

*Zacchaeus was a very little man,
and a very little man was he.
He climbed to the top of a Sycamore tree,
for the Saviour he wanted to see....*

I've been trying to figure out, why the story of Zacchaeus is so well known. And I came to the conclusion, it's probably because kids like climbing trees.

When I was a kid, we had a large Pepperina tree, growing beside the chook pen. And my brother and I, we just about lived up in that tree. It was a really good tree for climbing. All you had to do, was stand on a 20litre drum, and that would get you to the first branch, and then you could go up; and up; and up; and out... I don't think either of us ever fell, but it would've hurt if we did.

Do kids climb trees much anymore? There's probably an app for that...

But I reckon that's probably why the story of Zacchaeus was always a Sunday School favourite. We kids, we knew about climbing trees, and look!: Somebody in the Bible's doing it.

And we could imagine that we were there – we could imagine it was us (outsmarting the crowds who wouldn't let us in). We wanted to **be** the one who climbed the tree.

We wanted to be the ones, that Jesus would stop under our tree, and that He would look up, and Jesus would notice us...
“I'm going to stay at your place tonight, you excellent tree-climber, you...”...

How cool would that be, hey??? – to be noticed by Jesus...

And that's, sorta what this story is about: **the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

Zacchaeus, was spiritually lost. He was a sinner – a known sinner. And it comes across in the story that he most probably had a history of dishonesty: cheating/defrauding people out of their money...

Not that he needed it...

I mean, his position, earned him all the money he needed. Being a tax-collector, was a very well-paid job. It had to be. (Nobody would have done it, if it wasn't). The Romans were very generous to any local who were willing, to be hated by their community, while they collected taxes for Ceaser...

But, let's take this one step further: Zacchaeus wasn't merely a tax-collector – he was a "**chief tax-collector**". Now, we don't know exactly what that means. Maybe he was the principle-contractor and he had a bunch of other tax-collectors subbying out under him, and he got a cut from each of them... Or maybe he was a tax-collector responsible for collecting from the big tax-paying accounts... We don't know, but what we **do** know, was he wasn't just a tax-collector – he was a "chief tax-collector", and he was rich...

But, on top of his pay, it was quite common for tax-collectors to mis-use their position of **authority**. They would collect more than they were supposed to, and they'd shove the extra

in their own pocket... And we get a hint that Zacchaeus may have been doing just that, because when he repented, part of his repentance, was restitution: ...if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

So, here's Zacchaeus: a sinner, and not only that – he was a "social outcast". (Nobody liked tax collectors).

That's probably why nobody let him through to see Jesus... Why would they put themselves out, for somebody like him?

But that didn't stop him. He knew the direction Jesus was headed, so he ran on ahead, and climbed a sycamore tree.

And when Jesus got there, He looked up, and He said:
"Zacchaeus (BTW, we don't know how He knew Zacchaeus' name), hurry,,, and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

And Zacchaeus quickly descended from his perch and received [Jesus] joyfully.

Good story hey. But it doesn't end there. Jesus staying with a stinkin' tax collector really got-up-the-nose of pretty-much everyone there.

V⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled
Who's "they"? It's the crowd – the whole crowd who had been lining the streets, unwilling to open a gap for shorty Zacc

to get a look-in... when they saw [Jesus reaching out to Zacchaeus], they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

And you know what? They was absolutely correct – they did not mis-read the situation. Jesus **did** go to be a guest of a man who was a sinner...

Did you notice Jesus said: **I must stay at your house today.**

We're catching a glimpse of the lengths that Jesus will go to, to save the lost. He was **compelled** to stay with Zacchaeus for the night.

And this is what God does: To seek and save the lost, He **compels us** – He compels Christians, to connect with the outcasts and to rub shoulders, with some of the most **unliked** and despised individuals, around...

Why? What's the purpose?

- To love them.
- To fellowship with them;
- And to take Jesus to them...

