

Research: Luke 19:1-10

The Story of Zacchaeus

“The narrative shows that our Lord’s familiar intercourse with publicans and sinners was justified by its results. Zacchaeus became a convert, surrendered half of his great wealth to the poor, and made restitution for his past misdeeds” (Dummelow 764).

“This narrative contains what may well be considered the ‘key verse’ of Luke—viz., 19:10. The incident contains several primary Lukan features: the universal appeal of the gospel (vv. 2-4); the ethical problem of wealth (v. 2); the call of a ‘sinner’ who was in social disfavor (v. 7); the sense of God’s present work (vv. 5, 9); the feeling of urgency (‘immediately,’ v. 5), of necessity (‘must,’ v. 5), and of joy (v. 6); restitution, with goods distributed to the poor (v. 8); and, above all, salvation (vv. 9-10)” (EBC 8.1007).

1 And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

“*Jericho*. The city was close to the fords of the Jordan River, on the frontier of Peraea, and on the richest plain of Palestine, abounding most in the choicest productions, especially balsam; and was, therefore, an appropriate seat for an officer of superior rank to preside over the collection of revenues” (Vincent 1.408).

2 And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

The name *Zacchaeus* in Greek is *Zakchaios* and means “pure, innocent” (Thayer 2195).

“*a chief publican*. There must have been at Jericho one of the principal custom-houses, both on account of the exportation of the balm which grew in that oasis, and which was sold in all countries of the world, and on account of the considerable traffic which took place on this road, by which lay the route from Peraea to Judaea and Egypt” (Dummelow 764).

“Zacchaeus was a ‘chief tax collector,’ holding a higher office in the Roman tax system than Levi did. This system, under which an officer gained his income by extorting more money from the people than he had contracted to pay the Roman government, had evidently worked well for Zacchaeus. His location in the major customs center of Jericho was ideal. Being both a member of a generally despised group and wealthy, he is a notable subject for the saving grace of God . . . Zacchaeus’s desire to see Jesus, though commendable, was surpassed by the fact that Jesus wanted to see *him*” (EBC 8.1007).

“*He was rich*. Though this class of men was despised, and often infamous, yet it seems that they were sometimes wealthy. They sustained, however, the general character of sinners, because they were particularly odious in the eyes of the Jews” (Barnes 242).

3And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.

“*eager to see who Jesus was*. Is this a mere expression of curiosity, as many commentators understand? Or is there something more, a vague discernment of something special about this person who was passing through and of whom he had heard?” (AYB Luke x-xxiv.1223).

“*And he sought to see Jesus*—not to listen to his teaching or obtain anything from him, but merely to see *who he was*—what sort of person this was, about whom there was so much speculation, and after whom such crowds were following. Curiosity, then, was his only motive, though his determination not to be balked was overruled for more than he sought” (Jamieson 3.310).

“*To see*. To see who Jesus was, i.e. to distinguish him in the dense crowd which surrounded him.

“*The press*. The crowd; the multitude that surrounded Jesus” (Barnes 242).

“*Little of stature*. Short. Not a tall man” (Barnes 242).

4And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

“*A sycamore*. Not the English sycamore, but a tree which receives its name from the fact that its fruit is like a fig, and its leaves like those of the mulberry” (Dummelow 764).

“*Sycamore tree*. It grows with its large branches low down and wide open, so that Zacchaeus could easily have climbed into it” (Vincent 1.408).

5And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house.

See or *saw* is *eido* in Greek which means to perceive with the eyes, to discern, to turn the mind to, to behold; perception as denoted by *eido* when conceived of as completed, permits the sensuous element to be forgotten and abides merely as an activity of the soul (Thayer 1492).

Abide in Greek is *meno* which means to sojourn, to tarry as a guest, lodge, to remain, not to depart or leave, to continue to be present, to maintain unbroken fellowship with one, to be constantly present to help one, of the Holy Spirit (Thayer 3306).

“*At thy house.* Jericho was a priestly city, and according to the Talmud contained as many priests as Jerusalem. Specially significant, therefore, was Christ’s resolution to lodge with a publican” (Dummelow 764).

“Not only did he want to see Zacchaeus, Jesus had to stay with him—‘I must stay at your house today’ (v. 5). This divine necessity is stressed in Luke. Luke also has the word ‘today,’ with its special meaning. The reciprocity of the divine, sovereign call and the human response is striking (v. 6; v. 10)” (EBC 8.1007).

“*Abide at thy house.* Remain there, or put up with him. This was an honor which Zacchaeus did not expect. The utmost it seems which he aimed at was to *see* Jesus. But instead of that, Jesus proposed to remain with him and give him the benefit of his personal instruction” (Barnes 242).

“*said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste.* ‘he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out’ (John 10:3)” (Jamieson 3.310).

6And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

“At the same time one can trace the steps of this revolution in the mind of Zacchaeus. In the *look* which Christ gave him—‘When Jesus came to the place, he looked up,’ singling him out from all others—he must have seen something of a *purpose* towards himself, which would at once arrest his attention. Then his addressing him by *name*, as perfectly familiar with him, though he had never seen or heard of him before—this would fill him with amazement, and make the thought instantly flash across his mind, ‘This *must* be the Christ he claims to be!’ But when the *call* followed, in such wonderful terms—‘make haste, and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house’—with which it was spoken, as if sure of instant conquest of his mind and heart. But these, though the *avenues* through which Christ found his way into Zacchaeus’s heart, must not be regarded as the whole explanation of the changes upon him” (Jamieson 3.310).

