

"Zaccheus"

Luke 19:1-10

Baxter T. Exum (#952)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
December 9, 2007



Introduction:

This morning I would like for us to consider an event from the life of Christ as he traveled to Jerusalem for the very last time. As brother Del read for us just a few moments ago (from **Luke 18:31-34**), Jesus had been preaching and teaching for about 3-½ years when He pulled the apostles aside and told them that He was headed for Jerusalem to die. As Jesus began that journey, He traveled through the ancient city of Jericho just a little more than a week before the crucifixion. As I was preparing for this morning's lesson, I suddenly realized that (as far as I can tell), this is the only record of Jesus ever entering the city of Jericho.

We know that it was a strategic city and that it had quite an interesting history. We know from the Old Testament that Jericho was the first city to be conquered by the Israelites after they crossed over the Jordan River after wandering in the wilderness for more than 40 years. We remember Rahab the prostitute, a God-fearing woman who hid the spies—a woman who is praised several times in the New Testament as being a hero of the faith—a faithful woman who followed in the footsteps of Father Abraham. We remember how the walls fell down after the Israelites faithfully obeyed the Lord's command to encircle the city for seven days. We remember that after Jericho was conquered, Joshua issued a curse in **Joshua 6:26**. The Bible says, ***"Then Joshua made them take an oath at that time, saying, 'Cursed before the LORD is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with the loss of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son he shall set up its gates.'"*** More than 500 years later, there is a man named Hiel the Bethelite who rebuilds the city under the reign of the wicked king Ahab. The event is recorded for us in **1 Kings 16:34**, and just as the Lord had promised more than 500 years earlier, Hiel lost his firstborn son as he laid the foundation and lost his youngest as he reset the gates. And so the city of Jericho has a long and rather unusual history.

And so we go back to the end of **Luke 18**, we find that Jesus is on a mission. He sets His face towards Jerusalem, and He does not turn back. However, along the way, we have two more rather unusual events that take place in the city of Jericho. And again, this would have been just a little more than a week before the crucifixion. At the end of **Luke 18**, Jesus heals a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus. The Bible tells us that the blind man kept on calling out saying, ***"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*** And the Bible says that Jesus healed the man of his blindness and that the man began following Jesus, ***"...glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they [also] gave praise to God."***

Our text for this morning is found in **Luke 19**. I am not exactly sure why, but it seems that the account of Zaccheus is one of the favorite stories of children almost everywhere. Perhaps it has something to do with climbing trees—****PPT****—a favorite pastime of children everywhere—or maybe it is simply the thought of an adult climbing a tree! Or maybe kids like this story only for the song—**“Zaccheus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he...”** That song is very addictive! But whatever the case, as Jesus actually passes through the city of Jericho for the very first time, we find a rather unusual encounter. ****PPT**** And so if you will, please look with me at **Luke 19:1-10**...

¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. ³ Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." ⁶ And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. ⁷ When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." ⁸ Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

As we look back at these ten verses, I'd like for us to keep our thoughts focused on this paragraph. I'd like for us to consider the fact that Zaccheus was looking for Jesus, that Jesus was looking for Zaccheus, and then close with the fact that that is a very good combination!

I. First of all, though, we find that ZACCHEUS WAS LOOKING FOR JESUS.
****PPT****

But right away in **verse 2**, we start seeing some barriers that at least had the potential to keep Zaccheus away. First of all, for example, we find in **verse 2** that Zaccheus is described as a **"chief tax collector"**—the only man in the Bible ever described in such a way. Here in our nation, we certainly have a history of despising taxes. We remember the Boston Tea Party, where 90,000 pounds of tea were dumped into Boston Harbor 234 years ago next Sunday morning (December 16, 1773). Even in modern times, we sometimes moan and complain about paying our taxes. Just this last week, like many of you, we received our property tax bill, so perhaps the timing of this morning's lesson is especially appropriate. Maybe you have heard of the anonymous letter that was apparently sent to the IRS a number of years ago. The letter said, **"Enclosed you will find a check for \$150. I cheated on my income tax return last year and have not been able to sleep ever since. If I still have trouble sleeping I will send you the rest."**

My personal view of taxes is that we will pay them (based on **Romans 13**); however, we will pay no more than is absolutely necessary. I believe that as a Christian I can spend my money much better than the United States government. I believe that \$100 spent on the church food pantry will do a whole lot more good than sending that same \$100 to Washington, DC, for the bureaucrats to sort out. So, I will try to elect fiscally conservative candidates to local, state, and federal government, so that I can be more liberal with my personal giving. I trust the men of this congregation much more than I trust Mayor Dave, Jim Doyle, or George Bush.