Now, that might be the last thing we feel like doing... , "*Oh no, God, it can't be **me** that you want to connect with this person... I mean, they're nothing like me – we have nothing in common.*"

How much do you think Jesus had in common with Zacchaeus?

It is the compulsion of God, to:

- to embrace the outcast;
- love the unlovable;
- socialise with the one that is **despised** by society.

God compels **us**, to seek and save the Lost.

But don't be surprised when we get criticised for doing it. They criticised Jesus... they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

Yes, Zacchaeus was a sinner.... – A sinner, who found salvation.

How?

How was Zacchaeus saved through this encounter with Jesus?

Three things:

1. He received Jesus;
2. he had genuine repentance of his sin; and
3. faith.

1.

To "receive" a person, means to welcome them in – to welcome them into your home. But, there is something more at play here. Zacchaeus didn't only welcome Jesus into his home. Something spiritual took place. He welcomed Jesus into his life. .. He received Jesus.

2. Secondly, Repentance.

Something I immediately noticed, is the repentance of Zacchaeus, is in stark contrast to the response of the Rich Ruler (and his **lack** of repentance) only half a chapter earlier.

Do you remember the Rich Ruler? (It was only 2 weeks ago). And this is why it's really important when we study God's word, to follow it through. There is a continuing story unfolding. And if we only look at isolated bits and pieces of the Bible, we're going to miss the continuing story. – We're going to miss the significance of the contrasts.

So, a couple of weeks ago, The Rich Ruler asked Jesus, "What must I do to be saved?"

And Jesus said, ²⁰ **You know the commandments:**

- **'Do not commit adultery,**
- **Do not murder,**
- **Do not steal,**
- **Do not bear false witness,**
- **Honour your father and mother.'** "

And old mate goes, "Yeah, I've done all that, since I was a little fella."

And Jesus said: **"One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."**

And when he heard that, he was very sad, because he **was extremely rich**.

You see, the Rich Ruler, was ticking off items of “The Law” – what he considered the “dos” and “don’ts” of God’s Law... But even in the Old Testament, it wasn’t only about the “dos” and “don’ts”. “Godly Living”, is much more than written rules – It’s a matter of the heart – a heart submitted to God. And the outworking of a heart committed to God, can be seen in our actions. It will be a heart of compassion and mercy toward others. ...

Proverbs 14:21 (ESV)

²¹ Whoever despises his neighbour is a sinner,
but blessed is he who is generous to the poor.

Psalms 41:1 (ESV)

¹ Blessed is the one who considers the poor!
In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him;

The rich ruler had far more than he needed, but he didn’t consider the poor... And when Jesus challenged him to do that, “No... That’s mine....”

And Jesus then said, “It’s really hard for a person who has wealth, to enter the Kingdom of God.” (Do you remember this stuff? It was pretty cutting, wasn’t it.)...

He said: “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

And the Disciples said, “But that’s impossible”.

Yeah. It is impossible. “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Alright, the Rich Ruler, he wanted to hold on to his wealth... There was no heart of repentance in him.

And now, only half a chapter later, we meet Zacchaeus (who is also rich)... And Zacchaeus becomes that miracle of God. Yes, it is “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

And yet Salvation came to Zacchaeus. God did the impossible. A sinful, rich man named Zacchaeus, did something that was **more** impossible than a camel, going through the eye of a needle... He repented of his sin/greed/dishonest dealings,, and he received Jesus.

Repentance is a very practical thing. We talked about this two weeks ago, too.

Right at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, John the Baptist is preaching a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, And he tells the people, “Bear fruit in **keeping** with repentance”. And they said, “What then, shall we do?”

And John the Baptist said, **Luke 3:11 (ESV)**

11, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."

And this is exactly the act of repentance that Zacchaeus did (without being told).

- He made a commitment to Jesus, to give half of everything he owned, to the poor;
- **And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.**

Repentance has these two distinct aspects to it.

