

Zacchaeus

¹ He came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. ² Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, ³ was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. ⁵ When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” ⁶ And he came down quickly and received him with joy. ⁷ When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, “He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.” ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over.” ⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:1-10)



By Niels Larsen Stevns - Own work (photo: Gunnar Bach Pedersen)
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The stories you missed

A long section of the Gospel of Luke is passed over as we move from the 30th to the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C:

- 18:15-17 The Little Children
- 18:18-25 The Rich Ruler
- 18:26-30 The Demands of Discipleship
- 18:31-34 The Third Passion Prediction
- 18:35-43 The Blind Beggar

For many weeks the Sunday gospels have been accounts that are unique to Luke. At the beginning of his narrative of the journey to Jerusalem (9:51), Luke departed from the outline of Mark and began introducing material from sources either personal or common to Matthew and himself. At this point Luke begins to follow Mark again. The paragraphs below provide a very brief description of these passages:

18:15–17 Jesus and the Little Children. Luke uses these verses along with the story of the rich man as an illustrative sequel to the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The tax collector has the attitude of a child, defenseless and expectant, while the Pharisee is like the rich man (vv. 18–25), not yet ready to give up control over himself.

The disciples are infected with the attitudes of the Pharisee and the rich man. They have no regard for children, perhaps seeing them as non-persons since they were not able to contribute to the family or earn their way. In their view, Jesus is wasting his time on these children who are unable to comprehend the great work he is about. He startles the disciples by saying that the reign of God belongs precisely to such children. As well, the disciples are to learn that those in positions of power or authority must never hinder the weak, outcast, or stranger from the Kingdom of God.

18:18–25 Jesus and the Rich Ruler. This account seems to be intended to be read as having the same setting as the encounter with the Little Children. Perhaps the Rich Ruler is asking that if the Kingdom is meant for “them” then what awaits a ruler? ... *and what must I do to inherit eternal life?* (18:18). This is the same question as posed by the lawyer in 10:25 – and Jesus’ answer is the same, pointing the questioner to the Law and its demands – in other words, the simple answer that any child would know. In a way it is taken as a demeaning answer and elicits a response that suggests a tone of “this is all you can offer?”

Jesus does not draw the man into a closer relationship immediately. But when he hears a wish to go further, Jesus offers him his own way of life (see 9:57–58). The ruler cannot take the step because of his wealth, so often a threat to life in the kingdom (14:33; 16:13). He seems to know deep down that Jesus has spoken the word he needs to hear, but he is too enslaved by his possessions to follow it through. This provokes Jesus’ memorable remark about the camel and the needle’s eye. Semitic exaggeration is used, not to deny the possibility of salvation for the rich, but to imprint indelibly in his hearers’ minds the sinister influence that riches can be even on those sincerely desiring the reign of God.

18:26–34 The demands of discipleship. Jesus’ listeners are shocked by his warning to the wealthy. They would have thought that prosperity was a sign of God’s blessing because of a person’s goodness (Prov 10:3, 22). Jesus does not retract the harshness but enunciates the important principle that God is willing and able to save all who call out to him. Peter notes that the disciples have done what the rich ruler could not do, and asks in a rather clueless (cautious?) manner about the reward. Jesus promises an “overabundant return,” without specifying his meaning and speaks again of the priority of kingdom over family (see 14:26).

18:31–34 The Third Passion Prediction. Then to the Twelve Jesus makes the third prediction of his passion and resurrection, adding this time that these things will happen in fulfillment of prophecy. The meaning of his words is lost on them.

18:35–43 The Blind Beggar. The approach to Jericho signals the final stage of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. Here, as in the incident of the children, the disciples try to keep an “insignificant” person from bothering the Master. The evangelist continues on another level to present the life of the church as a journey with Jesus on the way of the Lord. The note that it is “the people walking in front” who reprimand the beggar is a subtle warning to church leaders who might overlook the needs of the powerless (see Acts 6:1). But it is for these lowly who express their need for salvation that Jesus has come. The present chapter is a gallery of such people: the widow, the tax collector, the children, now the blind beggar.

