

Bible Reading Devotional

WEEK OF OCTOBER 4, 2020

WEEKLY READING: LUKE 17—21

PASSAGE REFERENCED: LUKE 15:1-32, 18:18-25, 19:1-10

“Zacchaeus was a wee little man. And a wee little man was he...” You’re welcome. Now you’ll have that Sunday school classic stuck in your head all day. Seriously though, the story of Zacchaeus and his encounter with Jesus is a beautiful picture of the Gospel. It is a story that contains wisdom for our lives today.

Let’s start with some background. The town of Jericho, which was positioned at an essential border, boasted fertile lands and wealthy inhabitants. Zacchaeus, whose name literally meant ‘clean’ or ‘pure,’ was a chief tax collector. He would have been responsible for hiring tax collectors and setting collection policies. With customs and a cut from each tax collector, Zacchaeus was incredibly wealthy and wildly unpopular. He was also short, as we know from the song, probably somewhere under 5 feet tall.

As Luke says, Jesus was passing through on his way up to Jerusalem. He had already begun preparing His disciples for what would happen once He arrived there. From Jericho, there was still a 17-mile uphill trek to Jerusalem. This would have been a much-needed stop for Jesus and his disciples to rest. At this point in His ministry, Jesus was attracting a crowd wherever He went. Zacchaeus, the well-known and much-hated Jericho elite, wanted to see who this Jesus was. He chose an easy climbing tree to get up higher and covertly glimpse Jesus over the crowd. This sets up a comical meeting. Jesus looks up to find Zacchaeus hiding in plain sight. Now normally, a renowned teacher would not have to ask for hospitality—and they certainly wouldn’t accept it from someone with such a bad reputation. But Jesus turns the status quo on its head and invites himself over to Zacchaeus’ estate for dinner and rest. This is not the interaction anyone would have expected. So how would Zacchaeus respond? This is key. Jesus comes to him, sees him, and calls him out from life as he knows it. Zacchaeus climbs down immediately and eagerly welcomes Him. The people in the crowd were dumbstruck. *How and why would a respectable person enter into the home of a sinner and share a meal? Was Zacchaeus (who had probably exploited and extorted money from so many of them) really going to play host to this holy man? But Zacchaeus was changed. After choosing to welcome Jesus in, he was grateful. Rather than being polluted by association with sinners, Jesus’ gracious presence brought transformation and salvation to Zacchaeus. Out of a heart of thankfulness, Zacchaeus promises Jesus that he will use his considerable wealth to make right the wrongs he has committed. He goes beyond the expectation in his society for making restitution. Yet, it doesn’t say he gave all his wealth to the poor (see Luke 18:18-25). Still, Jesus assures this changed man, “Today salvation has come to this house.” And the passage ends with Jesus summing up the Gospel, “For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.”*

In one chance meeting, Jesus impacted Zacchaeus’ life for eternity. Jesus visited Zacchaeus’ house, and he ended up being welcomed into God’s house and family. Zacchaeus became a real-life example of the lost sheep that was found, the lost coin, and the lost son (See Luke 15:1-32). His story has implications for our lives today too. Take a few minutes to read Luke 19:1-10 and then reflect on the questions below.

– Nate Metler

- How are you like a “Zacchaeus”? Or maybe the murmuring crowd?
- How are you called to turn the status quo on its head in the way Jesus did here?
- Who are the “Zacchaeus” types in your lives?
- And finally, what change have you experienced in your heart and life from Jesus’ invitation?