

THE SEEKER
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March 28, 2010

LK 19:1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

LK 19:5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

LK 19:7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' "

LK 19:8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

LK 19:9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

- I. Zaccheus was A Short Man--But Jesus was Looking for Him.
- II. Zaccheus was A Tax Man--But Jesus was Looking for Him.
- III. Zaccheus was A Rich Man--But Jesus was Looking for Him.
- IV.. Zaccheus was A Sinful Man--But Jesus was Looking for Him.
- V. Zaccheus was A Lost Man--And Jesus was Looking for Him.

Dr. Luke alone tells us the story of Zaccheus, a colorful New Testament character that children love to hear about, and a character that creative teachers enjoy sharing with the children they teach. After all, Zaccheus is the little man in the 'sycamore' tree, who was addressed by Jesus to get down immediately from that tree and open his house to Jesus. As well as revealing a lot about Jesus and a lot about Zaccheus, the story itself reveals a lot about Dr. Luke also. The Zondervan Commentary says: "The incident contains several primary Lukan features: the universal appeal of the gospel (vv. 2-4); the ethical problem of wealth (v. 2); the call of a "sinner" who was in social disfavor (v. 7); the sense of God's present work (vv. 5, 9); the feeling of urgency ("immediately," *speusas*, v. 5), of necessity ("must," v. 5), and of joy (v. 6); restitution, With goods distributed to the poor (v. 8); and, above all, salvation (vv. 9-10)."

Luke loved to write about the poor, the outcaste, the lonely, the weak--but here he is telling the story of a different sort of outcaste person, one hated by his own people. And although Zaccheus does not fit the category Luke often addressed, he was an outcaste too.

When we first read the story in Luke 19, we more or less conclude that the story is about Zaccheus; but then the Holy Spirit reveals the truth to us that the story is about Jesus. The 10th verse tells us that: "For the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The story relates to the parables in Luke 15, and reinforces the truth that Jesus is

THE SEEKER. As we delve deeper into the story we find that He is seeking us.

I. ZACCHEUS WAS A SHORT MAN, BUT JESUS WAS LOOKING FOR HIM. Isn't it interesting how we categorize people, particularly regarding their physical features? I was reading the sports page the other day and found the story of one of the teams in the NCAA Tournament. One player who was only a fair player was 7 feet tall. He made the statement that whenever people looked at him they usually said, "You're really tall." He made the statement that he already knew that and he wished that people would say smarter things than that. People usually judge us by our physical features. We see the exterior parts of humanity. We see their eye color, their squinted-eyes, their yellow cheeks, their dark face, their height, or lack of height, their clothing, and we could go on to a hundred other physical things we see when we look at others. Human prejudice gets its start from physical features. I know people who will not watch basketball games because the players are not caucasian, not white, not Anglo-Americans. The outward feature of skin color has them so distracted that they cannot enjoy a good ball-game. We have largely lost the prejudice toward European immigrants, but I remember when the prejudice was pretty great in the Floyd County mining camps. I remember well the names they called the Europeans who worked in the mines. The Italians were called 'Dagos' and the Polish were called 'Pollacks'. Prejudice toward them usually came from their difficulty with English, and with their usual attribute of shortness.

I don't want to go into the problems short people have with everything made for average size and tall people. They need boxes to stand on, and steps to get into vans, and trees to climb to see important people, and other things that none of us average and tall people need. Now Zaccheus was a short man too. Perhaps the reason the Holy Spirit impressed Luke to include this story was to show that Jesus loves people as they are. As our Creator, He made us the way we are. I am aware of DNA and the human genome and the strides that science has made to unlock our complexity, but we are who we are, not the process. We are living, breathing human beings whose life and breath must one day cease and we then go the way of the whole earth. But our complex genome will still be a part of our descendents until the day of Christ. However, Jesus loves us as we are, black or white, old or young, short or tall. He still seeks us, and He seeks us because He loves us, and He loves us with the Love of His Heavenly Father who sent Him to earth to find us and tell of His Love.

