

Character: Zacchaeus

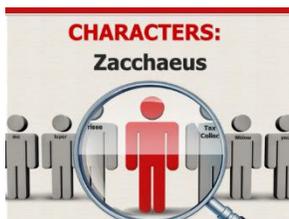
October 30, 2016

Luke 19: 1-10:

¹Jesus was going through Jericho, ² where a man named Zacchaeus lived. He was in charge of collecting taxes and was very rich. ³⁻⁴ Jesus was heading his way, and Zacchaeus wanted to see what he was like. But Zacchaeus was a short man and could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree. ⁵ When Jesus got there, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down! I want to stay with you today."⁶ Zacchaeus hurried down and gladly welcomed Jesus.

⁷ Everyone who saw this started grumbling, "This man Zacchaeus is a sinner! And Jesus is going home to eat with him." ⁸ 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."

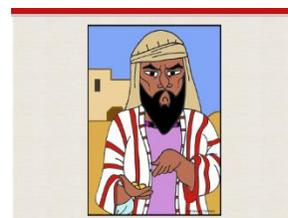
⁹ Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today you and your family have been saved, because you are a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost."



Today we continue with a tax collector. Last week our unnamed tax collector stood far off, beat his chest, and cried out to God for pity. Last week our tax collector knew that he was a sinner in need of God's grace. This week the story of a tax collector gets a little more personal. The tax collector has a name. He is up a tree - both

literally and metaphorically. You see, Zacchaeus is literally up in a tree when Jesus calls him. But he is also up a tree spiritually. Zacchaeus is lost. He is a sinner who does not know God. Today, as we look at the parable of Zacchaeus, we will look at both the ways we are like Zacchaeus and also at the ways that you and I are called to the Zacchaeus' that we meet. Let us pray.

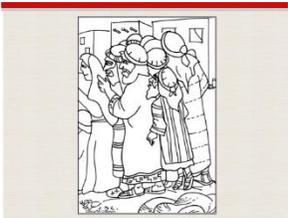
Our story today begins with rumors that Jesus is coming to town. It was apparently common for folks to know that Jesus was heading their way and it usually created a bit of a buzz. The local tax collector, Zacchaeus, catches wind of this news somehow. Certainly no one would have invited him to come along to see Jesus. Certainly no one would have shared the news with Zacchaeus either – he was a rich man, a man who got rich by cheating or coercing money out of people. The threat of the Romans “coming to visit” usually got Zacchaeus what he wanted for his own bank account. Zacchaeus was no one’s friend.



Verse three reads, “*Jesus was heading his way, and Zacchaeus wanted to see what he was like.*” From what we know of tax collectors in general, Zacchaeus was probably way more curious than he was religious. But I do not think this was uncommon during the time of Jesus’ ministry. Crazy stories like blind men receiving their sight and lepers being healed create a buzz. I imagine there were plenty of curious onlookers all the time. It’s like an accident we drive by on the highway – we almost can’t help but look. It’s like the rumors of the schoolyard

bully about to get his due after school from a kid's older brother. It draws a crowd. Everywhere Jesus went, there were the curious, the doubters, those there just to see what this was all about. I think this was Zacchaeus.

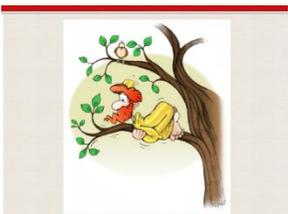
But poor Zacchaeus was short. There was a crowd. He could not see through the crowd. And I am sure it was a crowd that was not about to let Zacchaeus



through to the front. He was a tax collector. The crowd maybe even stood a little wider, stood a little firmer so he could not wiggle his way through to the front. *"So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree."* Zacchaeus finds

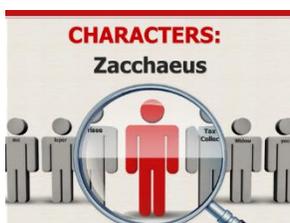
a sycamore tree to climb so that he can see Jesus when he passes by. All he wanted to do was to see Jesus.

So what kind of a tree were you up in when Jesus found you? Were you in the comfortable, "Yes, I come to church every Sunday but do not really have a personal relationship with Jesus" tree? Were you up the "I am far away from God and struggling with life" tree? Were you up the "my marriage just ended in divorce, now what" tree? Or were you up some other tree when Jesus found you? Usually we all get to a point in life where we realize that we each need to make a personal commitment to be in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.



For some of us, I think we looked like this picture of Zacchaeus in a tree. We were barely holding on. We were clinging to a branch. Maybe we were just a curious onlooker

in terms of our faith. For some of us, our faith story slowly evolved and we came to see that we must give control to Jesus and declare Him the Lord of our Life. The branch we clung to was "self". Then Jesus said, "John, hurry down! I want to stay with you today." Or Jesus said, "Amanda, hurry down! I want to stay with you today." Or Jesus said, "Peter, hurry down! I want to stay with you today."



