

## ZACCHAEUS

Jesus has been travelling down from the north on His way up to Jerusalem. He met and healed the blind man on His way into Jericho, and now He is on His way out. The crowds following Him have increased and they are all trying to get a good view of Him. One man went to the trouble of climbing a tree and sitting there waiting for Jesus to pass by.

Was this a chance meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus? Was this man simply at the right place at the right time? ... No, this was a divinely-appointed meeting. It did not happen by 'chance' for Jesus went to Jericho to meet this man, as He explained to him, **Lk. 19:5** *to day I must abide at thy house.*

So, what did Zacchaeus have in his favour? He could climb trees, - he was fit, healthy and athletic. He had plenty of money, and a good house. He had a job with authority for he was *the chief among the [tax-collectors] (v.2)*. He worked for a system many other people would not have worked for. ... And he could not only get *up* the tree, but he could get down out of it *quickly* as well (v.6).

... And something else that is very significant, he was there because he wanted to see Jesus. Yes, he had his reasons for wanting to see Jesus, and none of them would have been spiritual, but at least he was there. ... You would not have wanted him as your best friend, neither would you have wanted to be seen talking to or being with him, and no matter how much money and wealth he had, you wouldn't have wanted your daughter to marry him ... but he was there ... within reach of Jesus, because of the grace of God.

Many wouldn't make much of an effort to find positive things to say about Zacchaeus, - ... and he *was* a rascal ... but he was a rascal whom Jesus came to save. ... Besides, how many of us weren't rascals, to some degree?! ... And yet, there is none so bad that God's grace cannot reach them, no matter where they are. They may be 'up a tree', 'hidden by the leaves and foliage', but when the Saviour comes, He always finds them.

Zacchaeus is up the tree alone. Now, you may say, that's because nobody liked him and nobody wanted to be anywhere near him ... Well, that's true, - nobody did like him. If they would have seen him on one side of the street, they would have walked over to the other side. They wouldn't have talked to him ... If they had been up the tree, and Zacchaeus climbed the same tree ... you could be very sure they would have got down and climbed another one!

He most definitely was not liked! He worked for the invaders, the Romans. He was a traitor, *conspiring* with the enemy. He would have been prancing about with them ... letting on he owned the place! ... He was 'getting away with' corrupting the system, - falsifying figures, 'fiddling the books', - and his bosses didn't care as long as they 'got their cut'. He benefitted while robbing his own people. He cared about none but himself! He overcharged the people in their taxes, and he kept the rest ... *Nobody liked him!* ... Not even his own kind, - his business partners wouldn't have liked him. He was *chief* among the tax-collectors ... that means he was the biggest rascal of them all. He was a rich, powerful, influential, immoral, unscrupulous crook!

... And even when you knew you were being 'done', there was nothing you could do about it! ... When you walked past his beautiful house, the money he 'diddled' you out of went to pay for it ... And he had *no* time for religion, - besides, they wouldn't have let him into the synagogue! But he didn't care. He only cared about himself and what he could swindle and cheat.

Luke makes the point, <sup>3</sup> *And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature* ... and that is why he was up the tree. ... He could not do anything about his height, so he climbed up into the tree to rectify the situation. He knew he was too small to see over the people but he didn't want to miss out on this famous Man from Galilee, a Man everybody was talking about. ... He had a real hankering to see Jesus but his personal circumstances obstructed him ... so he made up for it by climbing the tree.

But here is the good thing ... He was in the place where Jesus would see him. ... I don't suppose he would have thought of that, - why would Jesus notice *me*?! ... But out of all the people Jesus saw as He was heading out of Jericho ... and with all his thoughts about what lay in front of Him in Jerusalem, Jesus was there, - at that place, - to meet Zacchaeus.

So, <sup>1</sup> *Jesus entered and passed through Jericho* ... and Zacchaeus was up the tree looking down on Jesus. ... And I wonder what he was thinking ... Would he have been thinking, "This Man Jesus is nothing to me. He doesn't own a business. He's not turning out a profit from some great enterprise. ... There is nothing I could possibly want from Him. He doesn't have anything I would want. Besides, I have a business that's making me rich and He would not approve, but I don't care! We are at opposite ends of the scale ... I'm curious though, and I'll go and take a look!" ... I wonder if he was thinking along those kind of lines ... or possibly he was thinking like this, "My life is empty,

and it has no purpose. No matter what I've got, I've got nothing ... I've plenty of money but I'm a traitor to my people, to my ancestors, to my religion and to the God of my fathers because I have *sold* myself to the enemy. I am in a cesspool of iniquity." ... I wouldn't be surprised if such thoughts were going through his mind as he was perched up in that sycamore tree.

After all, he was in that tree to see Jesus, - he didn't have to be there ... but that is where he was. Give him *some* credit, - he made the effort to climb the tree to see Jesus. Zacchaeus could so easily have been somewhere else fiddling money out of people ... but he was there, within the reach and the sight of the Saviour. He could not see Jesus *for the press, because he was little of stature* so he worked out how he *could* see Jesus. ... Jesus would not have wanted to see him, - or at least, that is what he would have been telling himself. "I'm too much of a disgrace, - a sinner, - for there to be any hope for me. I'll climb up into this tree and I'll get a look at Him from a distance for I'm never likely to see Him again." ... I reckon some thoughts along those lines would have been going through his head, otherwise he would not have been there ... he would have been away somewhere else.

