

Luke 19:1-9 - Zacchaeus: The Big-Hearted Man

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McBIC

- We are continuing in our series of messages called “Encountering Jesus.”
- In each message this summer, we are sharing stories about how people had an encounter with Jesus, about how they connected with Jesus. And in each case, they left that encounter a changed person. My hope for all of you is that during this summer you will encounter Jesus, and you will leave as a changed person.
- Today, we are going to encounter an encounter that a wee little man had with Jesus. And it changed his life and his eternity forever.
- Now, I used that phrase “wee little man” on purpose, because when I was a kid...
- And you know where I am going with this, gray-headed people... right?
- When I was a kid in Sunday School, there was this song that kids sang, along with the little old lady who led singing in my Sunday school class, along with a little old lady who played the piano.
- Any person older than, say, 49, who would like to come up here and lead it with me?
- Reeces PB Cups.

Zacchaeus was a wee little man
And a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see.
And as the Savior passed that way,
He looked up in the tree.
And he said, “Zacchaeus, you come down!”
For I’m going to your house today.
For I’m going to your house today.

- Great little song, right? Well, today my hope is that you will begin to see that this little song is only half of the story. The other half is actually the most important.

- One of the more recent joys of my time as a pastor has been to interact with my fairly new friend Kaz. Kaz, his wife, Kathy, and I have had the pleasure of meeting together a number of times since Kaz prayed to receive Christ and grow in his faith. God is really speaking to him through Scripture.
- And the cool thing for me is that when Kaz reads passages of Scripture that I have personally known for a long time, and as Kaz shares with me his thoughts about these very well known passages of Scripture, it feels like I am reading the story for the first time again.
- This story of Zacchaeus is so powerful, and so whether you are reading and encountering this story for the first time or the 100th time this morning, I invite you to ask God to allow you to see His power in this encounter. Especially if you learned this song as a kid and have heard the story many times, I hope that you will see something powerful here for your life.
- So especially for people who know this story, are you willing to set aside all of your previous thoughts about this “wee little man” and ask God to help you read this story again for the first time? Theologians call this a “First reading.”
- And today if this is the first time you encounter this story in your life, you are in luck! This is a great day to look at it for the first time.
- Turn to Luke 18 and 19 in your Bible or electronic device, and I want to encourage you to follow along as I have some Scripture readers here to help me.
- In order to understand the encounter that Jesus had with Zacchaeus, it is important to understand the context of where this story is in the book of Luke.
- Right look again at the encounter that Jesus had with the rich young ruler in Luke 18 that any of you heard right here two weeks ago. Let’s go back to this story in Luke 18 as we read it.

Luke 18-21

- ¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
- ¹⁹ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit

adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.^[a]”

- ²¹ “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

OK, let’s stop here...

- The rich young ruler was in a very high position in the Jewish community. As a wealthy man, no doubt he had a prominent place with the elite people in his community. He was probably offered the most important places in the synagogue, etc.
- A question for the kids...
- Jesus said, “You know the ommandments.” Do you all know what commandments that Jesus was referring to? The Ten Commandments, right?

Ten Commandments

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall make no idols
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
10. You shall not covet.

Which of the Ten Commandments did Jesus refer to when he was talking to the rich young ruler in Luke 18? Look for answers...

Ten Commandments

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall make no idols
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
- ~~5. Honor your father and your mother.~~
- ~~6. You shall not murder~~
- ~~7. You shall not commit adultery~~
- ~~8. You shall not steal~~

~~9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor~~
10. You shall not covet.

“Yes, Jesus, I got those down.” the rich young ruler said.

Mark’s gospel tells describes the same scene, and this is how Jesus is described:

Mark 10:21 - Jesus **looked at him and loved him**. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have **and** give to the poor, **and** you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

- Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven.
- Tell me, which of the Commandments did Jesus refer to when he spoke to the rich young ruler?
- 10, for sure. But also, he told the ruler to come and follow him. The first four commandments are really about a relationship with God, while the last 6 are about how we should relate to other people.

Luke 18:22-27

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

- Powerful story, isn’t it?
- But how does this relate to the story of Zavchaeus, the story we are going to look at this morning?
- I don’t think that we can truly understand Zacchaeus until we put the story of the Rich Young Ruler in context.
- So after this encounter that the rich young ruler had with Jesus in Luke 18...

- Jesus told his disciples a third time that he was going to Jerusalem to be crucified, and then while he was on the road to Jericho on the way to Jerusalem, he healed a blind beggar.
- And then we read this story about Zacchaeus.
- And as we read Luke 19 and the story of Zacchaeus, I want you to also think about the way that the Rich young ruler ruler responded to Jesus and compare it with the way that Zacchaeus did. Here we go.
- Luke 19:

Luke 19 New International Version (NIV)

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. **2** A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. **3** He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. **4** So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” **6** So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

8 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.”

9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

This is a picture of a 1000 year-old sycamore Tree in Israel today.



- Who is this wee little man who was employed as a tax collector?
- Better yet, what's up with tax collectors in the Bible?
- When most of us think of tax collectors, we think of IRS agents, etc.
- But in ancient Israel, Tax collectors were sell-outs to the Romans.