Nevertheless, we think we have it bad here, but it was so much worse in ancient Jericho. The nation of Israel had been conquered by the Romans, the Romans had assessed every province, and then they auctioned off the position of chief tax collector to the highest bidder. As long as the person in that position turned in what the Romans thought was appropriate, anything else they were able to collect was basically their reward for winning the bid. And the tax collectors had the full backing of the Roman military. And so for a Jew to win the bid and collect taxes from his own people was basically an act of betrayal.

We know from history that there were four basic taxes collected in Palestine at the time of Christ—a census tax just for being alive, a ground tax for any property, an income tax, and also duty tax—just in case they missed anything! They taxed your cart. They taxed the animals that pulled the cart. They could stop your cart out on the road somewhere and make you unload it so they could tax everything in your cart, and on and on and on. I think we see that the tax system could definitely be abused.

And so over time, the Jews spoke of tax collectors right along with robbers or murderers or prostitutes. They were all just slightly different categories of sinful people. Today, Zaccheus would have roughly the same social status as a high level drug dealer—tax collectors were absolutely hated. Not only this, but we also find that Zaccheus was a **"chief tax collector."** Today perhaps we would refer to him as the City Assessor. He would have been in the position of overseeing other tax collectors. We know from history that there were only three chief tax collectors in Israel at this time, so Zaccheus was apparently in a very high position and very well-respected by the Roman government.

Not only would his occupation have the ability to keep him away from Jesus, but we also read in **verse 2** that Zaccheus was **"rich."** Perhaps you remember what happened just a few verses earlier in the previous chapter. In **Luke 18**, Jesus had just dealt with the Rich Young Ruler, and in **Luke 18:24**, Jesus had just said, **"How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!"** And so it was going to be a challenge for Zaccheus to enter God's kingdom. As Jesus said in **verse 25**, **"For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."**

And then on top of being rich and a tax collector, we also find that Zaccheus was short. We do not know how short he was, but it is interesting that the author of this account was a medical doctor. And so in his professional medical opinion, Dr. Luke

says, **"This guy was short!"** The Greek word is **"mikros."** Zaccheus was a micro man! According to Dr. Luke, he was **"short in stature."** Or literally, he was short for his age—almost like an adult who is trapped in the body of a small child.

I was thinking: If we were to make a movie out of this, perhaps we could find Danny DeVito! That is the kind of person I can imagine that Zaccheus was. So, he was a chief tax collector, he was rich, and he was extremely short. But in spite of these external difficulties, we see that Zaccheus is looking for Jesus.

Perhaps the riches had failed to give him a meaningful life. Perhaps he was tired of being lonely and abused. But whatever the case, he starts looking for the Lord. I've always wondered if perhaps Zaccheus had heard about Matthew—or perhaps even Zaccheus was Matthew's supervisor. We remember that several years earlier Jesus had gone up to Matthew in his tax booth and had said, **"Follow me!"** The Bible tells us that Matthew, **"...left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him."** In fact, we find in **Luke 5:29** that Matthew basically threw a going-away party for himself and invited a lot of his coworkers to come and meet the Lord. Several years ago I preached on that passage in **Luke**, and I titled the lesson, **"Matthew's Party."** We had the video of that sermon on-line, and someone found it by doing a Google search for **"Matthew's Party Video."** I doubt they were looking for my sermon, but they found it! They were probably looking for something else! Nevertheless, it is possible that Zaccheus was already familiar with the Lord.

