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# A Small Man's Encounter

**LUKE 19:1-10**

## Introduction

1. All of us at one time or another have heard the Bible song about a "wee" man known as Zacchaeus.

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man  
And a wee little man was he.  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree,  
For the Lord he wanted to see . . .*

2. Many of us have these words indelibly imprinted upon our minds.
3. The story of Zacchaeus and his encounter with Jesus is important for two reasons:
  - a. In Luke's account of Jesus' life it is the last personal encounter He has before His arrival in Jerusalem and the events leading up to His death.
  - b. It reveals to us what Jesus is all about.
4. This morning, as we look at this "wee little man" from Jericho, I hope to share with you something which you might not have noticed before in this important encounter.

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## I. Zacchaeus the Man

### A. A CHIEF TAX COLLECTOR

"And there was a man called by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich." (Luke 19:2, NASB95)

1. In Jesus' day, taxes were collected at three regional locations within the

land of Israel:

- a. Capernaum in the north.
  - b. Jerusalem and Jericho in the south.
2. The taxes collected in Jericho came from those crossing the Jordan River on their way to Jerusalem and from the great palm forests and balsam groves in plain.
  3. As chief tax collector, Zacchaeus oversaw the taxes collected by those collectors under him.
  4. These collectors paid him and he, in turn, paid the Romans.
  5. As we learned from our study of Jesus' parable concerning the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-17), tax collectors were considered religious and political traitors, as well as extortioners.

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#### **B. A WEALTHY MAN**

“And there was a man called by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich.” (Luke 19:2, NASB95)

1. Because Zacchaeus was over the various tax collectors who dealt directly with the people, he received a larger share from the taxes collected before sending the monies on to Rome.
2. The result over the years was that Zacchaeus had become very wealthy.
3. No doubt, his was among the nicest homes, if not estates in town.

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#### **C. A PERSON SMALL IN STATURE**

“... he was small in stature” (Luke 19:3).

1. We are not told how tall Zacchaeus.
2. Evidently, he wasn't tall enough to see over the crowd.
3. Many of us can probably remember a time when our fathers put us on their shoulders so that we could see.

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## **II. Zacchaeus Meets Jesus**

### **A. ZACCHAEUS WAS "TRYING TO SEE WHO JESUS WAS"**

"Zacchaeus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature" (Luke 19:3).

1. No one would ever have guessed that Zacchaeus would have wanted to see Jesus.
2. However, Luke tells us that he "was trying to see who Jesus was" (v. 3). Why?
3. Perhaps he had heard that Levi the tax collector (Matthew) was now one of Jesus' disciple (Luke 5:27-32).
4. Perhaps he had also heard that Jesus was considered to be a friend of various tax collectors (Luke 7:34) and had even eaten meals in some of their homes.
5. Perhaps someone had told him that "all the tax collectors . . . were come near Him to listen to Him" (Luke 15:1).
6. It may also be that Zacchaeus the wealth he had accumulated and the lifestyle that accompanied it no longer satisfied him.
7. It might even be that the constant hatred and criticism which Zaccheus experienced at the hands of the people had left him feeling desolate and alone.
8. One thing was certain, Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, and he was determined to do whatever was necessary to make that happen.

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### **B. HE SOUGHT OUT A BETTER VANTAGE POINT**

"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" (Luke 19:4, NASB95).

1. Because of the crowd and the fact that he was short, Zaccheus needed to

find a place where he could get a view of Jesus.

2. So, in order to see Jesus, Zacchaeus did two things which rich, powerful men did not do.
  - a. He ran.
    - 1) Even today, "Middle Eastern adults do not run in public if they wish to avoid public shame"
    - 2) However, it was the only way for him to get far enough ahead of the crowd to access a vantage point.
  - b. He climbed a tree.
    - 1) Powerful, rich men do not climb trees at public parades anywhere in the world!
    - 2) Would you expect one of our elected officials (mayor, county executive, representative, governor) to climb a tree on Main Street in order to see someone coming down the street in a parade?
    - 3) Zacchaeus climbed up into a sycamore tree, a *ficus sycomorus*:
      - a) These were sturdy trees which grew to some 40 feet in height.
      - b) These trees were known for their short trunks, wide branches, and large leaves.
      - c) They were very easy to climb and would allow Zacchaeus to keep from being seen.
3. In your mind's eye you can probably see this small, wealthy man, up in this sycamore tree, sitting alone, in hope of seeing Jesus.
4. Of course, he didn't intend for anyone to see him there — he was, after all, a dignified man.
5. Perhaps, in his mind, Zacchaeus planned to see Jesus as He passed by without anyone in the crowd noticing him.
6. Then after the crowd had passed, he would slip down and go about his business.

