

## The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

### *Zacchaeus – Little, Lost and Loved*

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Luke 19.1-10

*He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> And there was a man called by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. <sup>3</sup> Zacchaeus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." <sup>6</sup> And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. <sup>7</sup> When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup> Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." <sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

Each week over the last ten weeks we've looked at one or more of the characters in the Story of Jesus Christ. For the last four weeks we've seen people who are very obviously in NEED and come looking for help ("the suppliants" as the scholars call them).

Today, we meet a cast member who comes and goes very quickly (10 verses). He is NOT obviously in need and in fact many people would envy him. He is by ancient standards (especially considering how brief the passage) he is thoroughly described. There are things about him that you'd NOTICE and also things you might NOT notice on first glance...

He doesn't come with a need like the suppliants... his only need/want is to see this Person everyone's talking about and to know who this Jesus of Nazareth really is...he's on a kind of quest.

In the few verses where we MEET this man...a lot is communicated about the Main Character of the whole story. We learn something very valuable about the MISSION OF Jesus Christ...and we have to ask ourselves whether we have understood that mission and whether we've JOINED HIM IN IT...have we received or accepted the MISSION and do we

have any sense of satisfaction or pleasure IN this task, in the mission or approach to life that Jesus Christ said was HIS OWN PURPOSE FOR COMING?

Let's #1 – Look, #2 – Listen and #3 - Receive

When we LOOK at this scene...we're DOING what the writer wants us to do. In only a few short verses, Luke the Physician...a man of science, an observer, Luke the writer USES "LOOK" WORDS in almost every verse. It's a passage about what we see and don't see in our everyday lives. Just doing the math, we have to conclude that this passage is about looking, seeing, beholding... It's about a way of perceiving reality: Jesus Christ is enabling a new way of seeing people and seeing life and looking at everything in a new way.

We SEE in the setting, that Jesus Christ is passing through the last stop town of Jericho en route to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, He will be hailed as a hero at first and then betrayed and will lay down His life as a ransom – He's reaching His goal. There are people all around Him as He passes through and readers have to SEE the scene.

When we get our first LOOK at today's character he's described in detail – v.2. Luke gives us FOUR telling facts. FIRST, his name is Zacchaeus...maybe a diminutive form of Zacharias (like Bill is to William or Cindy to Cynthia). Second, he's in charge – he's a "chief" or manager or supervisor (has power over others). Third, he's a toll-collector – he collected taxes for the Roman government. It was a lucrative job and one that was like a franchise...hard to get, a business a man might pass on to his son. Fourth, it was indeed lucrative for this family because our man, Zacchaeus, was "rich".

And rich people...you know...have it easy...are often envied... We all want to BE rich... because that would fix all our problems (Right?)... Except, that on second glance, when YOU LOOK at Zacchaeus, you see some other deeper things at play here.

He was seeking to see this celebrity passing through his town ("I love a parade")... but the crowd would NOT allow it. If he had power as a Chief tax-gatherer, that did NOT impress the crowd and they "boxed him out of the paint" (as they say in basketball – March Madness). The crowd was actively preventing the man from seeing and this may have been because the crowd had NO LOVE for tax collectors. They perceived these guys as traitors and collaborators with the enemy. Rome allowed them to set their own surcharge and many of them took advantage of that license and IT APPEARS THAT ZACCHEUS had done that – had defrauded people...his own countrymen! It was well-known.

And add to that second glance, the fact that he was LITTLE. He may have been YOUNG (that's what the word means elsewhere in the NT) and if young and rich and powerful and a

little crooked...people would have despised him. OR it COULD (as the context suggests) mean that he was just...short...couldn't see over people's heads...and deliberately elbowed out.

AND when we take a THIRD look...we see that he had maybe heard a lot ABOUT this Jesus of Nazareth but now had opportunity to see/look/observe this Rabbi and he is on a quest to "SEE who Jesus WAS" (v.3). It's more than a celebrity and a parade...Zacchaeus wants to conclude something...wants to know this Person's identity... It's a QUEST...not just a curiosity.

And so, scampering up the road...climbing like a squirrel into a tree (nothing worse than a powerful rich man acting like a clown...looks silly!) ...but Jesus Christ doesn't think so... He seems to appreciate the man's ingenuity and desire...sees the quest of this friendless man...a man who's shunned but who REALLY WANTS TO SEE...to have a fresh perspective.

So Jesus LOOKED (there's that word) LOOKED up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down" (Isn't that just what Jesus Christ says to everyone?! To you and to ME... "Hurry and come DOWN!" Like The Price is Right!) Jesus appears to be looking for the man.

And now we move from LOOK to LISTEN. Hear what Jesus Christ says, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down for TODAY I MUST (v.5) stay at your house." (Who ME?)

"THIS IS THE DAY THE LORD HAS MADE and this is why I have come – it's why I MUST stay at your house...because to stay with someone like YOU would epitomize the reason I have come. I MUST! It's the fitting thing for Me to do – TODAY is the Day of Salvation (that's how Luke often uses the word, "today").

And Zacchaeus LISTENS and becomes HAPPY! (6) "And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly."

Now, if you were there on that fateful DAY, and if you were really LISTENING you might also hear another noise. It was the sound like growling...a deep bass-note...and it's coming from... "THEM"... "they all began to grumble, saying, 'He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'"

And the next thing that can be heard (if you're listening) is Zacchaeus saying, "But that's gonna change RIGHT NOW...TODAY!...I'm gonna return any stolen stuff...any excessive surcharges with interest... and I'm gonna give half my stuff to the POOR!"