The beggar’s name is given in Mark as Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46). Blind as he is, he cries out with inspired insight, calling Jesus by the messianic title “Son of David.” When questioned, he goes further to identify Jesus as “Lord.” In response to this faith, he receives the message of deliverance that by now is a stereotyped phrase: “Your faith has saved you” (7:50; 8:48; 17:19). Both the beggar and the witnesses see the ultimate meaning of this act of power and glorify God.

The two Jericho stories – the blind man and Zacchaeus – each contains interesting parallels:

- a (poor) beggar || a wealthy chief tax collector
- dependent upon other's generosity || dependent on his own power and wealth
- unable to see Jesus || initially prevented from seeing Jesus
- wants to see (again) || tries to see (Jesus)
- cries out to Jesus || says nothing
- the crowd tries to keep him from Jesus || the crowd blocks his way to Jesus
- Jesus asks what he wants || Jesus tells him what Jesus wants
- “*Your faith has saved you*” || “*Salvation has come to this house*”

19:1-10 Zacchaeus. The story of entering the house of Zacchaeus stands fittingly as the last of Jesus' encounters with the outcasts before his entry into Jerusalem. The pericope picks up threads of the previous chapter. Alan Culpepper notes (*Luke*, 357):

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14) turns on the question of righteousness. Jesus declared that “all who humble themselves will be exalted” (18:14), and Zacchaeus cast aside all regard for his own dignity by climbing a tree in order to see Jesus. Jesus challenged the rich ruler to sell all he had and give it to the poor (18:22), but he went away sad. Joyfully, Zacchaeus responds to Jesus' declaration that he would stay at Zacchaeus' house by promising to sell half of his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. The difference between half and all is not the issue. Rather, it is Zacchaeus' eagerness to do what is right for the poor. Thus the salvation of Zacchaeus is told in the form of a miracle story. Jesus demonstrated the power of God at work in the announcement of the kingdom: “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (18:24). Finally, the story of Zacchaeus is coupled to the story of the blind beggar – both occurs as Jesus is passing through Jericho; the blind man wanted to see, and Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus; in both stories the crowd serves as an impediment to the one who desires to see; in both the verb for “stood”...marks a dramatic turn in the story (18:40; 19:8); the joy or the praise of God accompanies the “healing” (18:43; 19:6); and in both the effect is immediate (18:43; 19:9)

Crossing Categories

At first glance we might expect this to be another parable challenging the rich. The rich have not fared well in Luke's gospel. Jesus pronounces woes upon the rich (6:24). God called the rich farmer a fool (12:16, 20) for that very night his life would end. In another parable, a rich man went to Hades while the poor beggar Lazarus went to the bosom of Abraham. Jesus observed how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven (18:23, 25). Zacchaeus is a “*wealthy man*” (19:2)

Yet, Zacchaeus is like the others in previous stories of Jesus – people faced with obstacles (18:3-4, 15, 39); he is of low social status and esteem as are the widow, the toll collector, children and a blind beggar. Yet, like the rich ruler (18:18-30), Zacchaeus is a person of power, privilege and position – people not easily ignored. Whereas the Rich Ruler's self assessment is that he keeps all the commandments, Zacchaeus, according to popular opinion, is a sinner. Zacchaeus is a “Son of Abraham” and yet serves the Roman Imperia to the detriment of his own people and to his financial benefit. In a way Zacchaeus is a pivotal character whose characteristics straddle the boundaries. *Then who can be saved?* (18:26). The story of Zacchaeus answers the question that has flowed in and out of the Jerusalem travel narrative (since 9:51) as Jesus asserts, *Today salvation has come to this house* (19:9) – all in the unmerited grace of Christ.