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### C. JESUS CALLED ZACCHAEUS TO COME DOWN

“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.” And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly.” (Luke 19:5, NASB95)

1. However, instead of Jesus and the crowd passing by, He stopped under the tree in which Zacchaeus was hid.
2. To make matters worse, Jesus looked straight up at him in the tree — there was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, everyone could see him.
3. It was what Jesus said to him that made all the difference — “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” (Luke 19:5)
  - a. Jesus didn't say, “I would like to stay at your house’, but *I must stay*.
  - b. Jesus saw His visit to Zacchaeus as part of His divine mission.

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## III. On The Way To Zacchaeus' House

### A. THE CROWD GRUMBLED

“When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”” (Luke 19:7, NASB95)

1. The people are offended by Jesus' intention to stay with Zacchaeus.
2. While they like His miracles, they do not care for His choices as to whom He will associate.
3. Early in Jesus' ministry, after His call of Levi, another tax collector, that the Pharisees and scribes grumbled at His disciples, and said, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (Luke 5:30).
4. Jesus response to them at the time was, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:31-32).

5. It also the Pharisees and scribes who, not long before this, grumbled because “the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him”, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2).
5. The truth is that the crowd had learned little from observing Jesus’ ministry.

**Slide 9****B. ZACCHAEUS’ DEFENSE**

“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.”” (Luke 19:8, NASB95)

“And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”” (Luke 19:8, ESV)

“Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”” (Luke 19:8, NKJV)

1. No doubt, Zachaeus heard the crowd’s complaints and they hurt him deeply..
2. He was “being called a sinner for no other reason than the mere fact of his occupation.”
3. He immediately stopped and said to Jesus in front of everyone, “Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.” (Luke 19:8, NKJV)
  - a. Zachaeus, as a chief tax collector, was in a position that caused people to despise and shun him.
  - b. Israel was under Roman occupation and Rome required that taxes be paid.
  - c. It is true that there where tax collectors who used their position and

authority as a opportunity to defraud their fellow Jews.

- d. However, I believe that Zachaeus was one of the few who worked hard to be fair and honest in his responsibilities.
3. Do you remember the rich young ruler in the middle of Luke 18 who came to Jesus and asked Him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life (v. 18).
4. Jesus had initially told him to keep five of the ten commandments which have to do with the way we treat each other.
5. When the rich young ruler told Jesus that he had been keeping these since he was a young man, Jesus then told him to go and sell all that he possessed and distribute it to the poor (Luke 18:22).
6. Jesus added “you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Luke 18:22b).
7. This is what Zacchaeus is doing:
  - a. He is giving half of his possessions to the poor.
  - b. Out of the remaining 50 percent, he is repaying anyone from whom he has accidently collected too much, four times the amount taken from them.
  - c. This was far above and beyond what the Law required, which was to return what was taken and add 20% to it (Leviticus 6:5).
  - d. Zacchaeus is returning what had been wrongfully taken and adding 300% to it!
8. In the days of John the Baptist, some tax collectors had come to him asking what they should do.
9. He told them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to” (Luke 3:13).
10. I suggest to you that Zacchaeus may have been one of those men.

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### C. JESUS' DECLARATION

“And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.”” (Luke 19:9, NASB95)

1. Almost 700 years before Zacchaeus saw Jesus, the prophet Isaiah had declared, “all flesh will see the salvation of God” (Isaiah 40:5).
2. John the Baptist had repeated these words in his preaching (Luke 3:6).
3. On this day, a “wee little man” saw that salvation with his own eyes.
4. This “son of Abraham” was a Jew not only outwardly, but inwardly as well, one whose heart had been circumcised and who sought his praise not from men, but from God (Romans 2:8).
5. I suggest to you that he not only loved God with all of his heart, soul and mind, but also loved his neighbor as himself (Matthew 22:37,39).

## Conclusion

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1. Please take a moment and focus upon this last verse in our text:

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.””

(Luke 19:10, NASB95)

2. It was imperative on that day, long ago, that Jesus go to the home of Zacchaeus.
3. Even today, through the proclamation of His word, Jesus continues “to seek and to save” those who are lost.
4. Are you lost? Would you like to come home?
5. Jesus invites you to come.