Firstly, it is a genuine sorrow, for the wrong that we have done. And because we're sorry for what we've done, we face up to the consequences of our sin. That's why Zacchaeus said, "If I have cheated anyone out of anything, I will pay them back four-times. That comes from Exodus 22 and the penalties for stock-theft. If a person steals a sheep and kills that sheep (or sells it), he is to repay 4 sheep, for the one that he stole. And so Zacchaeus is saying, "I'll pay back 4 times what I stole".

You see, becoming a Christian, means we are forgiven by God (for all of our sins), but that doesn't set us free from the law of the land. That doesn't absolve our responsibility of restitution to those we have wronged.. In fact, we will want to do it.

So, that's the first aspect of repentance – genuine sorrow for the wrong we've done; confessing our sin; and facing up to the consequences of it.

The second aspect, is a change of heart. And a change of heart, isn't an abstract, hidden thing. A genuine change of heart, is evident in one's actions – in a change of attitude/behaviour.

It is to begin to:

- love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind & Strength; and
- love your neighbour as yourself.

With Zacchaeus, it was instantaneous. He was rich, and he was intent on getting more rich. He didn't care about "the poor"... And in Jesus' day, "the poor" truly were poor.

I mean, we've gotta remember, their society was nothing like ours – there was no pension – there was no welfare payments to help people get by... If a person couldn't work, they had to rely on the generosity of others. It is Godly, for those who have **more** than they need, to provide for the basic daily needs of those who have nothing.

So, Zacchaeus had a complete transformation. He knew he had much more than he needed. And his heart and his mindset underwent a seismic shift from focusing on this life (and

worldly riches), to thinking about eternity (and treasure in heaven); He shifted from being **self**-serving, to serving others...

“Lord, in Your sight, half of everything I have, **I give to the poor.**”

What an enormous change, hey...

So, we come now, to the third requirement for Salvation: Faith.

BTW, the word, “faith” itself isn’t used here. But if you know your bible, you can’t miss it. Jesus said: **“Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.**

The Jews prided themselves that they were “sons of Abraham” – the great forefather of their faith... And because they were Abraham’s descendants, they thought they’d be OK.... But they didn’t have faith in Jesus.

John the Baptist said: **Luke 3:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. (we’ve already seen that in Zacchaeus) And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I

tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

In other words, “being a physical descendant of Abraham, isn’t what it’s about.” It’s about faith.

Paul said: Galatians 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

Zacchaeus, even though he was terrible sinner, and even though he was an outcast of society, - Zacchaeus was saved, because:

1. he received Jesus;
2. there was genuine repentance; and
3. he had faith.

As we’ve read the Gospel of Luke, we’ve seen over and over again, Jesus doing something that’s totally unexpected. The crowds were cranky because Jesus had a compulsion to bunk at Zacchaeus’ house for the night... It was totally unexpected. But that’s only because they were disconnected with the purposes of God.

¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

That’s why Jesus came.

Never write a person off. Never think to yourself “They’re too far gone – there’s no point even trying to introduce that person to Jesus...” The lost, are precisely the ones Jesus came to save.

And never feel that **you** are too lost for Jesus. He came for you, as well as me.

Let’s pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank You, that You came
to seek and save the lost.

We thank You, that you found us.

At one time, we were totally unworthy,
But in Your grace, you stopped under our tree,
And You called out to us,
“Hurry. I must stay with You.”

That was You seeking the lost.
And we respond to You.

We receive You as our Master/Lord;
We repent of our sin;
Change our hearts, we pray;
And we cry out to You in faith,
“Forgive us Lord.
Receive us into Your Kingdom.”

And Lord, we pray,
that You would give us a heart like Yours;
That we would

- be generous;
- be loving;
- be kind;

- reach out to hurting and the broken;
- and care for the poor;

- be a people of faith;
- and that in faith, we would carry on Your work,
of seeking and saving the Lost.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.