Perhaps Zaccheus had heard that Jesus was speaking well of tax collectors. We remember the parable Jesus just told back at the beginning of the previous chapter—a Pharisee and a tax collector went into the temple to pray, and it was only the tax collector whose prayer was heard by God. Perhaps Zaccheus had heard some interesting stories as he went to collect his taxes, **"Oh, those 2,000 pigs I had last year? A man named Jesus drove them off the cliff."** Imagine the tax implications of Jesus healing the sick and raising the dead. At the end of the last chapter, we read about Bartimaeus—the blind beggar. Bartimaeus is now a productive, tax-paying member of society—as he had not been for many, many years.

And so in response to this desire to see the Lord, this short tax official (according to **verse 4**), **"...ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree."** And again it is rather unusual to see a grown-up climbing a tree—unless maybe they are being chased by a dog or maybe trying to escape a flood! Think for a moment: When was the last time we saw a government official climbing tree? When was the last time that we climbed a tree? We may have some hunters who have climbed some trees lately, but most of us have not climbed a tree for many, many years.

Zaccheus, then, was looking for the Lord. Hopefully there are some here this morning who are also looking for Jesus. Of course today, we no longer need to climb a tree—we simply need to read the Bible. The Bible is a guidebook for finding God. At the end of the book of **John**, the apostle wrote about the words of his book, and he said, **"...these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name"**

(**John 20:31**). Zaccheus looked for God by climbing a tree—we do it by reading the Scriptures. And this is the first lesson we learn—the importance of searching for God—in spite of any obstacles we may face in the process.

II. As we keep on looking at Luke 19, we also find that JESUS WAS LOOKING FOR ZACCHEUS. **PPT******

Zaccheus didn't know it at the time, but they were looking for one another! In fact, in **verse 5**, the Bible says that, "**When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, 'Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.'**" I am sure that Zaccheus had been called a lot of names. In the eyes of Rome, he was probably a number. In the eyes of the Jews, he was a traitor. But Jesus called him by his name. The name Zaccheus means "**clean**" or "**pure.**" We appreciate being called by our names. We appreciate the personal attention. Someone has cared enough to know and remember.

In **Isaiah 43:1**, the prophet passes along an encouraging word from God and says, "**Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!**" The God who created the Universe knows us by name! We know from **Psalm 147:4** that God calls every star by name. In **John 10**, we find that Jesus calls His sheep by name. We remember Saul being struck blind on the road to Damascus in **Acts 9**. The Lord's first words were, "**Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?**" Jesus knows all of us by name.

And so when Jesus calls Zaccheus by name, He invites Himself over for dinner. As far as I can tell, this is the only time that this happens, but Jesus says, "**Hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.**" With only a week left to live, Jesus decided to stay at the home not of a respected religious leader, but in the home of one of the most hated men in the nation of Israel. In **verse 7**, once the religious leaders saw that Zaccheus had welcomed the Lord, "**...they all began to grumble, saying, 'He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'**" And yet we find in **verse 10** that Jesus had come into the world for that reason, "**...to seek and to save that which was lost.**" And so we find that Jesus was looking for Zaccheus.

What an amazing example for us to follow! Jesus was looking to save the lost, and so He called out to Zaccheus by name and insisted that they share a meal together. Our mission today is the same—to always be looking out for others, to share our meals together, and to treat the lost as we ourselves would like to be treated.

III. As we come to the end of this passage, we see the results of a very strong combination—when a lost person is looking for God and when God is looking for the lost, SALVATION IS THE NATURAL RESULT. **PPT******

We are not told exactly what Jesus says to Zaccheus. I imagine that at some point Jesus asks Zaccheus about his job. And maybe at that point it all comes out, and Jesus explains the good news—that He is on His way to Jerusalem to die for the sins

that Zaccheus had been committing. We are not told exactly what was said, but we do read about what happens next.

As the result of talking with Jesus, Zaccheus (in **verse 8**) makes a rather bold statement. He stops and says to the Lord, **"Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."** What a contrast from the Rich Young Ruler in **Luke 18**, a man who was challenged by the Lord who ended up walking away very sad, because he was **"extremely rich"** (**Luke 18:23**).

