

Zacchaeus Meets Jesus

By
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You've probably sung a song in Sunday School about a man called Zacchaeus, haven't you? I know that my children and grandchildren used to sing it. The song goes like this:

Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
A wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree,
For the Lord he wanted to see.
And as the Saviour passed that way,
He looked up in the tree.
And He said, "Zacchaeus, you come down,
For I'm going to your house today,
For I'm going to your house today."

But just who was Zacchaeus? Well, let's find out, okay? But how can we find out who Zacchaeus was? That's right, by going to the Bible. Yes, we'll find out about Zacchaeus in the New Testament part of the Bible.

To start with, Zacchaeus was a Jewish man who lived at the time that Jesus was here on earth. Zacchaeus was rich, and he lived in the city of Jericho. So let's talk about Jericho for a minute. I think you will find this interesting.

Jericho is one of the oldest cities in the world. And, yes, this is the same Jericho where hundreds of years before God had the walls fall down when Joshua was sent to conquer it! Jericho was rebuilt lots of times. And there is still a city of Jericho over there today! One reason that men liked living in Jericho is because it has springs of water that come out of the ground. Water is very important, isn't it? The Jews sometimes called Jericho the City of Palms, because lots of date palm trees would grow where the water came up.

Over the years lots of different countries have owned Jericho. The Canaanites owned it before God had Joshua capture it. And then the Jews owned it. Later the Babylonians captured Jericho from the Jews, then the Persians captured it from the Babylonians, then the Greeks captured Jericho from the Persians and ruled it. Later the Romans captured Jericho from the Greeks. All this time there were Jews living in Jericho, and there are still Jews living in Jericho today. Well, when Jesus was on earth and when Zacchaeus was living in Jericho, it was the Romans who were ruling Jericho.

Another interesting thing about Jericho is that at the time of Jesus there were two cities very near each other, both of which were named Jericho. You see, there was the old small city of Jericho, and then a little ways away there was the new very big city of Jericho.

As I said earlier, Zacchaeus was a Jewish man -- but he worked for the Roman government that ruled the land of Israel then. So probably Zacchaeus wasn't too well liked by a lot of the Jews. Why not? Well, he probably wasn't well liked for two reasons. First, Zacchaeus was a tax collector. In fact, he was the head of the tax collectors there! Oh, dear! People often don't like to pay taxes, do they?! So, sometimes people don't like tax collectors, like Zacchaeus was. But probably the big reason why many of the Jews may not have liked Zacchaeus was because he was working for the Romans, collecting the taxes for the Romans who had conquered Israel and were ruling the Jews.

But now let's go on with the story of Zacchaeus from the Bible. It is a true story, one that really happened. And like all true stories, something came before it and something came after it. So today I'm not only going to tell you about Zacchaeus, but I'm also going to tell you what came before the story about Zacchaeus and then what came after the story about Zacchaeus. Okay? So now let's get to our story.

All right, then. Jesus and His disciples were going to Jerusalem for the great Passover feast. They were walking all the way there. One day they went through the one of the cities of Jericho, and as they were leaving it, a big crowd was around Jesus. Of course, Jesus is God as well as a man, but the people also knew that Jesus was a great teacher and that He could heal people and do other miracles, so they wanted to see Him. As this crowd was going along with Jesus, all of those people would be making noise with talking, wouldn't it?

Now there were two blind men sitting by the side of the road begging. One of these men was named Bartimaeus. Well, the two blind men heard the crowd, and blind Bartimaeus asked, "What is going on?"

The people told him, "Jesus from the city of Nazareth is passing by."

Well, Bartimaeus and the other blind man had heard about Jesus before, and they knew that Jesus could heal them. So they began yelling out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on us!"

Now, why were they calling Jesus the son of David? Well, for one thing, Jesus' great-great-great-grandfather was King David. But more importantly, "son of David" was a title that was given to the Jewish Messiah, the One who would come and save people from their sins. So the blind men were calling Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, the One whom God was sending, weren't they? (Messiah and Christ both mean the same thing but in different languages.)

But back to our story. Bartimaeus and the other blind man were calling out to Jesus for mercy, and some of the people sort of scolded them and told them to be quiet. But the blind men just started yelling louder, "Son of David, have mercy on us!!" They knew Jesus could make them be able to see, didn't they?

Now, do you think Jesus just kept walking? No. Jesus stood still and said, "Call them!"

So they called to the blind men and said to them, "Be of good cheer and get up! He's calling for you."

Well, Bartimaeus just threw his cloak off and jumped up, and both of the blind men went to Jesus.

When the blind men got near, Jesus said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind men said, "Lord, we want to be able to see."

Then Jesus felt sorry for Bartimaeus and the other blind man. Jesus touched their eyes and said, "Be able to see. Your faith has saved you."

