

A Call and a Dream

Luke 19:1-10

Sample Sermon

Written by: Dr. William G. Wilson
Pastor, First Baptist Church
Dalton, GA



A Call and a Dream

Zacchaeus. Just his name is enough to elicit a snicker. We remember him as something of a cartoon character. As children, we sang a little ditty about him; we drew pictures of him in Sunday School and made him out to be a sort of “Mini-Me” caricature.

The story of Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus is one of the best-known biblical texts from the New Testament. It is such a human story...a short man scrambling up a tree to see Jesus. All of us have known the burden of being too short to see over others at some point in our life, and so we identify with the words in verse 3: “**He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd.**” The resulting story borders on the humorous and the cute.

And yet, let me challenge that notion today and suggest that this is one of the most powerful and provocative stories in all of scripture. It introduces the very radical notion that God has a distinctive call and dream for each of us and will stop at nothing less than total transformation of who we are.

Let’s take a careful look at Zacchaeus and the world he lived in. Jericho was a veritable Eden. An oasis of date palms and balsam groves, it exported its products all over the known world. There was a day when Mark Anthony had presented Jericho as a gift to Cleopatra, with Arabia thrown in. It lay along the great caravan routes, and was a beehive of commercial and human activity.

Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector for the Roman government in this prosperous city. He probably had a staff of collectors, and he was, very possibly, the most hated man in Jericho. He worked for the occupying forces, and he was regarded as a traitor to his own people. He and his cohorts could stop a person in Jericho and assess duties on nearly everything in his or her possession. A cart, for instance, could be taxed for each wheel, for the animal that pulled it, and for the merchandise that it carried.

He would send in a portion of his collections, and anything over that amount he could keep. The system was ripe for abuse, and this passage tersely states: “**he was wealthy**” in v. 2, as if that were some kind of indictment, and it was.

He had accumulated his wealth in service to the invaders and at the expense of his countrymen, and he was regarded as human filth. Zacchaeus, whose name meant “the pure one” and “the righteous,” had turned his name into a sneer on the lips of his fellow Jews. He was a standing joke.

The money was nice, to be sure. But to live as an outcast among your own people, with no one to call a friend, no social life, no involvement with others except those who wanted to use him for their own ends. It had to be a lonely and depressing existence.

And then along comes Jesus. The word is out that this Messiah is different. Why in the stories he tells, it is the tax collector who is the hero and the Pharisee who is the foil! (See Luke 18:9-14). This Jesus comes into town with a reputation for being comfortable with those on the fringes of society: children, women, and those rejected by the trends of culture found in him a listening ear and a warm reception. He was worth checking out.

That was easier said than done. Zacchaeus was short, and seeing over or through a crowd was a real chore. Trying to squeeze through a crowd to the front was no sure thing, either. In the confusion of the moment, sharp elbows would fly when the townspeople saw the hated Zacchaeus vulnerable in the crowd. His only hope was to skirt ahead of the crowd and find a sycamore tree with its low, spreading branches that afforded a ringside view of the way Jesus was to come. And so he waited there, probably not quite knowing what to expect as Jesus came into view.

And then the most amazing thing...Jesus stopped and looked up at him. (v. 5) We know Jesus had eyes that saw what others missed. This uncanny vision allowed him to see into people and into situations that anyone else would have missed. He didn't miss Zacchaeus. Luke says he saw him and said simply, "**Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.**"

Zacchaeus wasted no time scrambling down from the tree, and he "**welcomed him gladly.**" I'm sure he did. No one came calling for Zacchaeus unless it was to complain, and houseguests had to be a rare exception to his lonely life.

I suppose Zacchaeus could have stayed up in the tree and rebuffed the call of Jesus. Plenty of people do. It is certainly much easier to go on with our life and to continue being preoccupied with our agenda than to allow a Messiah to invite himself over for lunch and delve into our inner core. It is risky business to allow such a person into that part of us where our true self resides. But Zacchaeus takes the chance and invites Jesus into his home. It was a lunch to remember.

This was all a bitter pill for the townsfolk to swallow. What kind of so-called Messiah would even acknowledge, much less eat with, the most notorious sinner in town? Luke says they began to "**murmur**" or to "**mutter.**" You can count on that, and plenty more.

We do not know all that happened at Zacchaeus' house. We do get to see the results, and those results tell us a great deal. Zacchaeus makes a two-pronged pledge: to give half his yearly income to the poor, and to return any stolen funds four times over. Jewish law only required restitution of the money taken plus twenty percent...but Zacchaeus thought four hundred percent was more appropriate.

