

The Call of Zacchaeus

Background Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Preschool Sunday School Lesson

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Purpose

To help preschoolers be aware that God calls people to do God's work.

Bible Story

Jesus Called Zacchaeus

Bible Background

Read Luke 19:1-10 prayerfully. First, read it as though you were one of the people from whom Zacchaeus extracted tax monies. Then read it from the perspective of Zacchaeus. Think about the two points of view.

The Roman government had devised a plan to collect taxes from the people. Those who were interested bid for the jobs. The jobs of tax collector were mainly filled by Romans, but sometimes the Jewish people were hired. A chief tax collector was one who hired other people to collect the taxes for him and he supervised their work. Tax collectors were well known for collecting the taxes imposed by the Romans, then adding some on the top for themselves, often quite a bit. The Bible says that Zacchaeus was a rich man, so he may well have added considerably to the tax burden already prescribed by the Roman government. You can understand why the people in Jericho disliked him.

When Jesus called Zacchaeus to his service, he called a person that the people of that day thought to be most unlikely. Zacchaeus, as a chief tax collector or publican, was a hated person among the people in Jericho. And Zacchaeus had another attribute. He was short in stature. When he tried to see Jesus with others in the crowd, he could not see above their heads. Perhaps they purposely excluded him. But Zacchaeus was not without ideas. He climbed a sycamore tree. Imagine the thoughts of the crowd. "That Zacchaeus! He will do anything to get attention."

But Jesus saw more in Zacchaeus than was apparent to those in the crowd. And when Zacchaeus met Jesus, he immediately changed his way of thinking. He answered Jesus' call by doing what Jesus wanted him to do.

Preschoolers love the story of Zacchaeus. As you tell them how Jesus called Zacchaeus and how Zacchaeus responded to Jesus, help them see that Jesus had a message for Zacchaeus. He had something he wanted Zacchaeus to do. Have you ever found yourself in a position such as Zacchaeus did? How did you respond?

People are called for a purpose. The Bible has many stories of people God called. He called Moses to help him free the Hebrew nation from Egyptian slavery. He called David to rule over his people. He called Samuel to give a message to Eli. Jesus called his disciples to spread the Good News. He called Paul to preach salvation in Christ.

What has God called you to do? Pray that God will help you to be ready to do God's work. Think of jobs God has chosen you to do. Thank God for allowing you to answer that call and do God's work. Reread the Bible story and memory verse to remind you how God works in peoples' lives.

Pray for the preschoolers you teach. Your job is to help them understand what God tells them in the Bible at their level of understanding. As you work with them in the learning centers and in group time, help them understand that God loves them and wants them to do God's work on earth as much as they can.

Preparing the Environment for Learning

1. Read through the session procedures.
2. Choose the learning centers you will lead and gather the materials.
3. Find several pictures of Jesus and Zacchaeus.

Bible Learning Centers (35-45 minutes)

Plan to offer as many of the learning center activities as you can. Participating in the learning centers will help the preschoolers think of actions God wants them to take. As they enjoy the activities, comment when they show kindness, helpfulness, cooperation, and so on. Help them know that they are showing God's love to others.

1. Blocks Center

Resources needed: several figures of people (include ethnic figures), Bible with pictures (or a teaching picture of Jesus and Zacchaeus), construction paper book marker. Place a bookmark at a picture of Zacchaeus.

Arrange the figures in the block center. Place the closed Bible near the figures. As the children play with the figures, talk to them about what the people are doing. Emphasize how people can show God's love by being kind to others. Guide a child to open the Bible to the picture of Jesus and Zacchaeus. Tell them that Zacchaeus really tried to see Jesus because he knew Jesus was special. Jesus called to Zacchaeus because He had something He wanted Zacchaeus to do.

2. Art Center

Resources needed: a picture of Jesus and Zacchaeus, and of children showing kindness. Colored construction paper for reminders, yarn, washable markers, hole punch. Print on each sheet of paper "God Calls People." Punch two holes at the top of each sheet and string a length of yarn through the holes. Place pictures of children showing kindness near art center.

Show the picture of Zacchaeus. Say that Jesus had special work for Zacchaeus to do. Read to the preschoolers the words on the construction-paper reminders. Tell them that God has special work for them to do also. God wants them to obey, to be kind, helpful, and loving. God wants them to tell others about Jesus.

Encourage the preschoolers to tell ways they can tell others about God. Suggest that they each draw pictures on their reminders that will help them remember what God wants them to do. Tell them that they are already doing many things that God wants them to do.

Tell them that when they go home, they may hang the reminders on a door or on a wall in their house. That will help them remember the things that God wants them to do.

3. Homeliving/Dramatic Play Center

Resources needed: Bible, picture of Jesus and Zacchaeus, plastic dishes and utensils, play food, napkins, toy pots and pans, paper, and crayons.