Green (*Gospel of Luke*, 667-8)

Employing categories fully developed in the prior narrative in incongruous, even oxymoronic juxtaposition – “ruler,” “tax collector,” “wealthy,” and “sinner” – Luke articulates a pivotal element of his narrative theology. Here, Luke dismisses the usual, stereotypical categories by

which one's status before God is predetermined, including even those surprising ones that might have been suggested in Luke's narration. Following a close reading of chs. 1-18, Luke's audience might assume that the wealthy and those who rule are out, sinners and toll collectors are in. What, then, are we to make of someone who is all these things? In his characterization of Zacchaeus, Luke pulls the rug from under every cliché, every formula by which people's status before God might be calculated. After the dust settles, two complementary assertions remain: (1) the salvific agency of Jesus on behalf of those routinely excluded and (2) the determination of one's inclusion in the family of God on the basis of the single query. Do you conduct yourself as a child of Abraham (cf. 3:8-14 ¹)?

Seeing and Seeking Salvation

In light of the narrative parallels between the blind beggar and Zacchaeus we should not be surprised to note that again Luke has introduced the idea of "seeing." Many times Luke uses the standard word *idein* to indicate that seen with the eyes (e.g. v.3), however, at important junctures Luke opts to make a direct verbal linkage via the word *anablepo*. In the account of the blind beggar *anablepo* is translated "see again" or "regain sight" (18:41, 42, 43). In our text it is translated "looked up" (19:5). What is important to our story is that this word is used elsewhere in the NT and its use always is connected to an anticipation of salvation in the kingdom of heaven or as a sign/symbol of the in-breaking of the kingdom and the time of salvation:

- *To look up to heaven as an act of hope in God.* In the account of the multiplication of the loaves Jesus looks up to heaven (Matt 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16). This sense also appears in connection with the healing of a deaf-mute (Mark 7:34).
- *Recovery of sight as a sign of the dawn of salvation.*
 - This sense appears in Mark 8:24 (the healing of a blind man in Bethsaida); 10:51 ("Master, I want to see" 52; Matt 20:34; Luke 18:41, 42, 43 where the believing act of seeing is a consequence of the encounter with God's offer of salvation in Jesus
 - In John 9:11, 15, 18 (the healing at the pool of Siloam of one blind from birth) the ability to see leads to faith in the Son of Man
 - when Jesus, the messianic bringer of salvation, restores sight, the OT eschatological promise of the healing of the blind (Isa 61:5-7; 35:5f.; 29:15ff.; also Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22) is fulfilled in the "today" of the encounter with Jesus.

In v.5 it is Jesus who "looks up" (*anablepo*) – thus not simply catching sight of Zacchaeus but "seeing" him all because salvation is being played out in front of all the *descendant[s] of Abraham* (v.9) who looked upon the scene. Jesus is the primary actor who "looks up" to heaven in an act of hope that Zacchaeus will again see the salvation first offered to the Jews via the patriarchs and the prophets and now offered in the person of Jesus.

On A Quest: Zacchaeus and Jesus - Today

Zacchaeus is introduced in v.2 and characterized four ways: Jew, a ruler, a chief tax collector [see Note on v.2 below], and wealthy. This last characteristic reminds one that Jesus has just remarked on the near impossibility of the wealthy entering the kingdom of heaven (18:24-25).

¹ *Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" He said to them in reply, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He answered them, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." Soldiers also asked him, "And what is it that we should do?" He told them, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." (Luke 3:8-14)*

Yet Zacchaeus is a man on a quest. Either because of his stature or age [see Note on v.3 below], Zacchaeus goes to extraordinary lengths to fulfill his quest – even if it means enduring the probable shame of climbing a tree as though he were a child. The earnestness of his quests accounts for some of the exuberance, but also *because of the crowd*. In some way the other people have become an obstacle to him, rendering him as a member of the lowly along with the widow, the tax collector, children, and the blind beggar of chapter 18.

Jesus is on a quest and so the “seeker” Zacchaeus, becomes the “sought”. While he is trying to see Jesus, apparently Jesus had already seen him. The same word (*zeteo*) is used in v.3 where it is Zacchaeus “seeking to see.” In v.10 it is Jesus who seeks and the resulting “seeing” is expressed in terms of salvation (to save): “*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.*” Who is seeking whom? Each is on a quest. Jesus extends the offer without prerequisite: “*Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house*” (v. 5). With the offer accepted, the banquet of the reign of God is proleptically seen in Jesus staying at Zacchaeus’ house:

“Today” (*semeron*) is an important word in Luke that is part of a recurring theme from start to finish of this gospel. Some of the significant verses:

- **Today** in the town of David a Savior has been born to you (2:11)
- **Today** this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. (4:21)
- I must stay at your house **today**. (19:5)
- **Today** salvation has come to this house (19:9)
- I tell you the truth, **today** you will be with me in paradise. (23:43)

“Today” is the moment of salvation. That moment is created by Jesus’ presence and his word. “Today” carries its own urgency, and so Jesus insists that the nature of his mission renders it imperative that he share Zacchaeus’ hospitality. This is a breach of decorum because Jesus does not wait to be invited to the tax collector’s house. He invites himself; the shepherd seeking the one lost sheep (v. 10; 15:4–7). Zacchaeus quickly descends from the tree and *received him with joy* (v.6).

Zacchaeus’ Speech

Zacchaeus, in spite of his reputation, has qualities akin to those of Peter. Zacchaeus is spontaneous and impetuous, given to extravagant statements. But there is a deep genuineness. Though he is a person of some importance, his position does not prevent him from climbing the sycamore tree nor from publicly admitting his guilt and professing his repentance. Even if he is a tax collector, Jesus says he remains a son of Abraham. And so, Jesus the Good Shepherd seeks out the one ostracized to help him find his way back to the flock.

In the previous paragraph there is an assertion that Zacchaeus has repented. While this is the majority understanding, Green (*Gospel of Luke*, 672) notes that the verbs in Zacchaeus’ speech are present tense: “I give ... I pay back” and Green interprets them as “present progressives: “My customary practice is to give half of what I have to the poor, etc.” [see Notes on v.8 below]. Green states:

Luke’s narrative mentions nothing of Zacchaeus’s need for repentance, act of repentance, or faith; nor of Jesus’ summons to repentance; nor does he in any other way structure this episode as a “story of conversion.” According to this reading, Zacchaeus does not resolve to undertake new practices but presents for Jesus evaluation his current behaviors regarding money. He even joins the narrator in referring to Jesus as “Lord.” Jesus’ reference to “salvation” (v. 9), then, signifies Zacchaeus’s vindication and restoration to the community of God’s people; he is not an outsider, after all, but has evidenced through his economic practices his kinship with Abraham (cf. 3:7-14). Zacchaeus thus joins the growing roll of persons whose “repentance” lies outside the narrative, who appear on the margins of the people of God, and yet who possess insight into and a commitment to the values of Jesus’ mission that are exemplary.

However, if it had been Zacchaeus's habit to give and pay back, why is there so much grumbling about Jesus going to the house of a sinner? Is it that the people can not see Zacchaeus' righteousness because of their own presuppositions of the nature of a tax collector? Or is it simply that, as most translators understand, that Zacchaeus has had a moment of conversion and is responding appropriately.

Culpepper (*Luke*, 358)

The interpretive crux of this story appears is Zacchaeus's declaration in v.8. The pronouncement is introduced by the report that Zacchaeus "stood up: (*isttemi*; cf. 18:40). Traditionally, this verse has been read as an indication of the genuineness of Zacchaeus's repentance.

Culpepper notes scholarly speculation similar to Green's comments above and acknowledges that there is a basic interpretive choice between Green's position (Zacchaeus' customary actions) and a statement that indicates Zacchaeus' resolve henceforth to rectify his past injustices. Culpepper continues

Nevertheless, the latter part of v.8 tips the interpreter's scales in favor of the traditional reading. Zacchaeus is not protesting his customary actions to the disbelieving crowd. Instead, he is freely declaring his resolve to make amends for his part wrongs as a result to the honor Jesus has bestowed on him.

Complaining About Jesus

In reaction there is the expected murmuring from the crowd. In Luke's gospel it is not uncommon for people to complain about Jesus – and usually about the same thing – his mercy towards sinners.

²⁹ Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were at table with them. ³⁰ The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ Jesus said to them in reply, "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. ³² I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners" (Luke 5:29-32).