Something in that encounter with Jesus changed Zacchaeus' eyes as well as his wallet. Now he could see people in need where before he only saw people he needed to fleece. Is that not one of the most dangerous things the call of Jesus does to our eyes? He changes how we see other people. No longer do labels work: poor, rich, Democrat, Republican, white, African American, Hispanic. Now we see people who are as valuable and as needy as we are. Now we see real people with real needs.

Salvation comes to Zacchaeus' house, and he is forever changed from a taker to a giver. This man had made his living taking from others, and suddenly, after one meal with Jesus, he is giving money away like he is the United Way of Jericho. As a pastor, I've observed it time and again. When Christ takes up residence in a life, we become generous. Somehow he loosens our grip on our wallet or pocketbook. Giving becomes an opportunity, not a requirement.

But the giving that God's call evokes is not just financial. Perhaps even more costly is to give him our vocation, our future.

Paul Scherer, in describing this story, says that this meeting with Jesus "**redeemed Zacchaeus' past, it transformed his present, and it redirected his future.**" From now on, Zacchaeus is on a mission from God. Whatever he did with his remaining days was surely more meaningful and more profound than anything he had known before. By the way, there is a somewhat dubious tradition that Zacchaeus later became bishop at Caesarea...it makes for a nice ending, regardless.

We often say that God's call is found at the intersection of your passions, abilities, and interests and the needs of this world/community.

Across the pages of the Bible, you will find God doing what God does here with Zacchaeus: calling people out of complacency and into a dynamic life of faith. Nearly always, the same common threads appear when God calls us out of our tree:

1. The call comes from **beyond you**, from God.
2. The call is **usually unpredictable**. God goes against the conventional wisdom of every era. God picks the slave people, the peasant virgin, the tax collector, the biggest sinner, the improbable Saul of Tarsus. Someone asked St. Francis why God had called and used him so; his response was: **“God picks the weakest, the smallest, the meanest of those on the face of the earth and he uses them.”**
3. The call is often focused on **mind-boggling, seemingly impossible objectives**. “Build a boat, Noah.” “Lead slaves out of Egypt, Moses.” “Come down out of that tree and become generous, Zacchaeus.” “Preach to the Gentiles, Paul.” Such a call is so challenging that it brings out things in us we never knew were there.
4. Each call is **unique**. No call seemed like any other. Every call of God is customized to you, your particular abilities and life setting.

I believe God is calling each and every one of us to a unique series of tasks in our lives. God has custom fitted you for whatever God envisions for you. This is not about comparing to others or denigrating what you are and are not capable of doing.

I recently heard a speaker describe God’s equipping and dreams for us in a unique way. She said she has three children. One rainy day, she sat them all down at the kitchen table and gave each one a blank piece of paper and a box of crayons. She invited them to create a masterpiece.

Now, all three had the same mother and father. All three had been raised in the same house at about the same time in history. But when they finished and brought her their masterpieces; each was unique.

One of her girls colored a beautiful meadow filled with horses, birds, and green grass and trees.

Another colored a shopping mall...

The little boy portrayed a space ship shooting down alien invaders.

Why didn’t they all draw the same thing? You know...because God had uniquely equipped and wired them, just as God has you.

Here’s a promise: when you find your “sweet spot” of ministry, when you discover where your gifts and passions and the needs of our world intersect, you won’t need any test to know, you will know that you are at home.

What was it Eric Liddle said in *Chariots of Fire*? **“When I run, I feel God’s pleasure.”**

That is where God wants your life to move. That is why he calls you out of whatever tree you are sitting in. If your vocational occupation enables you to do that, great. If not, then find one that does. Gordon MacDonald says that when you are living out of that sense of being in your sweet spot, of living out the dream God has given you, your life makes sense and your stress lowers and you find a kind of peace and contentment you have not known.

He compares it to driving a car from here to Seattle. You can drive in any of the 4- or 5-gear speeds indicated on the gear shift, but the drive is best done in gears meant for speed and economy. To drive that distance in second gear would mean engine wear, fuel waste, and slow speeds. If you are living life doing things that distract you from the dream God has called you to, the goal toward which you are to press, then it is like driving in second gear across country. It is time to slough off low-gear activities and focus on overdrive ones. It means you can’t do everything, just the important things. (From *A Resilient Life* by Gordon MacDonald)

When we answer God’s call and focus our attention on it and move steadily toward it, we will live generous lives. Now, please take money out of your mind. What I mean by a generous life is a life that is not selfish and not materialistic and not obsessed with pleasure. It is a life that finds ways to give itself away. It is to be generous **with what one is**, with words and time and attention and focus. It is to understand, at the deepest level, that this is not about you, it is about God’s dream of what God wants to do with and through you, and to offer yourself fully to God.

