ZACCHAEUS

Luke 19:1-10
He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

THREE WORLDS OF THIS TEXT

WORLD BEHIND THE TEXT.
Luke’s Gospel was written around the middle of the eighth decade of the first century about the same time as Matthew’s. Luke had access to the same sources as Matthew namely the Gospel of Mark and the sayings source known as Q. Luke was a Gentile writing for Gentile Christians.

Who was Zacchaeus:
The name Zacchaeus (Zaccai) is Hebrew therefore it is likely that this person was a Jew by birth but because he had engaged in a business so infamous, in the eyes of the Jews, he was considered as a mere heathen. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew name, Zacchaeus, properly means ‘pure’ ‘just’ or ‘innocent’.

Zacchaeus was chief among the publicans. The importance of Jericho and its situation would make it an important center for the collection of the Roman tribute. At the head of the publicans engaged in this business was Zacchaeus. He seems to have had a supervision of the district. He was rich. The job paid well. But he was honest (see Luke 19:8).

Jericho
As the Jordan separated between the provinces of Judea and Perea and as Jericho was the border city between these two provinces the custom duties of the place were apt to be considerable. Jericho was an important trading point for the famous balm of Gilead (balsam) and other things. This city, dating back to prehistoric times, is some 17 miles east-northeast of Jerusalem on the plain of the Jordan river. The old city (Tell es Sultan) is a mile northwest of er-Riha village (modern Jericho). Either location is properly called "Jericho." In the times of Jesus, Herod the Great (40/37 B.C.) and his successors built a winter palace with
and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost. “Later that day Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “I will give half of my property to the poor. And I will now pay back four times as much to everyone I have ever cheated.” Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Today you and your family have been saved, because you are a true son of Abraham. The Son of Man came to look for and to save those who are lost.”

**World of the Text**

It is characteristic of Luke that he is the only Gospel author who tells the story of Zacchaeus. This story is of a narrative genre. We do not generally remember that the scene with Zacchaeus was within a week of the Crucifixion. Our Lord was on his last journey to Jerusalem to die.

Luke 19:3 On account of the crowd… Zacchaeus suffered from being short of stature. When he wanted to see Jesus he discovered that it was not possible, because he could not see over the crowds who surrounded Jesus. And he would certainly not have sought to push his way through the crowd as many a member of that crowd would be only too pleased to avenge himself on this ‘tax collector’ and the moment that they saw who it was, alone and unguarded, they would have known what to do! ii

Luke 19:4 So he ran ahead… Forgetful of his rank and quality. Rich men and rulers use not to run, much less climb trees. But his earnest desire to see his Saviour made him seemingly immodest and unmindful of keeping decorum.

Luke 19:5 he looked up… Jesus looked at Zacchaeus with a look of love, grace, and mercy, he looked upon him and loved him, and was gracious to him and had compassion on him. Jesus looked on him, and not on others. There was a great crowd both before and behind him and all about him; but he looked not on these but he looked up to Zacchaeus. Jesus knows his name, how is not indicted however it is uttered in a cordial tone as if he were speaking to a familiar friend whom he is glad to see and with whom he means to stay that day.

Luke 19:7 all who saw it began to grumble… What sort of people were these murmurers? The voices of Pharisees and Jews who were more afraid of keeping company with sinners than being so themselves. Jesus will now come to show them they were mistaken in ornamental gardens, near the famous palm and balsam groves that yielded lucrative revenues.

**Sycamore trees** This sort of tree used to grow in plains and valleys and most probably grew in Jericho in great plenty. The sycamore is a wide open tree with low branches so that Zacchaeus could easily climb into it.
the man; that he whom they counted a sinner was a better man than
themselves generally were.iii

Luke 19:8 Zacchaeus stood there...Lord I give to the poor...if I have
defrauded anyone...
Zacchaeus stood...Before Jesus, in respect to him, and reverence of him
and in the presence of others, showing by his posture, his deliberate,
purpose and ready of mind, to make a public announcement before
them, and that they might all hear it.
The half of my goods I give to the poor – this is the direct translation from
Greek.
“If I have taken anything” It could be interpreted that the words of
Zacchaeus do not refer to a future purpose, but they speak of a past rule
of like which he had set for himself to follow and had probably followed
it for some time.

Luke 19: 9 he too is a son of Abraham.
He is also son of Abraham – A Jew born and as such has a right to the first
offer of salvation. One half of Jesus’ comment he said to Zacchaeus and
turning no doubt his face, the remainder he addressed to the crowd. To
the crowd he inferred – You may have supposed him an alien, sold, and
selling his nation to heathen but he is a true son of Abraham.iv

THE WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT

When they saw that Jesus Christ was willing to visit this fellow, the crowd
complained saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’’

Can we see the difference in attitude? It is huge!

One is a self-righteous attitude that said, we don’t agree with what Jesus
Christ has to offer or with his way of being with people who are not good
enough. Another is a man who said, I know I have sins, but I know I have
been blessed with money. I am a tax collector. My job is to take these taxes
from people, but he says I do all I can to restore it to them. I give half to the
poor, and if I offend anybody, I will liberally repay them.

Christ said, because of your attitude, I am bringing salvation to your house!
What a wonderful lesson to be learned.

In verse 7 ‘all the people’ describe Zacchaeus as a ‘sinner’. It may be that he
was dishonest (as he certainly had opportunity to be) but Luke does not tell
us so. As far as the author is concerned, the only grounds for describing him
a sinner are that ‘he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy’. To condemn him on that basis may have seemed a natural deduction to his fellow-countrymen, but it was based on stereotyped thinking and nothing more. What a contrast with Jesus’ attitude!

How do we see the people today? Nobody except for Jesus noticed Zacchaeus, they had stopped paying any attention to him because they thought he was a lost cause. Look at the people in your life differently. Look at people around you. How do you see them? Do you see them at all?

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