¹ The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, ² but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:1-2)

Verse 7 in our text is one of those grumbling verses: *When they [Pharisees] all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner."*

One of the definitions of "grumble" [*diagogguzo*] is to "complain because of disappointed hopes." Admittedly this is a secondary meaning, still, one wonders about the root of the Pharisees. Did they take it that the Messiah would not be gracious to sinners? Maybe they could just not accept that Zecchaeus could obtain forgiveness so easily. Three Sundays ago Naaman the Syrian could not believe that he would be cured of leprosy by simply dipping in the Jordan River – he wanted some mysterious and elaborate ceremony. Perhaps that is what the Pharisees are expecting – any would-be Messiah should castigate the sinner and provide a list of offenses and only after the sinner has rend their garments and heaped ashes upon their own head – only then would forgiveness be dispensed. Otherwise, isn't it a cheap grace?

Grace and Discipleship

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*The Cost of Discipleship*) at the advent of WWII wrote famously on "cheap grace." I include a long excerpt from his writing as someone who perhaps can be accused of being Pharisaic – yet knowing that he is writing in the shadow of Nazi Germany and the increasingly silent Christian Churches – the words make a case that there is indeed a dark side to "cheap grace."

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing....[45]

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins.... In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.[45-46]

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. 'All for sin could not atone.' Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin....

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.[47]

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man' will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus. It comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

On two separate occasions Peter received the call, "Follow me." It was the first and last word Jesus spoke to his disciple (Mark 1.17; John 21.22). A whole life lies between these two calls. The first occasion was by the lake of Gennesareth, when Peter left his nets and his craft and followed Jesus at his word. The second occasion is when the Risen Lord finds him back again at his old trade. Once again it is by the lake of Gennesareth, and once again the call is: "Follow me." Between the two calls lay a whole life of discipleship in the following of Christ. Half-way

between them comes Peter's confession, when he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God....[48]

This grace was certainly not self-bestowed. It was the grace of Christ himself, now prevailing upon the disciple to leave all and follow him, now working in him that confession which to the world must sound like the ultimate blasphemy, now inviting Peter to the supreme fellowship of martyrdom for the Lord he had denied, and thereby forgiving him all his sins. In the life of Peter grace and discipleship are inseparable. He had received the grace which costs.[49]

As Christianity spread, and the Church became more secularized, this realization of the costliness of grace gradually faded. The world was Christianized, and grace became its common property. It was to be had at low cost.[49]

Is it possible to be too gracious? Should Jesus have told Zacchaeus to straighten up his act before he invited himself to his house? Couldn't Jesus' actions have been interpreted as condoning the tax collector's sinfulness? Isn't that the accusation against the Christian Churches of Germany after WWII?

Salvation

Jesus' words in v. 9 are literally: "Today salvation has happened to/in this house(hold), because also this one is a son of Abraham."

What is the "salvation" that has happened? "Salvation" (*soteria*) is a rare word in Luke. All the other occurrences are in the *Benedictus* (Zechariah's song of praise – 1:69, 71 & 77), which are in references to John the Baptist's ministry. The related word also translated "salvation" (*soterion*) occurs in the *Nunc Dimittis* (Simeon's cry of praise in 2:30) and in a quote from Isaiah (3:6). So outside of two songs and an OT quote, the noun "salvation" only occurs in this text. (Neither of these words occur in Mt or Mk and only once in John – although we have already encountered a related verb "to heal/save" (*sozo*) and will again in v. 10 below.)

What happened to or in this house(hold)? Although this "salvation" declaration comes after Zacchaeus' promises to give away money, we must note

Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." (v.5)

And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. (v.9)

The "salvation" event was Jesus himself coming to the house. The salvation wasn't just for Zacchaeus, but for everyone else in the house(hold) – wife, children, slaves, guests?, etc. They had been in the presence of Jesus and that is salvation. (This narrative anticipates the household conversions in Acts 10:1-11, 18; 16:25-34; 18:1-11).

Descendant of Abraham

What about Abraham? The verse makes it sound like Zacchaeus is saved because he is a son of Abraham – and that it had nothing to do with Jesus. However, we look at another Lucan verse about children of Abraham. John the Baptist declares: "Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3:8-9) Being a child of Abraham is not about a biological connection, but bearing fruit worthy of repentance. As Paul stresses in Romans 4, the children of Abraham are those who live like Abraham, i.e., in a faith relationship with God. Zacchaeus has just promised to bear the proper fruit.

