowd he couldn't see anything. He figured Jesus was in the middle of it somewhere but standing on his tiptoes he still couldn't even see Jesus.

You probably know what it's like to be shorter than all the adults around. Well, Zacchaeus wasn't very tall for a grown-up and couldn't ask someone to pick him up to see better, that would've been silly!

So, Zacchaeus saw a sycamore tree in the corner of his eye and decided to climb it so he could see Jesus.

I just wonder if Zacchaeus thought it might be strange for a grown man to climb a tree? Especially since he was an important person in government. Whatever he thought he did it anyway and didn't seem to care.

When Jesus reached the spot, Zacchaeus was he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." He came down right away and welcomed him gladly.

This is amazing! First, Jesus knew Zacchaeus' name without asking him first. Second, Jesus didn't care that other people didn't like Zacchaeus, he wanted to visit with him at his house anyway. Third, Jesus said that he **MUST** stay at his house today. This means that Jesus knew that God wanted him to go there and Jesus obeyed.

Jesus asked to go to Zacchaeus' house in front of everyone and as soon as they heard this they all started talking among themselves. They were shaking their heads and saying "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

I'm sure they both knew what people were saying but Zacchaeus jumped out of the tree and said to the lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my money to the poor, and if I have cheated or stole anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

The important part about this is that Zacchaeus had a change of heart. I don't know if he was already thinking about repaying people back or he just knew what he should do when he saw and talked to Jesus.

He also said that he would pay back people four times the amount. If he owed someone one pound he would pay them back four extra pounds! Zacchaeus didn't have to do this but he wanted to make things more than right.

When Jesus heard this he said, "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."

Jesus meant that he had forgiven his sins and that even though people didn't think Zacchaeus was good, God loved him too and knew that his heart was good.

Then the very last part Jesus said that he came to seek and to save the lost. This was the whole point as to why God sent His son Jesus to come to earth. To find those who didn't know God and were lost and to show them who God is so they could live forever in Heaven with Him.