... But look at what he did, *4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.* ... He *sprinted* ahead of the crowd, and while they were all watching Jesus, he climbed up into the tree *to see Jesus* ... I don't suppose he was in the habit of climbing trees, but that is the extent he went to, to see Jesus.

It is not a silly question, but who planted the tree for Zacchaeus to climb? Who made it grow? *God* planted it and *He* made it grow, *Gen. 1:12 And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind* ... *God* planted the sycamore tree for Zacchaeus to climb ... Who put the branches in the right place so a wee fellow like Zacchaeus could climb? ... *God* did! ... It was *God* Who made the earth that the seed fell into so the tree would grow. *God* provided everything about the opportunity and the occasion for Zacchaeus to see Jesus. ... And Jesus *came to the place, he looked up, and saw him* ... Jesus knew Zacchaeus *would* be there and He also knew Zacchaeus *was* there for nothing can hide anyone from *God*. Not even the thickest leaves hid the wretched tax-collector, and the Saviour called him out of the tree ... *and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.* ... Zacchaeus, I'm going to your house today ... Isn't it interesting Jesus did not say, Zacchaeus, I'm going to your *home* today? ... No, where Zacchaeus lived was not a 'home', -

there was nothing warm and inviting about it ... It was just a house, - probably a nice house and the best in his street, - but it was cold and uninviting ... And yet, that was the house Jesus, - on his way out of Jericho, - invited Himself to.

... And something else ... Jesus did not climb the tree to get to Zacchaeus ... Instead, He called Zacchaeus *out* of the tree! And down he came, - he hadn't to be told twice ... such was the irresistible call of the Saviour that he could not reject it. ... Zacchaeus *came* to Jesus ... And also notice how the Lord used Zacchaeus' athletic ability ... **4** And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him ... **6** And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. ... He was in a hurry to get up the tree to see Jesus, but he was in an even greater hurry to get down the tree to be with the Saviour, and to bring Him to his house.

And then, inevitably, there were the murmurers. No doubt they were muttering about Zacchaeus ... and how bad a man he was ... but they were using the situation to particularly mutter about Jesus, **7** And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. ... Religion is like that. If you don't measure up, it will 'put you down' ... and Zacchaeus wasn't the type the Pharisees and the religious people would have been interested in.

But Jesus, on the other hand, that was why He came to Jericho, **Lk. 19:10** For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. ... And do you know what the name 'Zacchaeus' means? ... You would never guess! ... 'Zacchaeus' means 'pure', 'honest', 'righteous' ... His mother and father's expectations for him had drastically failed for his name means the very opposite of everything he became! And yet Jesus could see past the sinner to what he would become for He reached into the heart of this *wretch* and saved him by His grace.

There was not even the faintest 'whiff' of purity or honesty or righteousness about Zacchaeus, - nothing even remotely resembling it, - and yet, the Lord stopped and stood at the foot of the tree ... and he called Zacchaeus *down* from the tree and saved him! Jesus did the work that made a filthy sinner, a wretched rascal, a dishonest crook ... into a trophy of God's saving grace.

And Zacchaeus' life changed, - that is what happens to every person Jesus saves, for they become **II Cor. 5:17** ... a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. ... Zacchaeus knew he had been doing

everything wrong ... he knew it but he kept on doing it until the grace of God *arrested* his heart! And his life was changed, and the proof of the change was demonstrated immediately in his commitment to Jesus, **8** *And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. ... I'm leaving my old life behind and I'm starting afresh with You. To use the language Jesus used with Nicodemus, Zacchaeus was 'born again' ... and Jesus became his Lord and Master.*

Aren't you glad you are saved? Aren't you glad Jesus found you when He did? You might have been rustling up in the branches, and you didn't think He saw you ... But when you heard Him call, you had to get yourself down out of that tree for Jesus went to where you were and He found you. ... Over two thousand years ago, He came into this world to die on the cross of Calvary for you, and He rose again. He is in glory now, waiting for you and preparing a place for you.

Zacchaeus, - the name which means 'pure', 'honest', 'righteous', - today *is* 'pure', 'honest', 'righteous', - and that is because the Lord saved him! ... Maybe *you* are not saved ... but you are *interested*. In some ways, you are 'up in the tree' because you are not sure if Jesus would want you or not. Well, I can assure you He does want you because it is for people like you and me He came into this world. If you hear Him calling, 'climb down' without hesitation, - and receive Him as your Saviour and acknowledge Him as Zacchaeus did ... as your *Lord* (v.8).

... This is the beautiful account of God's saving grace in transforming a sinner into a saint ... **Rom. 5:8** *God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ... The moral and the immoral, the religious and the irreligious, the good people and the bad ... He makes no difference, Lk. 19:10* *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost ... Whether they are 'hiding up in the trees' or under the mask of religion, it doesn't matter because neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).*

May the Lord direct the preaching of the Gospel, for His Name's sake! Amen.