It is easy to claim to be a Christian, but the hard part comes in proving it. Have our friends seen a change in the way we are living? If someone took my check register, could they prove that I am a faithful Christian? When an outsider looks at my marriage, could they safely assume that I am living according to the New Testament? Like Zaccheus, we are to demonstrate that a change has taken place. We are never told what the Lord said, but we can see the results!

As a man who dealt with numbers, Zaccheus was not talking in the abstract, but when he referred to half of his possessions being given to the poor, he was a man who would have known the exact figure. Zaccheus knew the amount. And when he promises to pay back four times as much to those he had cheated, he most likely knew who those people were. We can only imagine what that would have been like—to see the tax man going door-to-door giving refunds—what a strange sight that would have been! And as he explained the reason, what an impact that would have had, because by the end of the following week, Jesus would be dead. **"I am giving you this money back, because Jesus changed my life!"**

What an impact that would have had on the residents of Jericho! Zaccheus finally understood that money is merely a tool for doing the Lord's work. It was Albert Schweitzer who said, **"If you own something that you cannot give away, then you don't own it, it owns you."** Perhaps all of us should keep this in mind as we plan our giving for the coming year.

Zaccheus understood what the apostle Paul would write later (in **Ephesians 4:28**), **"He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."** Repentance required a change in his behavior.

Earlier this year, I heard someone say, **"Nowhere does the New Testament require restitution."** I would have to respectfully disagree with that. If I steal my neighbor's car, what Scripture allows me to keep that car? If I steal my neighbor's wife, what Scripture allows me to keep that wife? If I kidnap my neighbor's child, what Scripture allows me to keep that child? Some people would say that I have to return the car but that I could keep the wife—absolute insanity!

In our society, maybe someone has an addiction that is damaging to the body—Biblical repentance is a change of heart that results in a change of direction. It is not

enough to say, **"I am sorry for being a drunkard,"** and then go back to the drinking. That is not Biblical repentance.

Sometimes we will see a situation where two people are married in the eyes of the state, but they are not married in the eyes of God—two men married to one another, or maybe a heterosexual couple where a previous marriage did not end for a Scriptural reason. Those couples need to separate from one another. That is a serious change—especially when children are involved. And yet it is not enough to simply say, **"My bad,"** and then return to a sexually immoral relationship. When John the Baptist spoke to King Herod, he was not requesting an apology. He was not asking for mere regret or even sorrow. But John's message was, according to **Mark 6:18**, **"It is not lawful for you to have your father's wife."** In the same way, Zaccheus did not just apologize for making a mistake, but he took steps to correct his sinful behavior.

Maybe we are facing the sin of gossip. Repentance tells us that the gossip needs to stop. We cannot go to heaven simply by apologizing if we are not willing to actually stop the sinful behavior.

In a similar way, when Zaccheus realized that he had been dishonest in collecting taxes, he did not just say, **"I'm sorry,"** but he made a commitment to make things right to the best of his ability. And after Zaccheus makes this announcement, Jesus replies in **verse 9**, **"Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham."** This was, perhaps, the greatest miracle that ever happened in the city of Jericho—even greater than the walls falling down—the miracle of a rich man being saved by the grace of God! This man with a horrible past—this traitor and evil man—is now identified as a, **"son of Abraham."**

Conclusion & Invitation:

After hundreds of years, Zaccheus is following in the steps of Rahab the prostitute—another resident of Jericho who at one time was searching for God and reacted to finding God with faithful, loving obedience.

This morning, perhaps you are standing at a similar crossroads. At any given moment, all of us can go in one of two very different directions. We can live by sight—we can think about things in the short term. Or, like Zaccheus and Rahab—we can make the difficult choices in doing whatever it takes to follow God as we should.

The New Testament tells us to turn away from all forms of sin. We are then to allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our past sins. Immersion in water looks back to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is at the point of baptism that we are baptized into His death. If you have any questions, we hope you will talk to us right away. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org