

Zacchaeus Meets Jesus



Scripture Reference: [Luke 19:1-10](#)

Suggested Theme: Jesus looks for sinners and shows them love. His love changes how we treat others.

Memory Verse: “The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them.” [Luke 19:10, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

When Jesus passed through the city of Jericho, a man named Zacchaeus climbed a tree to get a better look. Jesus amazed the crowd by calling Zacchaeus down to tell him He would be coming to his house. In a true act of repentance for what had probably been a dishonest tax-collecting career, Zacchaeus declared that he would pay back the people he had cheated and give half of his wealth to the poor.

Background Study:

What child has not had to stretch and climb on top of something to get a good view? This is a great story for them because they know what it is like to have their view blocked by a bunch of adults!

Jericho was about one mile west of the Jordan River and about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. This was a city rebuilt by Herod the Great. The Romans ruled the land, and Jews were subject to Roman tax. The Roman government paid Jews to collect taxes from their own people. Zacchaeus is referred to as a “chief tax collector.” This is the only time the term is used in the bible. Perhaps he was the manager of a large number of tax collectors. Because of this and because Jericho was in a prosperous region, Zacchaeus would have been quite wealthy.

The Romans expected a set amount from the tax collectors. Any money the tax collectors raised above that amount was theirs to keep. This setup invited corruption. Tax collectors were hated because of the way they cheated the people. The Jews especially hated the Jewish tax collectors because they saw them as traitors of their own people. Some have suggested that short Zacchaeus was willing to climb a tree because it had the added benefit of keeping him out of the way of a crowd of potentially hostile “former customers.”

A sycamore fig tree ([Luke 19:4](#)) was a very sturdy tree that grew to 30-40 feet. It had a short trunk and spreading branches. It bore a fig-like fruit and was good for timber. Amos, the prophet, tended sycamore fig trees (read [Amos 7:14](#)).

If Jesus were concerned about being popular, then He would certainly not have gone to the house of someone whom the people hated ([Luke 19:7-9](#)). Verse 9 explains exactly why Jesus chose to go to Zacchaeus’ house. He did not come to praise the people that were already good. He came to “seek and to save what was lost.”

Zacchaeus must have been ready for a change of heart because he was eager to see and hear Jesus. The scripture does not record the conversation that took place between Zacchaeus and Jesus. Possibly, Jesus showed him the error of his ways, and then Zacchaeus repented. More probably, Zacchaeus already knew what he was doing was wrong. The fact that Jesus took an interest in him and came to his house humbled him in such a way that led him to do what he needed to do.

Zacchaeus was a Jew when he was cheating and stealing from people. But in verse 9, Jesus points out that it was on this day that salvation truly came to Zacchaeus. Just being born into a Jewish family was not being a true Jew. His repentance showed that he really was a Jew- the son of Abraham.

Sometimes children (and adults) know the right thing to do and even want to do it. Changing just seems too difficult. We need to let children know that we will love them and help them be better. Jesus believed in Zacchaeus and gave him the encouragement he needed. We can do the same for others. Even children know how to encourage their friends and tell them, "I know you can do it."

Way to Introduce the Story:

Explain to the children what a tax collector in Jesus' time did. If a person owned something, then the tax collector would decide how much it was worth and how much tax the person had to pay. The tax collector would take the money and give it to the government leaders. Sometimes, the tax collector would make the person pay extra money, and the tax collector would keep it for himself. Let the children take turns acting out the following play- or have two people from the congregation come join your group today and perform it:

Tax Collector: What are you bringing into Jericho?

Traveller: (holding bundles) I have four bundles of cloth.

Tax Collector: Let me see your cloth. (Looks at cloth) That will cost you seven coins.

Traveller: (angrily) That's more than it cost last time! You charge too much. You're cheating me.

Tax Collector: (smirking) Either pay it or don't sell your cloth in Jericho.

Traveller: (giving up) Oh, all right, but I know you tax collectors charge too much! No wonder no one likes tax collectors!

After you have acted this out a few times, say, "Children, today we are going to learn about a tax collector who met Jesus. This tax collector was named Zacchaeus."

The Story:

One time, when Jesus was travelling, He came to the city of Jericho. Even though He was just passing through the town, a large crowd gathered around him. Everyone wanted to have a look at Jesus. Everyone wanted to see the great teacher who had made sick people well.

A man named Zacchaeus lived in Jericho. He was very rich, but he did not have many friends. That was because Zacchaeus was a tax collector. People did not want to be friends with tax collectors because tax collectors usually cheated people. Zacchaeus was rich because he probably cheated people.

Lots and lots of people gathered around to see Jesus. Zacchaeus was a very short man, and he could not get to the front of the crowd. He could not see over the heads of the other people. Zacchaeus was worried. He didn't want to miss out. If he didn't do something soon, then Jesus would just pass by, and he would never get to see him.

Zacchaeus had a great idea. Do you know what he did? He climbed up into a big tree! Now Zacchaeus could see Jesus really well. He saw Jesus walking along the road. Then he saw Jesus walking right by the tree.

Then guess what happened next. Jesus stopped right by the tree. Zacchaeus could probably see the top of Jesus' head.