- At one time, the Roman Empire stretched 3000 miles wide, and it included all of the land around the Mediterranean Sea. The Romans at the time of Jesus occupied all of the land in Orange and Green. By 180 A.D., the land in red was also part of the Roman Empire.
- By the time Jesus was born, the land of Israel, and specifically Jerusalem, had recently been taken over by the Romans. A Roman governor was named to take control of the territory. Remember King Herod when Jesus was born? He was the one who ordered that all the male babies aged 2 and under were to be killed.
- Yea, the Jews HATED the Romans
- And to finance all of this, the government needed taxes. Lots and lots of taxes. They burdened the people in the lands they took over with taxes. If they did not pay, they had their methods for people who didn't pay, and if you had the audacity to revolt against the Romans, they devised an excruciating death penalty method - a cross.
- And so to finance all of this government system, the Romans hired **tax farmers**. This way, the Romans got their money, and the tax collectors were left to collect the taxes.

- And what angered the people of Israel even more is that many of these tax collectors demanded extra. And not only did these tax collectors pocket the extra, many of them were Jewish people themselves who were selling out to their enemies.
- How many of you ever heard of Matthew?
- Matthew (who wrote the gospel of Matthew and was one of the 12) was a tax collector when Jesus called him and he left his tax collector's booth.
- And Zacchaeus was also one of these Jewish tax collectors.
- And THAT was why the Jews hated tax collectors. They sold their souls to the Romans.
- And that is also why tax collectors and prostitutes were thought of as scum of the earth.
- Listen on in Luke 19:
- **5** When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." **6** So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.
- **7** All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."
- Zacchaeus was the lowest of the low in Jewish society.
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- So Let's go back again and talk about the rich young ruler whose story was told right before Zcchaeus. Remember the commandments that He said that he had followed?:

Ten Commandments

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall make no idols
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
- ~~5. Honor your father and your mother.~~
- ~~6. You shall not murder~~
- ~~7. You shall not commit adultery~~
- ~~8. You shall not steal~~
- ~~9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor~~
10. You shall not covet.

Remember what tripped him up? He could not let go of his money. #10, and ultimately #1-4. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, an upstanding member of society:

- **24**“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! **25** Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”
- **26** Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”
- **27** Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

The Rich young ruler was high in social status, while Zacchaeus was the lowest of social status.

- We don't know what Jesus said to Zacchaeus in their interaction at his home. All that Luke wrote about is that Jesus called out to him in front of everyone:
- “Zacchaeus, you come down! For I'm going to your house today...”
- But what we do know is that a greedy man who was a sell-out to his own people did something completely out of character for him.
- He made a radical change in his life.
- Here's the interesting thing: Jesus didn't ask him to sell all that he had and give it to the poor like he did the rich young ruler.
- Luke doesn't tell us what Jesus asked him to do, but from the looks of the story, it seems that Zachaeus didn't need Jesus to tell him what to do. Look at what happened:
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Luke 19:8 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.”

- Tell me something: if Zacchaeus gave away half of his wealth to the poor, and he agreed in front of a large crowd of people to pay back four times the amount that he may have cheated anyone... how much money do you think he had left after it was all over?
- Zacchaeus did what Jesus asked the rich young ruler, but this time he was not asked to do it. I mean, people don't just do that. That's crazy...
- Or maybe, just maybe, something happened to Zacchaeus that changed his life.

- He had an encounter with Jesus, and that made all the difference.
- Think about it: the rich young ruler had an encounter with Jesus, and he focused on the rules.
- Zachaeus had an encounter with Jesus, and he changed his life based on the relationship he had with Him.
- And then Jesus said the most interesting thing to Zacchaeus.

Luke 19:9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

- The people with Jesus asked him just a chapter earlier, who then can be saved? Jesus replied, “With God, all things are possible.”
- It is also interesting that Jesus says, “today, salvation has come to this house” after Zacchaeus made a radical change in his life. He probably didn’t get his theology right. But he was in the presence of Jesus, and it changed him. He allowed it to change him.
- So it begs some questions:
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 - Are you lost?
 - Have you ever encountered Jesus? I mean, have you ever had a real encounter with Jesus? I don’t know what Jesus would say to you if you had an encounter with him. I do know that if you do have an encounter with Jesus, it will change your life forever. And if you do have an encounter with Jesus, all of the people who did have an encounter with Jesus and followed him were set free from themselves, and they were set free from their sin. They experienced the peace and joy that changed eternity for them.
 - Do you want that for your life?
 - It’s never too late for you.
 - In God’s economy, it is possible for an old dog to learn new tricks.
 - It is possible for crooks to become saints.
 - It is possible for greedy people to become generous.
 - Ebenezer Scrooge is not just a fictional character. It can happen in a traitor like Zacchaeus.
 - It is possible in God’s economy for broken people to be made whole, and for broken relationships to be restored.
 - How many of you were here last week and heard from my friend, George?

- He was an angry, depressed man whose life was in shambles because of what he did to others and to himself.
- But he had an encounter with Jesus, and it changed everything.
- So the old Sunday School song is only half of the story.
- The second half is much, much better.

Zacchaeus is a brand new man
 And a big-hearted man is he.
 He started rich, but ended poor...

Wait a minute... according to whose standards?

Zacchaeus is a brand new man
 And a big-hearted man is he.
 He started poor, but ended rich
 Because he could finally see.
 As he encountered Jesus Christ
 Zacchaeus grew and grew.
 And Jesus said: "Today salvation has come!"
 For I've come to save the lost.
 For I've come to save the lost.

- And He's come to save you, too.
- Friend, if you have not had an encounter with Jesus Christ, or if it has been a long time since you had that kind of connection with Jesus, I double dare you to find your own sycamore tree to climb up to catch a glimpse of Jesus.