And LISTENING further, you'll hear Jesus Christ defend the man... Jesus hears the regret and sorrow in the man's voice and the JOY of the Kingdom that He's heard from many other repentant mouths. And standing up for this "Wee Little Man", Jesus says out loud, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham." (And THEN...)

"They" (you know "they" – they say vaccines cause autism...they say a picture is worth a thousand words) but THEY only saw on the surface and didn't see or hear what was really happening. Salvation came to the House of Zacchaeus and the repentant sinner turned out to BE a son of Abraham...a person who really believed in the promises of God...

And then, after defending this son of Abraham, you can hear Jesus Christ defending His own mission and His own reason for coming. He defends it first by a proverb, then by a parable.

The proverb, if you're listening, says, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." See, Zacchaeus THOUGHT he was seeking Jesus but it was really Jesus seeking HIM. The man was little and lost but turned out to be LOVED and sought and saved...and validated and defended. "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save..." It's His whole Mission put into a single saying, a proverb.

And THEN He defends His mission in a parable... the next whole section...about a Great Landowner who prepares to go a long trip but first leaves His possessions in the care of His servants. When he returns from the trip, the servants show what they made by using the money/capital entrusted to them.

And then we come to the last servant who says 'Master, behold your money, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow.' (20-21)

And, I think the reason Jesus Christ tells this parable right after defending Zacchaeus and after this proverb is to say, "Look! You're so afraid that God is this horrible OGRE, this stingy, mean projection of your own selves...that YOU have hidden His grace and mercy in the ground...You stay clear of bad people like Zacchaeus because you think you may get corrupted and God will punish you because God loves to punish...but I'm here to show you God: My Father loves to show mercy... And to show how serious His love of mercy is, I'm going NOW into Jerusalem, riding a donkey...and I'll take the blame for the sins of MY PEOPLE...so that God, My Father, can be JUST and the JUSTIFIER of everyone who trusts in ME – He is not the fiend and tyrant that YOU ARE... quit being afraid you'll be punished and start investing His MERCY in people... TODAY!

Now, LOOKING at this scene...and LISTENING to what's happening...let's end by RECEIVING it

personally. IF we get this, welcome this teaching and gladly embrace this News...what will happen to us?

Well, first we'll see ourselves as sinners, like the Wee Little Man in the Tree. We'll see our own clownish silliness and come down with our hands up and we'll come to Him who has come for US.

And when WE do...to the degree that we live in His pardon and trust that HE has sought us and defended us and forgives us and brings salvation to us...to that degree we will know a NEW kind of freedom to live in un-self-conscious, self-forgetful joy and obedience. It'll be different from just doing the exact requirements of the Rules or the Law or Commandments – that's the significance of these outrageous numbers, "Lord, half of my possessions I'll give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much..." (way beyond the Law- Lev 5.16 et al)

That's not a negotiation – it's a LIBERATION. This little, lost man feels loved and feels safe and what used to matter...no longer matters... He's able to give it away with joy and abandon.

You may be thinking – I don't know if I can make the sacrifices I've seen Christian people make – but it's no real sacrifice at all – it's a liberation...it's Jesus Christ taking His place in the heart and setting it free to obey with self-forgetful uncalculated joy and spontaneous love...we move from being slaves to being sons... and that's a very different lifestyle.

Second, we learn to empathize with people and not judge by the first glance. We can associate with people who "look" like notorious sinners and maybe ARE notorious sinners... because Jesus Christ is seeking and saving that type. And we want to join in with His mission. We can not hide God's greatest resource...we can not play it safe because we fear He'll whack us, if we mess up because He's a big grouch... What really angers God is PROJECTING OUR STINGINESS ON TO HIM and thereby hoarding and hiding His grace... He wants to be famous for MERCY!

Third, mercy begets mercy. When you see yourself for the big sinner that you are...and you learn that Jesus Christ has your number and that He is seeking you...and when salvation and mercy comes to YOUR house...stuff happens! You'll start to think about poor people and making sizeable investments in them (BTW, you can start by helping with these Easter Food Baskets and many other opportunities here at St. Andrews to extend MERCY). Go with the impulse...when YOU receive MERCY you want to give it...it makes you glad.

Last, "they" did not help poor ol' rich Zacchaeus... the crowd hindered him... But the tree

helped him.

You know the sycamore fig tree was a symbol for the church (Israel) that's why Jesus Christ cursed it because it was barren. What if WE as a church saw it as OUR Mission...in conjunction with the Mission of Jesus Christ...what if we saw ourselves as a place where people could come to get a NEW PERSPECTIVE... could count on us to give them a clearer view of Jesus... Like Zacchaeus got from the Tree.

What if we could be LESS like the crowds, "they grumbled"... they judged and made it difficult for this man who NEEDED GRACE...they made it harder... but what if WE could help people like Zacchaeus "see who Jesus was"... That HE is the One who paid it all...who paid MY DEBT and raised this life up from the dead... wouldn't that BE good? Wouldn't that be the right way to invest our Master's greatest resource, His darling attribute – MERCY?

I don't know what the modern South Florida equivalent to Zacchaeus IS...a young, powerful, rich, JERK (whom many despise) who has used and abused people...but who somehow deep within... longs for MERCY and salvation and to be loved and defended and liberated for a new life... I'm not sure who today's Zacchaeus IS...but may God help us...find these people... and JOIN THE SON OF MAN who has come to seek and save that which was lost.