

Getting Started

From the Commentary

The name *Zaccheus* means “righteous one,” but this supervisor of tax collectors was not living up to his name. Certainly the Jewish religious community in Jericho would not have considered him righteous, for he not only collected taxes from his own people but also worked for the unclean Gentiles! And publicans were notorious for collecting more taxes than required; the more money they collected, the more income they enjoyed (Luke 3:12–13).

Though Zaccheus was a renegade in the eyes of the Jews, he was a precious lost sinner in the eyes of Jesus.

—*Be Courageous*, pages 85–86

1. What changes did Zaccheus experience that day, all because Jesus visited Jericho? How are each of these changes significant? What lessons does Jesus teach through His invitation and subsequent conversation with Zaccheus? Why would these lessons have been surprising to the people of his time?

More to Consider: Under the Mosaic law, if a thief voluntarily confessed his crime, he had to restore what he took, add one-fifth to it, and bring a trespass offering to the Lord (Lev. 6:1–7). If he stole something he could not restore, he had to repay four- or fivefold (Exod. 22:1), and if he was caught with the goods, he had to repay double (Exod. 22:4). How does this truth add weight to Zaccheus’s story? How does it make his actions even more notable?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from Luke 19—20 that stands out to you. This could be something you’re intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here.

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

Passover season was always an emotionally charged time for the Jews, because it reminded them of their deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. This annual celebration aggravated the misery of their bondage to Rome and made them yearn all the more for a deliverer. Of course, there were subversive groups like the Zealots who used commando tactics against Rome, and politicians like the Herodians who compromised with Rome, but most of the Jews rejected those approaches. They wanted God to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies and send them their promised King.

—*Be Courageous*, page 88

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What attitudes and actions of the people Jesus met affected His response to them? What attitudes and actions should we have toward Jesus?
2. How did Jesus' view of Zaccheus differ from the view most Jews had of a tax collector?
3. Which attitudes of Zaccheus prompted Jesus to be responsive to him?
4. What are the differences and similarities between James 2:14–26 and the account of Zaccheus?
5. What are some examples of restitution that you've observed or practiced?

QuickStudies ON ZACCHAEUS

Jesus recognizes and rewards the efforts of Zacchaeus to see Him, and Zacchaeus immediately demonstrates how a relationship with Jesus can make a difference in one's life.

1. Which of your physical features are you most dissatisfied with? How would you change if you could?

2. What problems did Zacchaeus have to deal with (vss. 1-4)? (He was short, and his job as tax collector was not a popular one.) What did he have going for him? (He was wealthy [though this is a good place to point out that lots of money does not ensure happiness].)

3. How did Jesus know to “look up” (vs. 5) when He got to the tree where Zacchaeus was? (Perhaps Zacchaeus was trying to get Jesus' attention. Even if not, it should show us that Jesus is aware of every effort we make to get closer to Him.)

4. When Zacchaeus “went out on a limb” for Jesus, he was rewarded with a personal visit (vss. 5, 6). What are some ways we could go out of our way to get a little closer to Jesus?

5. Knowing Jesus made a real difference in the life and relationships of Zacchaeus (vss. 7-10). He could no longer go around cheating people—at least, not with a clear conscience. How has knowing Jesus changed the way you relate to other people?

NT WRIGHT QUESTIONS ON ZACCHAEUS

STUDY

1. Read *Luke 19:1-10*. Why would everyone in Jericho have disliked Zacchaeus?
2. Here Jesus doesn't tell a parable as he has been doing, like that of the prodigal son. Rather the tax collector himself speaks to Jesus in public. In what ways does Zacchaeus give evidence of his extravagant repentance in this story?
3. How is the story of Zacchaeus a kind of balance to the previous story of the rich ruler?
4. How do these stories speak to how we should view and deal with our possessions and money?

WIERSBE COMMENTARY ON ZACCHAEUS

1. THE SAVIOR WHO SEEKS THE LOST (19:1–10)

The name *Zaccheus* means “righteous one,” but this supervisor of tax collectors was not living up to his name. Certainly the Jewish religious community in Jericho would not have considered him righteous, for he not only collected taxes from his own people but also worked for the unclean Gentiles! And publicans were notorious for collecting more taxes than required; the more money they collected, the more income they enjoyed

(*Luke 3:12–13*). Though Zaccheus was a renegade in the eyes of the Jews, he was a precious lost sinner in the eyes of Jesus.