All of a sudden, Jesus looked right up at Zacchaeus and said, "Zacchaeus, come down right now. I am coming to your house today."

Zacchaeus could hardly believe what he was hearing. How did Jesus know his name? They had never met. Besides, Jesus was a very good man. Why would He want to come to the house of a bad man like Zacchaeus? All of the people were surprised too. Why would Jesus want to go to Zacchaeus' house?

But Zacchaeus quickly climbed down the tree and took Jesus to his house. Zacchaeus was so happy that Jesus visited him. He thought about how good Jesus was. It made him want to be good too.

Zacchaeus said, "Jesus, thank you for coming to my house. I have decided that I want to try to be good now. I used to not even think about poor people. Now I want to help them. I have lots of money. I am going to give half of all my money to help poor people."

Everyone must have been so surprised. Zacchaeus was very rich. Now he would give half of his money to the poor. It really did sound like Zacchaeus meant it. He was really going to try to be good. But Zacchaeus was not finished yet.

"I want to help the poor people, but I also want to do something else. I want to pay back all of the people I have ever cheated. If I have cheated anyone, I will give them back four times the amount I cheated them."

He was very happy that Zacchaeus was sorry for what he had done wrong. Jesus wanted people to be good. He was happy that Zacchaeus was going to try to be good now.

Now everyone knew why Jesus had gone to Zacchaeus' house. He went to Zacchaeus' house to help him learn how to be good.

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

1. What is the name of the short man who climbed a tree to get a better look at Jesus? (Zacchaeus)
2. What was Zacchaeus' job? (Chief Tax Collector)
3. What did Jesus tell Zacchaeus while he was in the tree? ("Come down, for I'm going to your house today")

4. Why was it strange that Jesus wanted to go to Zacchaeus' house? (Zacchaeus was known as a sinful person and the Jews didn't like him)
5. What had Zacchaeus been doing that was wrong? (He made people give him more money for taxes than they had to, and he kept the extra money for himself)
6. What did Zacchaeus tell Jesus he was going to do? (He would give half of his possessions to the poor and paid back the people four times what he had cheated them as a tax collector)
7. What did Jesus say about Zacchaeus after he'd changed his ways and stopped cheating people? (Zacchaeus was saved and a true Jew)
8. What did Jesus come to Earth to do? (Find lost people and save them)
9. What does this story teach you about Jesus?

Reflection:

1. How tall do you think Zacchaeus was?
2. Have you ever struggled to see because you weren't tall enough? What do you usually do so you can see?
3. If you were Zacchaeus, and you couldn't see Jesus in the crowd, what would you have done?
4. Do you think it was easy or difficult for Zacchaeus to climb the tree?
5. How do you think Zacchaeus felt when Jesus came over to him and said he would stay at his house that day?
6. How do you think Jesus felt when all the people began to mutter that he was staying at the house of a sinner (Zacchaeus)?
7. Why do you think Zacchaeus decided to change his ways and be generous instead of greedy with money?
8. Is there anything you do that you want to change? How can Jesus help you change?
9. What is something you wonder about in this story?
10. What part of this story do you find most interesting?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [Zacchaeus Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Bring a measure and let the children measure each other to see who is the most like Zacchaeus (shortest).

- Draw a vertical line down the centre of a chalkboard, whiteboard or on a large sheet of newsprint. Entitle one column “wrong” and the other “repent.” Have the children use the “wrong” side to list things that a child their age might do wrong. Opposite to each of those list ways that person would show they were sorry and had really repented. Example: Wrong- pushing little brother when you are angry. Repent-help him up, say you’re sorry, and play a game with him to cheer him up and then not do it again.
- If the weather is nice and the group is cooperative, take them outside and let each child climb a tree and tell everyone what they see. A really industrious teacher might climb the tree before the session and tie a picture of Zacchaeus to a branch for the child to find ☐ Or, if you have a really nice low tree, you could have everyone sit on a branch while you tell the story. Children will always remember these kinds of lessons.
- Play a simple word game. [Bible Wordz Game](#) is an adaptable game where children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to words found in the Bible lesson.



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Draw a tree’s trunk and big limbs on a sheet of paper before the session begins. Give each child a spring-type clothes peg and a small square of sponge. Children can dip the damp sponge in green tempera paint and then sponge-paint leaves onto the tree. Use yellow, red, and orange for an autumn tree. Each child can make an individual picture, or the whole group can make a big one to decorate the room. Glue on a picture of Zacchaeus when the “leaves” are dry.



Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).

- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and worksheets about Zacchaeus \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Craft: Printable card \(Sunday school crafts\)](#)
- [Printable, Fill-in-the-blank story worksheet \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)
- [Printable, Crossword puzzle \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)

- [Printable, Decoder puzzle worksheet \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)
- [Printable, Multiple choice story quiz \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)
- [Printable, "Zacchaeus Meets Jesus" word search \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)
- [Printable, "Wordshape" puzzle worksheet \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)
- [Group activity ideas \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)
- [Teaching idea to explain how Jesus changed Zacchaeus' heart \(Faith Sprouts\)](#)

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