Zacchaeus stuns us with his generosity in his willingness to repay those he has unfairly taxed. An even more generous gift was the balance of his life, which he apparently gave to Jesus as well.

I want to invite you to give up your small dreams of what your life can be, and to lift your gaze and consider the larger and more daring call of what God wants to do with and through you. It is a question you need to ask of yourself as long as you draw breath.

When Billy Graham held his historic crusade in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1960s, he insisted on an integrated choir. The newspaper editorialized that Graham had come to Alabama and set the church back a hundred years. Graham's answer was classic: **"If that's the case, I failed in my mission,"** said Graham. **"I intended to set it back 2,000 years."**

That's the kind of call to a large dream that Jesus brings into Zacchaeus' life. This is more than a story for preschoolers. It is a powerful story of change. It turns out to be a reproduction in miniature of the mission of Jesus: received by the outcast, condemned by the authorities, inviting those he meets to live out his dream for them, and the murmuring follows him into Jerusalem.

It starts with a little man in a tree. And it ends with that little man living out a very large dream.

Jesus is coming to town. He has an agenda: to seek, to save, and to change the world one person at a time. Let me invite you to climb a tree and watch to see what he is up to. But beware. He may stop beneath the tree where you sit, no matter how comfortable or complacent or secure or immobile you may be. He may look at you and invite you down to fellowship with him and to be transformed by him. It takes courage to get out of that tree, but the gift of a call and a dream for your life are more than worth it.

In the end, Jesus declares that salvation has come to the house of Zacchaeus, that he is a son of Abraham. He was just lost. He had gotten confused about why he was here, and whom he was to serve. Like you and me. Thank God, Jesus comes looking for us and invites us to a better life. He comes to call us to his dream for our future. Thanks be to God!

From Wee to Wow

Luke 19:1-10

Sample Sermon

Written by: Dr. David Olive
President, Bluefield College
Bluefield, VA



From Wee to Wow

The story about Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus found in Luke is one with which many of us are familiar. For those who have grown up in and around church, we remember the song retelling the story of Zacchaeus and his desire to see Jesus – "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he." Although this song that is emblazoned in our minds tells of this wonderful encounter with Jesus, it leaves the listener in suspense as to what happens once Jesus goes and visits Zacchaeus at his home. We are left without knowing the powerful impact rendered upon Zacchaeus' life and the effects of this transforming experience.

As we move beyond the remembrances of this childhood song and into the passage we explore today, our attention focuses on the calling of Zacchaeus and how this experience challenges us to examine our own callings. For some, this is a calling perhaps explored but one that has not been personally embraced. For many of us, we have encountered Jesus and have opportunity today to reassess how we have, and continue, to respond to Christ in living out our callings.

Interestingly, Luke is the only writer to capture this simple story of Jesus' journey through Jericho. We learn that Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector. Although not articulated in the story, we are left to our own imaginations that Zacchaeus' wealth came from perhaps unscrupulous tactics used in collecting taxes from those in his community. He was considered a sinner, and there are examples of other tax collectors who were dishonest in their collection methods.¹ Of particular interest, however, is Zacchaeus' desire to see Jesus. Again, we are left to our imaginations as to why Zacchaeus wanted to see him, but perhaps it was the same curiosity and desire that drives us to a presidential motorcade route for a glimpse of the president or to gather and hopefully get close enough to shake the hand of the Pope or the Queen of England when they visit the States. We can only presume that Zacchaeus had heard of the miraculous stories of Jesus healing the blind and the lame, as well as rumors that Jesus was the Son of God.

We learn very quickly that Zacchaeus was a short man, or as one might express in today's vernacular, Zacchaeus was *vertically challenged*. This is the first point of reflection – if you have the desire, you can overcome any challenge in life to encounter Jesus. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but couldn't because of the crowd. He was blocked from view or access to Jesus due to his height. Here's where we need to ask ourselves a question. What hinders each of us from seeing and experiencing Jesus in the way he desires? For some, the answer may be related to a physical condition from birth or by the randomness of life's circumstances which creates an emotional entrapment too great to fully embrace the grace and peace Jesus has to offer. Others may be hindered by their proclivities or choices, things driven by self-interest, self-gratification, power, greed, or the like, which creates an imbalance in their lives and distances them from a holistic relationship with God. Whatever the circumstances, rather than allow those hindrances to prevent us from our own encounters with Jesus, we need to take a cue from Zacchaeus and climb a tree.