And right away Bartimaeus and the other blind man weren't blind anymore! They could see! This was a miracle, wasn't it?! Then Jesus kept walking down the road, and Bartimaeus and the other man followed Jesus, praising God for healing him. And all of the people there saw that Jesus had made the blind men be able to see, and the people praised God, too.

Yes, the two blind men had had faith that Jesus could make them be able to see, because God can do anything, can't He? But the men hadn't healed themselves, had they? No, Jesus had healed them because they had faith. That was so kind of Jesus, wasn't it?

Well, Jesus and his disciples and two men who had been blind and the big crowd of people kept walking and went into the other city of Jericho. And this was where Zacchaeus was living and working.

Now, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, too, but he had a problem. You see, Zacchaeus was short, and there was a big crowd of people, and he couldn't see over them. Now, in that time a rich, important, grownup Jewish man would be very dignified. He would be careful how he acted. But Zacchaeus really wanted to see Jesus. So he forgot his dignity, and began running. And he ran ahead of where Jesus was, and he climbed up into a sycamore tree so that he'd be able to see out over the heads of the crowd of people. He didn't care if people might laugh at him for running or climbing up in a tree. Seeing Jesus was more important to him.

Well, here came the crowd, and Jesus was with them. Do you think Jesus just walked on by? No. When Jesus got to where the sycamore tree was with Zacchaeus in it, Jesus stopped walking. Jesus looked up and saw Zacchaeus, and he said to Zacchaeus, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. Today I need to stay at your house."

You can imagine how Zacchaeus felt then! He must have been so happy! Jesus wanted to stay at his house! So Zacchaeus quickly climbed down out of the tree and greeted Jesus with great joy.

When the crowd heard and saw this, they began sort of complaining among themselves saying, "Why, Jesus is going to stay with a man who is a sinner!" (They thought Zacchaeus was a big sinner because he was a tax collector for the Romans.)

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to Jesus, "Look, Lord, I give half of what I have to the poor, and if I've taken anything from anyone that I shouldn't have, I give back to that person four times what I took."

Now, that is a little confusing, and I'm really not sure exactly what this means. Different people think different things about it. Some people think that Zacchaeus was saying that he had been giving half of what he had to the poor and had paid people four times what he'd taken in taxes that he shouldn't have taken. Other people think that Zacchaeus is saying that he used to take money that he shouldn't have taken and that now he was going to pay it all back with lots more with it and that he was going to start giving half of what he had to poor people. But I'm not going to worry about it! I'm just going to say that Zacchaeus believed in Jesus then and wanted to be good.

Anyway, then Jesus said to him, "Salvation has come to this house today. The Son of Man has come to look for and save those who are lost." ("The Son of Man" is another name for "the Messiah", that is, for "Christ".)

And that is all we hear about Zacchaeus. We don't know how long Jesus stayed with Zacchaeus. It could have been just for that day, or it could have been for several days. The Bible doesn't say.

Well, after Jesus left Zacchaeus, Jesus and His disciples left the city of Jericho, and they kept walking toward Jerusalem. Finally they got to a little town named Bethany which was just a little way outside of Jerusalem. Jesus' friends, Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived there. Of course, another big crowd of people came to see Jesus there. Big crowds always seemed to try to find Him!

Now, the next day when Jesus was going to go into Jerusalem, He told two of His disciples to go into Jerusalem where they would find a young donkey. They were to bring the young donkey to Him. They did this, and they put their coats on the donkey to make a seat for Jesus, and put Jesus on it. And Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey. A crowd of people went with Him. The people inside Jerusalem heard Jesus was coming, so then another crowd of people came out of Jerusalem to meet Jesus. And the people were all very happy. Some of them cut branches off of trees and spread them along the road for the donkey to walk on, and they were cheering Jesus and shouted praises to God for the miracles they had seen. They shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David!! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel! Hosanna in the highest!" They were all so happy! (This is what we call Palm Sunday.)

Now, hundreds of years before Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the young donkey, a prophet named Zechariah had said that this would happen. So as Jesus rode on the donkey into Jerusalem, this prophecy was being fulfilled, wasn't it? Of course, anything God says will happen, always does happen, doesn't it?!

Now, remember, Jesus was a Jew, And some of the leaders of the Jews were there, too, and they saw all of this and they heard the people shouting praises to Jesus, and they didn't like it. In fact, the leaders of the Jews were already making plans to kill Jesus! Imagine that!! Jesus was doing so many good things, but the leaders were jealous of Him. But that had been prophesied hundreds of

years before, too, that the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of David, would be killed -- but not for anything bad He had done. No. He would die on the cross to make a way that our sins could be forgiven. You see, God the Father loves us so much and wanted to make a way that we could go to heaven and be with Him some day. Also, the Lord Jesus wants to be our friend, too, just as He was Zacchaeus' friend. All we have to do is to trust in Jesus and ask Him to forgive our sins. Then He will be our Saviour, our Friend, and our King!

