

The Case of Zacchaeus

As Jesus entered Jericho, a man named Zacchaeus became determined to see Him. Zacchaeus was not simply another face in the crowd. Luke tells us that he was “a chief tax collector, and he was rich” (Luke 19:2). In the eyes of many Jews, that made him an unlikely candidate for friendship with Jesus. Tax collectors were commonly despised because they worked within the Roman taxation system, and many had reputations for dishonesty and greed.

Yet something was stirring in Zacchaeus. He wanted to see Jesus. The problem was that he was short, and the crowd prevented him from getting a good look. Rather than giving up, Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree.

“He was trying to see who Jesus was, and couldn’t because of the crowd, because he was short. He ran on ahead, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was going to pass that way.” (Luke 19:3–4)

Imagine the scene. Here was a wealthy and important man climbing a tree like a young boy simply because he wanted to see Jesus. He may have thought he was only going to observe Jesus from a distance. Instead, Jesus stopped beneath the tree and looked directly at him. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus—but he soon discovered that Jesus already saw him.

“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” (Luke 19:5)

That is one of the beautiful lessons in this account. Zacchaeus may have been overlooked, rejected, or even hated by the people around him, but he was not overlooked by Christ. Jesus knew his name. He knew where he was. He knew what kind of life he had lived. Yet Jesus was willing to enter his home.

The crowd did not understand. They complained that Jesus had gone to be the guest of a sinner. But Jesus was interested in something greater than Zacchaeus’s reputation. He was interested in Zacchaeus’s soul.

Being in the presence of Jesus produced a change in this man. Zacchaeus declared: ***“Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone, I restore four times as much.”*** (Luke 19:8) This was more than emotion. Zacchaeus demonstrated repentance through action. Money had apparently been an important part of his life, but after encountering Jesus, his attitude toward wealth and toward those he had wronged changed dramatically.

Jesus then announced: ***“Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”*** (Luke 19:9–10)

Those final words explain not only the story of Zacchaeus but also the mission of Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

Zacchaeus teaches us that no person is beyond the reach of the Lord. Past sins, bad reputations, poor decisions, and the judgment of others do not prevent someone from turning to Christ. But coming to Jesus must involve more than curiosity. Zacchaeus climbed the tree because he wanted to see Jesus; he came down when Jesus called; he received Him joyfully; and his life began to change.

There may be many obstacles between a person and Christ—the crowd, pride, possessions, reputation, or past mistakes. Zacchaeus refused to let those things keep him from seeing Jesus.

The question for each of us is simple: **How determined are you to see Jesus, hear His call, and allow Him to change your life?**