Brad, a young 20-something engaged in ministry to his faith community, has endured the pain of losing someone he loved. His girlfriend of six months was struck and killed by a truck while jogging. He was devastated by the loss, and many in his congregation wondered whether he would fall apart and move away from the faith that he had shared so openly. Brad admitted that he was destroyed at that point, but he trusted God and wanted his life to be used to encourage others who experience challenges in their lives.

A devoted wife and mother of two, Chloe had her world turned upside down as she relocated with her family to a new community, one which might as well have been on the other side of the world. Her friends, her faith community, her identity – all had suddenly disappeared. She struggled as she began the process of putting the pieces back together, but she continued to put her faith in God and trust that God had a plan for her and her family. She realized God could and would use her in this new place.

Both Brad and Chloe had to climb a proverbial tree to see Jesus, to experience the love and grace that each of them needed. What drove them to seek Jesus? They had a desire. Just as Zacchaeus sought out Jesus, Brad and Chloe had a desire to move beyond their challenges and experience the presence of Jesus. Each of us who seek to understand who we are and what we are to be about must desire to encounter Jesus with the same tenacity and ingenuity as Zacchaeus and overcome whatever challenges hinder our pathway to experiencing the fullness of God.

As this story continues, we also witness how quickly Zacchaeus' life is transformed. **That is the second point of reflection – once you encounter Jesus, your life ought to reflect the transformation that has taken place.** We must use our imaginations once again as we envision the conversation that took place between Jesus and Zacchaeus. We know Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly to his home and responded enthusiastically to the call extended by Jesus to follow as his disciple. Zacchaeus' life was so dramatically changed that he committed giving half of his possessions to the poor. He got it! His priorities were reoriented to reflect the priorities of Jesus – concern for the poor, the suffering, the outcasts, and the enslaved. Zacchaeus even felt compelled in offering to pay back four times whatever he had wrongfully taken from those whom he had cheated. His life was transformed, and he willingly demonstrated the change that had occurred in his life.

Aaron, another young man in his 20's, had heard God's call to serve the poor. As he prepared for his departure, he shared this message to family and friends, "Pray that I would learn the secret of being content whatever the circumstance; that I would not focus on maintaining a lifestyle, but rather on fulfilling a calling." Without any plans as to where he would live or how he would sustain himself, Aaron left Virginia for Boston with a few hundred dollars in his pocket. He found a job working with a nonprofit food organization and met an unlikely acquaintance, Ma Siss, who recruited him to form a church in her inner-city neighborhood. Before long, people in the community were calling him "Bishop."

Aaron's life depicted one that had been transformed, and his priorities in life became those of his Transformer's. Zacchaeus was so sold out to Jesus and his vision that he went from being a wee little man to a man of wow! Whether we respond to Christ as Zacchaeus or Aaron did, our lives should reflect the fact that we have been transformed. The radical nature of Jesus' calling to each of us should manifest itself in such a way that our transformation is demonstrated in how we live our lives, not just for the one day we first encounter Jesus, but for every day we live. That's the essence of calling.

As this story concludes, we hear Jesus' pronouncement of Zacchaeus' salvation and his proclamation that he has come to seek and to save. We also are left knowing only that which has been revealed in the story. **It is at this juncture a third and final point awaits our reflection – through your vocation, you answer God's call.** We leave this story knowing Zacchaeus has been, and we assume continues to be, a tax collector. It is interesting to note in certain encounters with Jesus that some leave their vocations to follow Christ, yet in this situation Zacchaeus is not called to leave his vocation but rather called to live his vocation. His vocation does not change, but we know the manner in which he lives out his vocation has changed.

At Bluefield College, one key initiative in the strategic plan is "to enable students to hear and respond to their call." Although a number of students arrive knowing God is calling them into missions or ministry, not every student who comes to the College is pursuing a vocation in ministry. That's why the College believes this is an essential step in helping young people – regardless of their planned vocation – develop an understanding about themselves, their gifts, and how God can best use those gifts through their vocations.

The word “vocation” is rooted in Latin and means “voice.”² Parker Palmer, a Quaker theologian and teacher, notes: “Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear.”³ Vocation is a process of listening for the truths and values held in the heart, and for the called, it is a heart that reflects the heart of God. That is why Zacchaeus could no longer live his life of vocation as an act of his will. Rather, he listened to his heart, a transformed heart, and one that changed who he was and how he lived his life.

Have you experienced God’s calling? My prayer is that your answer is yes and that you seek God’s guidance as to how your transformation is reflected in your life. God wants us to be people of wow! Now, let’s go live it out.