Invite the preschoolers to take turns making a meal and serving it to the others. Ask the children to tell what other things they could do at home to be helpful to their families. (Wash dishes, pick up clothing and toys, bring in the mail, and play with the baby). Say that being kind and helpful to family members is something that God wants them to do. Tell them that already they are doing many things that God wants them to do. Open the Bible and show them the picture of Jesus and Zacchaeus. Say Jesus talked to Zacchaeus because he had something special he wanted him to do.

4. Puzzles/Manipulatives

Resources needed: Bible, a piece of construction paper, a plastic table cloth, wooden figures of different people, five plastic letters (J, E, S, U, S), a picture of Jesus and Zacchaeus, a dishpan for sand (or a sand table), magazines and outdated literature.

Print "JESUS" on the construction paper. Put the teaching picture in the Bible at Luke 19. Bury the wooden figures of people and the letters in the sand. Place the dishpan on the plastic cloth on the floor. Invite a child to begin looking for the wooden figures and letters. When the letters have been found, spell out "Jesus." Let the children match the letters to the name on the card. Talk about how special Jesus is. Ask the children to tell some of the things they know about Jesus.

Tell the preschoolers that God wants people to tell others about Jesus. As the figures are found, let the children talk about things they could tell others about Jesus.

Older preschoolers may enjoy finding pictures of families and helpers in magazines and outdated literature. Encourage them to tell you what the people in the pictures are doing.

5. Music

Resources needed: Bible, paper plates, hole punch, stapler, yarn, small jingle bells (not small enough to swallow). Staple two paper plates together. Punch six holes around the outside edge.

Allow preschoolers to make tambourines by using yarn to tie jingle bells onto paper plates. Begin singing "God Is So Good." (God is so good, God is so good, God is so good, He's so good to me.) Continue singing quietly and shaking the tambourines. Ask the children to think of other words they could sing about God. Tell the children that they may sing songs about God to other people. Tell them they will sing the song and use the instruments in storytime.

Clean-Up Time (5-10 minutes)

About two minutes before clean-up time, tell the children that they have only a few more minutes to play. Help them finish what they are doing in each center. Lead the children in putting away their learning materials. Lead them to sing a clean-up song. Comment on how well they are straightening the room.

Group Time (10-15 minutes)

Preparation: You will need a Bible, a picture of Jesus and Zacchaeus.

Help the girls and boys to settle in a circle by saying, "Criss-cross, applesauce!" several times until they are all sitting quietly. Open your Bible to Luke 19. Place the teaching picture upside-down on the floor.

Show the children where the story is in the Bible. If there is a picture in your Bible, show it to them now. Tell the story in your own words. Tell them that Jesus called on a special person in the story. Ask them to listen carefully for that person's name.

Jesus Called Zacchaeus (based on Luke 19:1-10)

Jesus and his friends were on a journey. They walked everywhere. Sometimes it was hot. Sometimes it was dusty. Sometimes they got tired and they would rest.

Jesus came to the city of Jericho. Many people in the city saw Jesus. They started to follow him. Suddenly crowds of people were following Jesus.

A man named Zacchaeus lived in Jericho. He was a tax collector. He was very rich. Zacchaeus heard that Jesus had come to town. He wanted to see him.

Zacchaeus ran to one spot. But he could not see Jesus. He ran to another spot. He still could not see Jesus. There were too many people. Zacchaeus was a short man. He thought and he thought.

Zacchaeus had an idea! He climbed way up into a sycamore tree. Zacchaeus was glad. He could see Jesus.

Jesus looked up into the tree and called, "Zacchaeus, come down. I am going to stay at your house today." Zacchaeus climbed down the tree. He was so happy!

Zacchaeus knew that he had taken too much money from people.

"Lord," Zacchaeus said, "I will give half of everything I have to poor people. And if I have taken anything extra from anyone, I will give four times as much back to them."

When you have finished the story, close your Bible and wait a minute until the children realize the story is over.

Story Review/Application

Ask the children to tell the names of the people in the story. (Jesus, Zacchaeus) Ask these questions.

- How did Zacchaeus finally see Jesus? (He climbed a tree.)
- What did Jesus do? (He called to Zacchaeus. He wanted to go to his house.)
- What did Jesus want Zacchaeus to do? (He wanted him to come down from the tree.)
- I wonder what Jesus thought when Zacchaeus returned the money.
- I wonder what Jesus ate when He went to Zacchaeus' house.

Tell the children that God calls people too. He wants them to do something for him. Tell the children that they could:

- Sing songs to tell people about God just as they did earlier. Tell the children they may sing the song they sang earlier if they wish. Distribute the instruments.
- They could help other people. (Invite the children who made reminders to show them and talk about them.)
- They could show kindness to other people. (Serving food, playing with the baby)

Prayer: "Thank you, God, that you call people to do things you want them to do."

Closing Game/Activity

Lead the children to march around the room, playing the tambourines and singing "God Is So Good" or another familiar song. Add some of the words that the children thought of earlier. Continue singing and marching until all the children have been picked up, or until extended teaching-care leaders have arrived.