It is interesting to see the changes Zaccheus experienced that day, all because Jesus visited Jericho.

A man became a child (vv. 2–4). In the East, it is unusual for a man to run, especially a wealthy government official, yet Zaccheus ran down the street like a little boy following a parade. And he even climbed a tree! Curiosity is certainly characteristic of most children, and Zaccheus was motivated by curiosity that day.

John Calvin wrote, “Curiosity and simplicity are a sort of preparation for faith.” This is often the case, and it was certainly true of Zaccheus. Why the big crowd? Who is this Jesus of Nazareth they are following? What am I missing?

Jesus said, “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (*Luke 18:17*). Perhaps more than anything else, it is pride that keeps many “successful” people from trusting Jesus Christ.

A seeking man became found (v. 5). Zaccheus thought he was seeking Jesus (*Luke 19:3*), but Jesus was seeking him (*Luke 19:10*)! By nature, the lost sinner does not seek the Savior (*Rom. 3:11*). When our first parents sinned, they hid from God, but God came and sought them (*Gen. 3:1–10*). When Jesus was ministering on earth, He sought out the lost; and today the Holy Spirit, through the church, is searching for lost sinners.

We do not know how God had worked in the heart of Zaccheus to prepare him for this meeting with Jesus. Was Levi, the former publican (Luke 5:27–39), one of his friends? Had he told Zaccheus about Jesus? Was he praying for Zaccheus? Had Zaccheus become weary of wealth and started yearning for something better? We cannot answer these questions, but we can rejoice that a seeking Savior will always find a sinner who is looking for a new beginning.

A small man became big (vv. 7–8). It was not Zaccheus's fault that he was "little of stature" and could not see over the crowd. He did what he could to overcome his handicap by putting aside his dignity and climbing a tree. In a spiritual sense, all of us are "little of stature," for "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). No one measures up to God's high standards; we are all "too little" to enter into heaven.

The tragedy is, many lost sinners think they are "big." They measure themselves by man's standards—money, position, authority, popularity—things that are an "abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). They think they have everything when really they have nothing (Rev. 3:17).

Zaccheus trusted Jesus Christ and became a true "son of Abraham," meaning, of course, a child of faith (Rom. 4:12; Gal. 3:7). That is as big as you can get!

A poor man became rich (vv. 9–10). The people thought Zaccheus was a wealthy man, but actually he was only a bankrupt sinner who needed to receive God's gift of eternal life, the most expensive gift in the world. This is the only instance in the four gospels of Jesus inviting Himself to someone's home, and it illustrates the words of Revelation 3:20.

Zaccheus was not saved because he promised to do good works. He was saved because he responded by faith to Christ's gracious word to him. Having trusted the Savior, he then gave evidence of his faith by promising to make restitution to those he had wronged. Saving faith is more than pious words and devout feelings. It creates a living union with Christ that results in a changed life (James 2:14–26).

Under the Mosaic law, if a thief voluntarily confessed his crime, he had to restore what he took, add one-fifth to it, and bring a trespass offering to the Lord (Lev. 6:1–7). If he stole something he could not restore, he had to repay fourfold (Ex. 22:1), and if he was caught with the goods, he had to repay double (Ex. 22:4). Zaccheus did not quibble over the terms of the law; he offered to pay the highest price because his heart had truly been changed.

The child of God is born rich, for he shares "every spiritual blessing" in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3). We have the riches of God's mercy and grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:4) as well as the riches of His glory (Phil. 4:19) and wisdom (Rom. 11:33). These are "unsearchable riches" that can never be fully understood or completely exhausted (Eph. 3:8).

The host became the guest (v. 6). Jesus invited Himself to Zaccheus's house, and Zaccheus received Him joyfully. *Joy* is one of the key themes in the gospel of Luke, and the word is found over twenty times in one form or another. The experience of salvation certainly ought to produce joy in the believer's heart.

Zaccheus became the guest in his own house, for Jesus was now his Master. He was ready to obey the Lord and do whatever was necessary to establish a genuine testimony before the people. To be sure, the people criticized Jesus for visiting in a publican's house (Luke 5:27–32), but the Lord paid no attention to their words. The critics also needed to be saved, but there is no evidence that they trusted Jesus.

When a day begins, you never know how it will end. For Zaccheus, that day ended in joyful fellowship with the Son of God, for he was now a changed man with a new life. Jesus is still seeking the lost and yearning to save them. Has He found you?