Jesus had come to that historic city of palm trees, Jericho, perhaps the oldest inhabited city on earth according to archeologist, Kathryn Kenyon, to seek One Man, Zaccheus. Joshua had come here to conquer and to destroy the inhabitants of Jericho, and had sent two spies to reconnoiter the city. They were helped by the prostitute Rahab, who gained physical salvation by her actions. God told Joshua how to conquer that city with the 7 days and 7 trumpet blasts, and the last short blast, that would bring down the walls and give the Hebrews their most important victory on their way to the Eastern Highlands, the Promised Land. But Jesus had come not to destroy but to save, not to break down walls 12 feet high and 7 feet thick, but the walls around the heart of Zaccheus. He came to seek and to save Zaccheus, not to take the city, but to save the soul of a short, little, man. The Seeker who sought Zaccheus is seeking You.

II. BUT ZACCHEUS WAS A TAX MAN, AND JESUS WAS LOOKING FOR HIM.

About the worst thing you could say about a man in Jesus' day was that he was a Publican. Levi is the first tax collector we hear of becoming a follower of Jesus. That was

during The Great Galilean Ministry when the popularity of Jesus was at its height. Here is another tax collector wanting to get a glimpse of Jesus as the Lord was going up to Jerusalem to die. His popularity had taken a great dive in up North in Galilee, but here in Jericho, and in all Judea, among the people He was still extremely popular. No doubt many people felt that Jesus was a great teacher and healer, and suspected that He was indeed the Messiah to come. But Jesus didn't just come, He came to seek and to save them that were lost. He came to save a man named Zaccheus, a Tax Collector.

Zaccheus was a tax man. During this particular time of the year our focus has to be on the taxes we paid last year, and how much we might still owe. If we are normal human beings we do not like paying taxes. But we all enjoy the benefits that our taxes afford our nation. That is especially true of our safety as a people, good roads, and a high standard of living. Still, however, we fear the tax man, and we always fear the possibility of being audited, of having to pay more than we can afford, and so on.

You might not know it but Zaccheus, was, at that time, a more important tax man than Levi. Listen to what the Zondervan Commentary says of him: “**1-4** Zacchaeus was a "chief tax collector" (*architelones*, v. 2), holding a higher office in the Roman tax system than Levi did (5:27-30). This system, under which an officer gained his income by extorting more money from the people than he had contracted to pay the Roman government, had evidently worked well for Zacchaeus. His location in the major customs center of Jericho was ideal. Being both a member of a generally despised group and wealthy, he is a notable subject for the saving grace of God. Observe the proximity of this story to that of the rich ruler, whose attitude toward wealth kept him from the Lord (18:27). Zacchaeus's desire to see Jesus, though commendable, was surpassed by the fact that Jesus wanted to see him.”

Barclay calls Zaccheus “The Man Whom All Men Despised.” We can all understand that a man who takes our money and cheats us would be hated. It is harder to understand how Jesus loved him. But that is the nature of Jesus. He loved Zaccheus because He knew more about Zaccheus than anyone did. When others thought he had no heart, Jesus knew the heart of Zaccheus and knew that there was some good in that heart. In the Gospel of John the Bible tells us that Jesus knew all men and did not need anyone to tell him what was in man. Jesus knew the sadness and the loneliness that was in the heart of this tax man. Barclay writes this of Zaccheus, “Inevitably he was lonely, for he had chosen a way that made him an outcast. He had heard of this Jesus who welcomed tax-collectors and sinners, and he wondered if He would have any word for him. Despised and hated by men, Zaccheus was reaching for the love of God.”

III. ZACCHEUS WAS ALSO A RICH MAN, BUT JESUS WAS LOOKING FOR HIM.

LK 19:1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

Luke was not saying that because he was impressed with someone who had gained a large amount of wealth. He mentioned his wealth because he had gotten wealthy in a very unworthy way. He was a tax collector. He bought that right from the Romans. His fellow Jews first considered him a traitor. He charged much more in his taxation than he paid the Romans for this yearly franchise. In fact, between the lines, and from his confession, he squeezed the people and had acquired enough money to be considered quite

