

Luke 19:1-10

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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By the end of this Chapter, Jesus will have entered Jerusalem and the last week of his life before he is arrested, tortured and executed.

In this passage he enters Jericho near Jerusalem.

Zacchaeus is a **CHIEF** tax collector. This probably means he has been given a contract (for an agreed set price) to collect taxes from a large region. He would employ others to actually do the collecting - one of whom we met in [last week's parable](#).

Zacchaeus is also rich. The fact this is mentioned in addition to the fact of him being a chief tax collector suggests that some chief tax collectors were not wealthy.

Zacchaeus is NOT popular. Not only does he collect taxes; in everyone's eyes he has wealth that does not properly belong to him. That is, no matter how legitimate and honest he might have been, the fact that he has **acquired** wealth (as compared with having it from his family) means that someone else has lost wealth. Zacchaeus is despised and not trusted.

Climbing a tree would be a highly unusual, foolish, and immodest thing for a rich person to do. Zacchaeus would now be openly mocked as well as despised and distrusted. It would be obvious to Jesus that here was an exceptional interest in him.

The sycamore tree is the Biblical tree of life.

Jesus honours Zacchaeus' foolish behaviour by announcing that he will eat with him. Eating with anyone was a sign of social approval - either given or received.

Zacchaeus is aware of the honour being bestowed on him by Jesus and is made happy by it.

But the crowd disapproves. Zacchaeus is despised and dishonoured; Jesus is honoured and lauded by them. If Jesus eats with Zacchaeus they will also have to grant honour to Zacchaeus and stop despising him. Or they will have to change their regard for Jesus - and their hopes that he was going to do big things next week during the Passover. The response of the crowd, shifting from approval to disapproval, foreshadows what lies ahead for Jesus in the week to come: "Hosanna!" during his triumphant entry to Jerusalem, and then "Crucify him!" during his trial.

To counter the crowd's opinion of him, Zacchaeus responds by pointing out the good works he **does**. (Bruce Malina says that the verb tenses here for "give" and "pay back" are **present** tense, and NOT future tense as shown in the English translations: "will give," "will pay back." Zacchaeus is not promising to **change** his behaviour, he is pointing out the good he already is doing. That is why there is no mention of any repentance at this point.)

Jesus acknowledges Zacchaeus' good works and solidifies his honouring of Zacchaeus by declaring that salvation has come to his house, and that Zacchaeus is indeed "one of us," a son of Abraham. Thus Jesus restores Zacchaeus into the social fabric of Jewish life in Jericho.

Notice that Zacchaeus does **NOT** repent of his occupation; he does not give up being a chief tax collector. Like all of us, Zacchaeus remains compromised, unpure, sinning. Thus, one possible moral of this story is to realize that salvation does not require, nor result in, perfection. Salvation is not about the end state. Salvation is the process, the healing and reconciling for creating right relationships within which compromised, unpure, and sinful people - like us - can live within, in response to, and toward, the realm of God.

Verse 10, "For the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost," raises the question of who (or what) in this story are the lost? The salvation that comes to Zacchaeus is the restoring of his right relationship

within his community. But in this story, it is the attitude of the crowd that is being challenged by Jesus. When Jesus declares that salvation has come to Zacchaeus' house, he is in effect also declaring that healing (salvation) has come to the crowd since it is Zacchaeus' relationship to them that is being healed. And, given the behaviours already exhibited by Zacchaeus - giving to the poor, making amends for fraud, making a fool of himself just for a glimpse of Jesus; and those exhibited by the crowd - shallow enthusiasm, sharing in gossip, judging others by their outward appearances; perhaps it is not unreasonable to imagine that WE are the crowd and to ask what is the salvation we need to hear and receive from Jesus today?

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