Some still cling to that branch. Some are like the tax collector from last week, standing in the corner, thinking they are not worthy of God's love. Sometimes their guilt or shame can keep them distant from God. Sometimes they think their sins are too great for God to ever forgive them. Other times maybe they are too proud to admit their sin and to seek forgiveness. Maybe they instead try to justify their sins. These and similar thoughts are common among non-believers. I am too bad for God. God could never forgive me for what I have done. God does not know my past. I can do life on my own. I do not need God. My life is just fine without God. They cling to the branch and cannot quite surrender to Jesus.

Or are they like Zacchaeus, up in the tree, thinking "Who, me?!" when Jesus calls out to them. Once we were there too. Just because Jesus calls out does not mean we have to answer. Just because we can sense Jesus knocking at the door of our heart does it mean we have to open the door. Sometimes Jesus has to knock over and over. And He will continue to knock over and over and over.

This calling out is represented in the stained glass window up front. We can sense Jesus knocking at the door to our hearts, wanting to come in. Jesus loves us so much that He never gives up on pursuing us. A personal relationship with each of us is what Jesus wants more than anything. Jesus loves us so much that He will continue to pursue us to our last day. Jesus wants us all to be with Him one day in heaven. In Revelation 3, we hear this in Jesus' own words: "²⁰ *Listen! I am standing and knocking at your door. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and we will eat together.* ²¹ *Everyone who wins the victory will sit with me on my throne, just as I won the victory and sat with my Father on his throne.*" But we were all there once. We all had to open the door. For some, they hear His voice, but they cannot open the door.

Just as we once heard the voice and felt the knocks and did not respond at first, there are many people who hear and feel but do not or cannot make the connection. One does not live very long before beginning to sense God's presence in the world. God is present in so many ways, yet many will deny sensing it. Many will sense God and still choose to dismiss God. Many, however, not only sense God but also desire to connect to God. This is why Jesus came in the first place. His mission is summed up in the last line of our scripture from today, "*The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost.*" That was what Jesus did throughout His ministry. He came to save the lost. When Jesus' time on earth came to an end, He issued the Great Commission. This is

"The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost."

where we come in. Matthew 28:19 states, "*Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples.*" We are sent to those who are lost.



For each of us, part of our story is that we too were once lost. But now we are found. Part of our story is that we too were once each dead in our sin. But now we are forgiven and alive in Christ forevermore. Each and every one of us has a faith story that is unique to us alone. Each and every one of us has faith experiences unique to us alone. The fact that we were all once lost and now are found is a great story. It is a great story that must be shared. There are lost people, desperately clinging to that branch, that want to let go and cling to Jesus instead.

Once Jesus called Zacchaeus down out of that tree, Jesus informed him that He was coming to his house. Jesus said, "*I want to stay with you today.*" This is just another way to say, 'I am standing at the door knocking, will you open the door?' Many there in the crowd that day thought, "*This man is a sinner! And Jesus is going home to eat with him.*" Again, "*The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost.*"

Jesus did not care who or what Zacchaeus was. He simply knew that Zacchaeus was lost and needed to be found.

Who do you know that is lost and needs to be found?

"The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost."



Jesus went to Zacchaeus' house that day. They spent time together, they talked. Jesus' time with Zacchaeus apparently had a great impact upon him. Our passage tells us that, "*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."* Talk about a change of heart. We do not know what stories Jesus shared with Zacchaeus that day. But we do know that the stories Jesus shared radically changed Zacchaeus' life. This we know.

We too were once lost. We too have been found. In this, there is a story. The story of what Jesus Christ has done for you and what he has done for me can help to transform another's life. So I ask again, who do you know that is lost and needs to be found?

Our unique faith stories tell of how Jesus called out to us and helped us let go of that branch we were clinging to. Maybe it was control. Maybe it was pride. Maybe it was addiction. Maybe it was anger. The branches we cling to can be so many things. Many people cling to things other than Jesus. Our stories recall how, for each of us, Jesus became the way, the truth, and the life. Our stories bear witness to how we were able to let go of that branch, whatever it was, and to cling to Jesus instead. This week, may we each begin to see our story. This week may we each begin to see how our story can be used to answer the question: who do you know that is lost and needs to be found?

GPS - Grow, Pray, Serve

1. Zacchaeus was up a tree when Jesus first found him. Where were you when Jesus first found you? How did Jesus get into your heart?
2. Begin to consider your faith story. Begin to formulate the transcript.
3. At times we feel unworthy. At times we let shame and guilt keep us separated from God. What is it that separates you from God? Pray to God and lay that down at the throne. Feel God's mercy and forgiveness.
4. Again I ask: who do you know that is lost and needs to be found? Consider how you will begin this week to help them find Jesus. Pray for God to use you this week to introduce another to Christ.