wealthy. Jericho was a wealthy city. It was a direct highway from the territories across Jordan up to Jerusalem and throughout all Palestine. It was a low lying area with a warm climate, excellent for figs and other fruits. Josephus called Jericho “a divine region.” Barclay gives this description, “Jericho was a very wealthy, and a very important town. She lay in the Jordan valley, and she commanded both the approach to Jerusalem and the crossing of the river which gave access to the lands east of the Jordan. She had a great palm forest and the world famous balsam groves which perfumed the air for miles around. Her gardens of roses were known far and wide...The Romans carried her dates and balsam to world-wide trade and fame. All this combined to make her one of the greatest taxation centers of Palestine. ..Zaccheus was a man who had reached the top of his profession, and he was also the best hated man in the district.” He was also likely the richest man in Jericho.

We often think of what Jesus said in Matthew about the rich man: ^{MT 19:23} Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Jesus did not come to condemn the rich but to find the rich and to get them saved. Nicodemus was wealthy. So was Joseph of Arimathea. The Bible says of him: ^{MT 27:57} “As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. ⁵⁹ Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, ⁶⁰ and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.”

The Lord never condemned any rich man to eternal destruction. He came to Seek and to save the rich man.

IV. ZACCHEUS WAS ALSO A SINFUL MAN, AND JESUS WAS LOOKING FOR HIM. ^{LK 19:7} All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a `sinner.' "

The people in Jericho, and for that matter, throughout Israel, were somewhat limited in their judgment of what constituted a sinner. This was especially true of the religious elite. To break the Sabbath made one a sinner; to fail to attend synagogue made one a sinner; and to be a Jewish tax-collector, a publican, was to be a bit sinner. So when they saw Jesus go into the house of Zaccheus they said, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

The religious people would not associate with the ‘sinners.’ But since Jesus came to find sinners, is it a wonder He strayed in the home of a ‘sinner?’ After the 2nd World War the allied soldiers who were stationed in Germany were ordered not to fraternize with the German people. By their refusal to speak to the Germans and by their aloofness, they were supposed to show the German people how guilty they were and how sinful they were in the war. But the “non-fraternization” policy of the West hindered the post-war effort to integrate Germany into the brotherhood of nations. We fought the war for human brotherhood, as one said, and then we denied it to the Germans. Thank God, however, our actions in the Berlin airlift and the Marshall Plan made things a lot better, and made the Germans friendly toward the Allied nations.

The objective of people who isolate people into groups like sinners and saints is

that we are all sinners. We cannot make people repent by ostracizing them, by marginalizing them, by shaming them, or by blaming them. Perhaps their sinfulness is less respectable than ours, and perhaps our sins are more hidden than theirs, the fact still remains, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

God is an inclusive God. It is not His will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The Pharisees could bring no one to repentance, but Jesus did so constantly. Look at Nicodemus! Look at the Woman at the Well! Look at the Blind Man! Look at the Woman taken in Adultery! Look at Zaccheus! LK 19:8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

LK 19:9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham."

Can there be any question that the Love and Acceptance our Lord showed to Zaccheus led that tax-collector to repentance? Obviously not!

The Zondervan Reference Bible says, "There is no doubt that Zacchaeus had really "cheated" people. "Four times the amount" was far more than what the OT specified for restitution (Lev 5:16; Num 5:7). Whether or not Zacchaeus knew of these laws, his offer was unusually generous and was the sort of "fruit in keeping with repentance" earlier sought by John the Baptist (3:8)."

2Pet.3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God is the great Seeker of Sinners. He desires all to be saved. He wants everyone to be found by His Son so that they will gain Eternal Life and not perish.

V. ZACCHEUS WAS A LOST MAN, AND JESUS WAS LOOKING FOR THE LOST.

We are precious in the sight of God. He loves us and wants us to be saved. But we are lost and someone must find us. Jesus is the Only One who can find the Lost. He is looking for you. He knows your name. He even know you if you're up some kind of tree. He wants to come in and be the guest in your house. How does He search for you? He searches for you with His Holy Spirit. When the Spirit touches your heart and says, "Come home; I want to dwell with you today" ;and you invite him into your heart, God will find you and you will be no longer lost. Will you let Him find you today?