But getting back to our story here, a few days after this Jesus was put on the cross and died for our sins. Then he was buried in a cave-tomb. But what happened three days later?! Yes, Jesus rose from the dead!! He was alive again! And that is what we celebrate at Easter time, isn't it? That Jesus was resurrected; He rose from the dead. He talked with His disciples after that and did more miracles, and lots of people saw Him alive. Then after forty days Jesus went back up to heaven, and He is still alive in heaven. And that's all we're going to talk about today.

Well, I started out to tell you the story of Zacchaeus, didn't I? It is a true story that really happened. But usually when we hear the story about Zacchaeus, that's all we talk about, and we forget that other things happened then, too. That's why I told you the other stories as well, the stories about the blind men before Jesus met Zacchaeus and then the story after Jesus met Zacchaeus when Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem and everyone was cheering but then that Jesus died on the cross but was alive again. Yes, that way I could tell you what happened before and after the story of Zacchaeus, along with the story about Zacchaeus.

So let's quickly go over what we talked about today. First we said that Jesus and His disciples were walking a long way to go to Jerusalem for Passover. And as they walked along there was a big crowd with them, and they came near the city of Jericho where Bartimaeus and the other blind man called out for Jesus to heal them. And Jesus did. Then they went into the city of Jericho, and that's where Zacchaeus lived. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, too, but he was so short that he couldn't. So he didn't think about being dignified. Instead, he ran ahead and climbed up into a tree so he could look over the heads of the crowd. Jesus stopped by the tree and told Zacchaeus that He was going to go to his house that day, and that made Zacchaeus very happy. Later Jesus and His disciples began walking toward Jerusalem again. When they got near it, Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem as the people all cheered and shouted praises to God. But the leaders didn't like this, and a few days later they put Jesus on a cross where He died. Then He was buried, but three days later Jesus was alive again!

And why did Jesus die? That's right. Because God loves us so much that He wanted to make a way so we could be with Him someday. So Jesus died for our sins. And if we trust in Jesus to forgive our sins, He will. Then the Bible says we will be a child of God, and we can be with Him someday. And God always keeps His promises, doesn't He?

But what can we learn from just the story of Zacchaeus itself? First, we learn that Jesus is very important, isn't He? Zacchaeus didn't wait, thinking he might be able see Jesus another time. In fact, he didn't know it, but we know that Jesus was heading to Jerusalem where He would die on the cross for our sins (of course, 3 days later Jesus was alive again and then He later went to heaven where He's still alive). And we should not wait, either. We should turn to Jesus now, trusting in Him to forgive our sins.

Another thing we can learn is that Zacchaeus didn't let the fact that people were in his way stop him from seeing Jesus, did he? And we shouldn't let people stop us from learning about Jesus and turning to Jesus and asking Him to forgive our sins.

Also, Zacchaeus wasn't too proud to run and climb a tree in order to see Jesus. And we shouldn't be too proud to turn to Jesus and ask Him to forgive our sins.

Now, we can't climb a tree to see Jesus like Zacchaeus did, can we? But we can read the Bible and sort of "see" Jesus that way. Yes, the Bible tells us about Jesus and what Jesus wants us to do.

Also, Jesus said He was going to Zacchaeus' house that day, and Zacchaeus was glad and had Him over to his house. Well, we can't have Jesus come over to our house in the same way that Zacchaeus did, can we? But when we trust in Jesus and follow Him, and get to know Him and what He wants us to do by reading the Bible, and when we think about Him, and talk to God by praying, then it's like we're having God the Father and the Lord Jesus come be with us. And that makes us glad, too.

And people thought Jesus shouldn't have anything to do with Zacchaeus because he was a tax collector for the Romans, and they called Zacchaeus a sinner. But we need to remember that we are all sinners and that we all need a Saviour. And we need to remember that we shouldn't think we are better than other people.

Also, Zacchaeus said that if he'd done wrong to anyone, he would make up for it. And we should always try to make up for anything wrong we've done to anyone else, shouldn't we?

And Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Salvation has come to this house today. The Son of Man has come to look for and save those who are lost." (Remember, "The Son of Man" is another name for "the Messiah", that is, for "Christ".) We're lost, that is sinners, too. But when we trust in Jesus to save us from our sins, salvation will come to us, too; He'll save us. We all need Jesus, don't we?

There are lots of things we can learn from the story of Zacchaeus, aren't there?!

So the next time you sing "Zacchaeus was wee little man...", maybe you can remember the story of Zacchaeus and remember some of those things we learned from it today. I hope you enjoyed our talking about Zacchaeus. I have.