



Pressezentrum

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ZACCHAEUS: Jesus Came to Seek and Save

Luke 19:1–10

Apart from the passage in Luke 19:1–10, Zacchaeus is otherwise unknown. His name (*Zakkaï*) means “clean, innocent” and is often used in parallelism with “righteous, upright.” However, this is not what the people saw in him, as we shall see. Then the city, Jericho, was an important customs station for the major trade route between Judea and the lands East of the Jordan. It also produced and exported costly balsams. For this reason it was a center for fee collectors.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector, wanted to see Jesus, but he was the town *collaborator*. The Romans collected taxes by farming it out to local people. At the end of the year, they give so much money, and won't ask any sticky question about how much they took in. It is a system that guarantees to have oppression, injustice and graft. As a chief toll collector, Zacchaeus was viewed by his fellow townspeople as a sinner and described as “**lost**”. Not only to eat with him but also to stay and “to be a guest ... of a sinner” was an extreme.

Zacchaeus was short and climbed the tree to see Jesus; it's not that he can't see over the crowd, he is a powerful man, and powerful people would choose to stand at a hidden viewing platform. But more, it is because collaborators don't mix with crowds. They always have careful check of their backs. He doesn't dare to go *in* that crowd, because he is the town collaborator. One would probably come with a knife and stab him, and no one would turn to see that until the crowd is gone. After that one cannot arrest thousands of people to see who killed him.

What's Zachaeus is going to do?

He picked up a tree with big leaves (sycamore tree) and lots of branches. He doesn't want anybody to see him. Yet powerful people don't climb trees at parades, little boys and girls do. The crowds he hoped would be dispersed. But it isn't. The crowds were there, and they *spot* Zacchaeus. How do we know? We know because if Jesus saw Zacchaeus, so the crowds do. They called him by his name.

What do you think the crowds would say about “good” old Zacchaeus on a tree? All things that they want to say them in his office on the last 30 years, and they could not say, because he is too powerful man, *now* they can call out what they like. One insult triggers another, and soon crowds start to get angry. Then a whiff of violence in the air.

And Jesus is supposed to respond. Supposed to say: “look Zacchaeus; the anger of this people is fully justified. You have broken the Law of Moses. You have become the town collaborator. You have drained the economic life blood of your own people and gave it to the enemies. You deserve this and more. What is required of you is to quit your job, and go up to Jerusalem, and weeklong process of ceremonial purification because you and everything you touch is defiled. And come back, and get a job within the confine of the Law. Purify your house. If you do so, next time I come to town, I will drop for congratulation and maybe a cup of tea.”

But Jesus told Zacchaeus: “I think I did not have time for anybody in this town, but I have just changed my mind. I decided to accept your gracious invitation to be your guest for the night.”

So, what the crowds would say: “he has no time for us, and he has time for the town collaborator? Instead of going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast (liberation of Israel), now he is going to a defiled person of a defiled house, agent of the Roman powers!” And this gross political indiscretion that not going to be forgotten. And when Jesus gets there in Jerusalem the “big boys” will be able to take care of him.

Did you notice that the anger against Zacchaeus is shifted to Jesus? They were angry of Zaccheaus, now they are angry of Jesus. Isaiah the prophet said, “by His stripes we were healed.” (Is. 53:5)

Two things Jesus have done: He reprocessed his anger into grace. He is a Jew, he is part of his community, he understands their oppression under Rome, he sympathized with it. He grew up in a world which despises the tax collector more than anybody else. And a Rabbai (teacher) is even telling that you are allowed to give lies to three people: a thief, a murderer, and a tax collector. In a way he was in that kind of list. Jesus, in other words feels inside of the crowd. But Jesus has reprocessed his anger into grace. Having done so, (second thing) he is able to reach out and *show costly unexpected love*. All these words are important.

Grace is costly. Jesus shifted the anger of the people to himself.

It is seen (it cannot be spoken merely; it is also to be acted).

It is unexpected, because Zacchaeus didn't earn it. Grace is free, but not cheap.

And its nature is love,

And when you have these two sides of the coin: reprocess anger into grace and showing unexpected love, love would be seen in its ultimate expression: The Cross.

Zacchaeus came down of the tree and joyfully accepted Jesus in his home.

"Authentic repentance is acceptance of being found." (as one theologian said) it is not a remorse over a broken Law. Jesus is redefining repentance. The lost sheep gets lost, the shepherd looks for it, he picks it up, and carries it back. The sheep thinks is going to die, some wild animal going to eat it, and accept to be found with great joy. Zacchaeus accepts to be found with great joy. There is a place for remorse, but the initial emotion of repentance is joy and not remorse.

What happens after? They go into Zacchaeus house, and they reclined. And Zacchaeus feels the inner pressure to respond. Nobody tells him what to do. Nobody gives new set of roles. Nobody gives him a new law book. He got to respond. And in the middle of the banquet, the pressure to respond is so intense. He speaks out the depth of his own soul. He promises to clean up his financial acts with the community. He doesn't respond out of whose somebody else is. There is the law: 10 commandments, but Christ asking us to go beyond what is required of us: to walk in the law of love.

And when Jesus sees that Zacchaeus' repentance is authentic, he gives the final statement, and says to him: "today salvation has come," (passive,) "to this house." Who brought it? Jesus did. How? At great cost. We are talking about one of the deepest level of love: the Cross.

"Since he also is son of Abraham", Jesus said. The rest of the community denies that status of Zacchaeus. Abraham has started a journey not knowing where going to end. This man (Zacchaeus) is doing the same. He is starting a journey not knowing where he is going. (Some church traditions say that Zacchaeus became a Bishop of Caesarea city, and died as martyr).

"The Son of man (Jesus) came to seek and to save." He *came*, that's Bethlehem. *To seek*, that's Jerusalem. Both coming together in Him: to seek and save. He who sought to see Jesus is really sought, seen, and saved by him. Serious and sincere people in the spiritual journey are rare. It is expensive to decide to follow Jesus, few who are able to pay the price.

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