

Zacchaeus Meets Christ

(Luke 19:1-10)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Have you ever been to a parade in which a very important person, such as an Olympic gold medalist or an astronaut or maybe even the President, was going to appear? What was it like? (Noisy, crowded.) Do you remember how much you wanted to see, how hard you struggled to find just the right place to stand? Perhaps others wouldn't let you in. If they didn't, you'll understand just how Zacchaeus felt.

Opening Prayer

Father, give us the ability to listen with our hearts this morning as we learn from Your word. We want to thank You that we have Your word that shows us the way we should live our lives. We never want to lose sight of what a great and awesome privilege we have to be able to study Your word. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

Lesson

A man named Zacchaeus lived in the city of Jericho. He was a tax collector. Zacchaeus didn't contribute anything to his fellow Jews who were oppressed by the Roman government. Instead, he worked for the Romans, taking tax money from the Jews! Zacchaeus was a sell-out.

Tax collectors were Jewish people who had agreed to work for the hated Romans by collecting money from the Jewish people to give to the Romans. To make matters worse, anything the tax collectors charged above the set tax amount, they got to keep for themselves as payment for their services. Most tax collectors collected far more than what was fair from their fellow Jewish citizens. The Jewish people

thought tax collectors were robbers and traitors! Zacchaeus probably did not have many friends. He was probably a very lonely guy.

Luke 19:1-2

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. (2) There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich.

Zacchaeus was not just *any* tax collector, he was the *chief* tax collector. And, he was probably rich enough to buy just about anything he wanted. Yet, he knew he wanted something that money couldn't buy.

One day Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was coming to Jericho and he was excited to see the famous Miracle Worker in person!

Luke 19:3

He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd.

People were everywhere, all scrambling for a good spot to see Jesus as He came in through the city gates into Jericho. Poor Zacchaeus, he was too short to see over the heads of all the people.

Being too short to see wasn't Zacchaeus' only problem. If people had liked Zacchaeus, they could have made room for him. But, the Jews saw Zacchaeus as an awful sinner — someone who had grown rich by cheating his own people.

We are all born with a "want to" to do wrong, just like Zacchaeus. Our sin separates us from God and it spoils our relationships with others. That is what had happened to Zacchaeus. And Zacchaeus was desperate to see Jesus.

Luke 19:4

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. And to Zacchaeus's amazement, Jesus also wanted to see him!

Luke 19:5

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."

As He passed, Jesus purposely looked right at Zacchaeus and spoke kindly to him. Jesus is God the Son. He knows everything. He knew Zacchaeus' name. He knew that Zacchaeus was a sinful tax collector. He also knew that Zacchaeus was suffering because he was doing wrong and because others disliked him. Zacchaeus may have thought that even God disliked him. But Jesus loved him no matter what he had done.

Others may not want to be your friend because of bad things you've done. But, Jesus loves you no matter what you have done or what other people think of you.

God knows all about you (Psalm 139:1-3) because He made you (Psalm 139:14-16), and yet He loves you. The Lord Jesus knew and loved Zacchaeus and wanted Zacchaeus to know Him, too. That's why he stopped and spoke to him.

By saying that He wanted to spend time at Zacchaeus' home, Jesus let everyone know that He accepted Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus, a man no one wanted to be around, was selected to host the most popular man in town! The people of the town were shocked! Didn't Jesus know about this man? Didn't He know what an awful sinner Zacchaeus was? Zacchaeus must have been amazed, too!

Luke 19:6

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy.

Zacchaeus might have been surprised, but he was obviously very pleased because he jumped down from the tree with joy.

Luke 19:7

But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

The people grumbled because Jesus was being a friend to a man they viewed as a terrible sinner. No decent person would want to be caught talking with a tax collector, let alone be found in his house. The people had no time or concern for Zacchaeus, but Jesus did. Jesus saw Zacchaeus as a person of value, as someone who could be changed completely once he received God's forgiveness. It didn't matter to the Lord what Zacchaeus had done or what other people thought of him. Jesus reached out in love to Zacchaeus and He is reaching out to you, too. He wants to save you no matter what you have done wrong, no matter what others think of you. And He wanted to save Zacchaeus.

Luke 19:8

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

Zacchaeus was so grateful for Jesus' forgiveness that he wanted to repair the damage his sins had caused. Zacchaeus promised half of his possessions to the poor. He promised to make things right with anyone from whom he had stolen by paying back four times the amount.

Luke 19:9-10

Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. (10) For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

Zacchaeus was saved by his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in spite of his sin and the rejection of the people. The Lord assured Zacchaeus (and all who were listening) that because Zacchaeus had truly repented (turned from his sin) he had been saved.

After Jesus' visit, Zacchaeus was a changed man. He loved Jesus with all his heart. Zacchaeus showed that his salvation was real. He paid back what he had stolen. His actions proved that Jesus had changed him.

Even great Bible heroes sinned. When we sin, we can either run away from God (like the rich young ruler did) or we can turn around and repent (like Zacchaeus did). Repenting means we admit our mistake, say we're sorry, and ask God to help us change. When we repent, God forgives us and makes us clean.

What are some ways we can make up for our wrong doings? How might you show by your actions that you are God's child? [Teacher, help the children discover things like apologize to someone offended; or, do something nice for another person; or, fixing or replacing something that was broken or lost; or, paying back money or objects that were stolen.] When you and I do something mean to someone, we should remember Zacchaeus. Whether it is taking something that does not belong to us, or saying words we should not say, or doing something to hurt others, we can say, "*I'm sorry*" to the person we have hurt and make it right. The other person will be glad we did. And so will Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Father, when we are naughty and make wrong choices and sin, we always want to show that we are your children by our actions. Help us, Lord, not to be prideful, but always humble. Help us to admit our sins and to make things right with the person we sin against. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

"Bowling" Game: Give each student an index card and a pencil. Have each one write a brief description of a situation in which kids their age need to make wrong actions right. (For Example, "*I lied to Dad about where I was going after school.*") Tape an index card onto each of six empty plastic soda bottles, water bottles or toy plastic bowling pins. Using a rubber ball, have the students line up behind a line. Each player gets two tries to knock a pin over. Lead student to discuss a way to make the situation right. Replace each card after it has been discussed. Continue the game until each student has a turn.

Or, use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. Where did Zacchaeus live? (Jericho.)
2. What did Zacchaeus do for a living? (He was a tax collector.)
3. Why didn't the Jews like tax collectors? (They cheated; they took more money than was rightfully owed.)
4. What did Zacchaeus do to get a good look at Jesus? (He climbed up a tree.)
5. What did Jesus do when He came to the place where Zacchaeus was up in a tree? (He looked up, saw him, and said, "*Come down, I'm going to stay at your house.*")
6. How did the people react to Jesus going over to Zacchaeus' house to stay? (They grumbled because Jesus was being a friend to a man they viewed as a terrible sinner.)

7. How did Zacchaeus show that his salvation was real? (He paid back what he had stolen.)
8. Have you ever been wronged? What happened? What would have made the situation right or at least better?
9. What are some ways we can make up for our wrong doings? (Apologize to someone; do nice things for someone we've offended; return stolen things.)
10. What might keep someone from feeling like he or she wants to say, "*I'm sorry*" for a wrong they've done? (Pride, selfishness, fear, not wanting to admit they've done wrong.)
11. How should you respond when someone doesn't forgive you or want to be your friend? (Talk to God about our feelings. Ask parents or teachers for advice.)
12. If you have done something wrong to someone recently, how might you make the situation right again? (Say, "*I'm sorry*" to the person we have hurt and make it right.)