7And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

“*Murmured.* Found fault, complained” (Barnes 242).

“Now ‘all the people’ complain that Jesus was consorting with a sinner. Similar criticism was made of Jesus’ visit with Levi the tax collector. In each case table fellowship was involved—something that had a far deeper significance than our dinner parties” (*EBC* 8.1007).

8And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

“*And Zacchaeus stood.* Probably after the feast, or on the next day. The effect of our Lord’s conversation was the complete conversion of Zacchaeus, which immediately showed itself in act” (Dummelow 764).

“*Stood.* Describing a formal act, as of one who is about to make a solemn declaration. He was like the Pharisee in attitude, but not in spirit” (Vincent 1.408).

“*If I have taken anything by false accusation.* Whatever I have taken” (Vincent 1.408).

“*If I have extorted anything from anyone.* ‘if I have shaken anything down from anyone.’ Or been involved in any transaction for personal gain exacted through kickbacks or blackmail. The implication is that he does not do this deliberately; but if he has discovered that he has been so involved, he takes action to repair it” (*AYB Luke x-xxiv.*1225).

“*I give.* Up to the time of his conversion Zacchaeus had given little in charity. He now atones for his past neglect by surrendering one-half of his capital. *If I have taken.* ‘Wrongfully exacted ought.’ He proposes to examine into his past transactions, and if he has wronged any one, to make restitution out of the half of his capital which he still retains. *Fourfold.* The Law only required this from a detected thief” (Dummelow 764).

“Zacchaeus’s announcement sounds abrupt and is probably intended to seem so. After all, for Luke the use of possessions is a major indicator of one’s spiritual condition. There is no doubt that Zacchaeus had really ‘cheated’ people. ‘Four times the amount’ was far more than what the OT specified for restitution. Whether or not Zacchaeus knew of these laws, his offer was unusually generous and was the sort of ‘fruit in keeping with repentance’ earlier sought by John the Baptist” (*EBC* 8.1007).

“He was convinced, as we may suppose, by the presence and discourse of Jesus. At first attracted only by curiosity, or it may be by partial conviction that this was the Messiah, he had sought to see the Saviour; but his presence and conversation, convinced him of his guilt, and he stood and openly confessed his sins, and expressed his purpose to give half his ill-gotten property to the poor” (Barnes 242).

“The frozen heart had melted down, the clenched fist had opened and—unlike the rich young ruler—the idol had been dethroned. This was a change indeed” (Jamieson 3.310).

9And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

“The word ‘to this *house*’ was probably designed to meet the taunt, ‘he is gone to lodge at a sinner’s house.’ The house, says Jesus, is no longer a sinner’s house, polluted and polluting: ‘Tis now a saved house, all meet for the reception of him who came to save.’ What a precious idea is *salvation to a house*, expressing the new air that would henceforth breathe in it, and the new impulses from its head which would reach its members” (Jamieson 3.310).

Salvation is *soteria* in Greek which means deliverance, preservation, safety, health (Thayer 4991).

“*forsomuch*. Because. For he has given *evidence* that he is a new man, and is disposed to forsake his sins and receive the gospel” (Barnes 242).

“*A son of Abraham*. Both in descent and character. This the Pharisees would have denied, for they ranked publicans with the heathen” (Dummelow 764).

“They were called his sons who were descended from him, and particularly they who resembled him” (Barnes 242).

10For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Save in Greek is *sozo* which means to save; keep safe and sound; to rescue from danger or destruction; to save one suffering from disease, to make well, heal, restore to health (Thayer 4982).

Lost is *apollymi* in Greek which means to destroy; to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to ruin; to render useless; to perish; to be lost, ruined (Thayer 622).

“Verse 10 could well be considered the ‘key verse’ of Luke. As noted in the introductory comments to this section, the context is rich with Lukan themes, an appropriate setting for a significant verse. The verse itself expresses the heart of Jesus’ ministry as presented by Luke, both his work of salvation and his quest for the lost” (EBC 8.1008).

Ezek 34:16 (to :)

I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick:

“Luke’s Greek has recast the first three words (Ezek. 34:16) and added ‘to save’” (*AYB Luke xxiv.1225*).

“What thousands have thus, all unexpectedly to themselves, been transformed into new creatures! What a testimony to *instantaneous* conversion have we here! The preparation for it may be very gradual; it may take a hundred or a thousand steps to bring the very means which are to be effectual right up to the heart, and the heart itself into a frame for yielding to them. But once let it come to that, and the transition from death to life must be instantaneous—the last surrender of the heart must be so. The result of such words from heaven, as ‘Live’! (Ezek. 16:6): ‘Be thou clean’! (Matt. 8:3): ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee’! (Mark 2:5): ‘Make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house’!—cannot but be instantaneous” (Jamieson 3.310).