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.”

The question then becomes what are we seeking? Hopefully the answer is a saving and right relationship with Jesus that bears fruit in the world. Maybe the harder question is what enslaving prejudices do we bring that hold us and others back? We know Zacchaeus, or people like him, and we more easily hold on to our assessments than to change our opinions about them. We pigeon-hole people, we interpret all their present behaviors upon our past conclusions about them as people. We believe what God can do in us, but others..... sometimes that is harder to believe. It is that moment we can perhaps more clearly see what we do not seek and what we assume is lost.

Notes

Luke 19:1 Jericho: The city was located on an important trade-route from Jerusalem to the East / Trans Jordan area. Locally is a center of a good deal of wealth, not only from trade, but also from the balsam groves that abounded. In many ways Jericho would have been a desirable location for collecting taxes.

Luke 19:2 Zacchaeus...chief tax collector: His name in Hebrew means ‘pure’ or ‘righteous’. The man is unknown to us apart from this incident. He was not simply a tax collector like others we have met in this Gospel (see on 3:13; 5:27), but a *chief tax collector* (*architelōnēs*). This title is not found anywhere else, so its precise significance is not known, but it seems to point to the head of the local taxation department. Zacchaeus would employ others in the actual collecting of the taxes, while he passed on what the Romans required.

Luke 19:3 short in stature: *hēlikia mikro* – the expression literally means “small in age.” Most others places in the NT and OT, age is the primary meaning. The context of the account, especially the action of climbing the tree in order to see has lead to the reference to height. But even beyond his marginal social status as chief tax collector, Zacchaeus may in fact be young. In ancient near east culture the representatives of the communities were the older men, who acted as judges, wisdom figures, and leaders in the community. As the crowds gathered to greet this traveling wonder worker, his age may have caused him to be ushered to the back of the crowd and thus unable to see.

Luke 19:7 grumble: *diagongýzō* – “murmur,” “grumble,” “complain,” “be dissatisfied,” “grumble because of disappointed hopes.”

Luke 19:8 shall give to the poor: *didōmi* (to give) in the Greek is in the present tense, in other words, a literal translation should be “I give to the poor.” Is Zacchaeus simply stating what his current practices already are? That he already gives half his income/wealth to the poor? **Shall repay:** *apodidōmi* (to give back) is also in the present tense, again, stating that if he discovers he (or his subordinate tax collectors) have extorted payments, then his current practice is to repay it even more than Biblically required.

and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over: Zacchaeus’s declaration alludes to Exod. 22:1, “four sheep for a [stolen] sheep,” and 2 Sam. 12:6, “he shall restore the lamb fourfold.” The LXX of 2 Sam. 12:6 has “sevenfold” (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 16.3): rustlers were required to repay the amount plus a threefold penalty. Since the legal restitution for monetary extortion was the amount plus twenty percent (Lev. 5:16; Num. 5:7), Zacchaeus’s resolve is an expression not only of his willingness to restore the damage that he has caused but also of his inward transformation resulting from his encounter with Jesus.

Luke 19:9 descendent of Abraham: literally, “a son of Abraham.” The tax collector Zacchaeus, whose repentance is attested by his determination to amend his former ways, shows himself to be a true descendant of Abraham, the true heir to the promises of God in the Old Testament. Underlying Luke’s depiction of Zacchaeus as a descendant of Abraham, the father of the Jews (Luke 1:73; 16:22–31), is his recognition of the central place occupied by Israel in the plan of salvation.

Luke 19:10 *the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost*: The assertion in 19:10, “seek and to save the what was lost [zētēsai kai sōsai to apolōlos],” concludes the Zacchaeus story and sums up the saving message of Luke’s central section: Jesus has come to seek and save the lost. This formulation echoes Yahweh’s self-description in Ezek. 34:16 as the true shepherd who will seek and save the lost sheep of Israel: “I will seek the lost [to apolōlos zētēsō], and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.”

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