Bibliography

1. Robertson, A. T. (1930). *Word Pictures of the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman.
2. Palmer, Parker J. (2000). *Let Your Life Speak*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
3. Palmer, Parker J. (2000). *Let Your Life Speak*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The Call of Zacchaeus

Background Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Preschool Sunday School Lesson

Written by: Ann Tonks
Calvary Baptist Church,
Lexington, KY



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.

The Call of Zacchaeus

Background Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Children's Sunday School Lesson

Written by: Ann Tonks
Calvary Baptist Church,
Lexington, KY



Purpose

To help children understand that God calls all people to do God's work.

Bible Story

Jesus Called Zacchaeus

Memory Verse

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. 1 Samuel 3:9b (NIV)

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; 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. Zacchaeus answered Jesus' call by doing what Jesus wanted him to do.

Girls and boys love the story of Zacchaeus. But they can also relate to his predicament. They often find themselves in situations where their playmates and friends may not like them, even if it is only temporary. They can understand that

the people may not have liked Zacchaeus, but Jesus did. Jesus saw something in him that apparently no one else did. And Zacchaeus immediately responded to Jesus. He knew what Jesus would want him to do and he did it. Have you ever found yourself in such a position? 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? As you teach, help the children understand that God wants and needs people to do God's work on earth. God calls people, girls and boys included, to tell others about God, to show God's love to others, and to live in God's ways.

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 girls and boys you teach. You never know when God may already be working in the life of a child. Your job is to help them understand what God tells them in the Bible.

Preparing the Environment for Learning

1. Think of ways you can make Jesus' call to Zacchaeus real to them.
2. Print "The Call of Zacchaeus" on a large strip of paper. Obtain at least one picture of Zacchaeus and Jesus. Place the title banner and the picture in a focal area of your room.
3. Print the memory verse on a large piece of construction paper and place it on the wall.
4. Make two or three memory-verse puzzles. Print the verse on several pieces of construction paper and cut them up as jigsaw puzzles. Place each puzzle in an envelope. As the first children arrive, suggest that they work the puzzles. Use them again during the Bible study time.

Preparation for Introductory Activities

1. For "I Hear You!" prepare the room in case the girls and boys want to hide. Move the bookcase a little out from the wall. Place a table against a wall with one or two chairs in front of it. Drape tablecloths over tables or chairs to make hiding places. The game can also be played without the children hiding.
2. For "Bible Treasure Hunt" (older children) print these Bible references on strips of paper, one reference per strip: Genesis 10:28-22, Exodus 3-4, 1 Samuel 3, 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Jonah 1, Matthew 4:18-22, Acts 9:1-19.

Preparation for Bible Study Time (Large Group)

1. Place a bookmark in your Bible at Luke 19 and 1 Samuel 3:9b.
2. If you choose to sing, choose some songs about Jesus that the children enjoy. Sing them before you pray.

Preparation for Application Activities

1. Listening to God Mobile

Collect a large box, construction paper, scissors, colored markers, glue, string, and several outdated learner guides.

2. A.M.A.G. Buttons

Obtain poster board or heavy cardboard, several safety pins, colored markers, scissors, and masking tape. Cut several four-inch circles from poster board or heavy cardboard.

Guiding the Learning Session

A. Introductory Activities (10 minutes)

(Small Group Activity with Younger and Older Children Participating Separately)

1. I Hear You! (Younger Children)

Welcome the younger children as they arrive. Tell them that they will play a game called "I Hear You!" Each child will call (not shout) another child's name. The child whose name was called will answer, "I hear you." The first child will then call someone else. Several children can all play at the same time, calling out the names of their friends and answering each other. Encourage the children to move to different places in the room as they play. Some may want to hide, which would be fine. As children arrive, include them in the game.

2. Bible Treasure Hunt (Older Children)

Welcome the older children as they arrive. Distribute the Bible-reference strips. Guide the children to locate the passages and determine whom God called. They may work alone or in twos or threes.

B. Transition to Large Group

When all the children have arrived and played for a few minutes, call them together and ask them to tell you what they were doing. Ask the children to name other people who might call them (parents, teachers, brothers and sisters, playmates). Ask the children to tell some of the reasons they may be called (time to eat, bedtime, recess is over, need help). Tell the children that God also calls people, even girls and boys, when God has something special to say to them.

C. Bible Study Time (30 minutes)

Point out the title banner and memory verse. Tell the children they will hear a story about how Jesus called someone to follow him.

Tell the Story

Ask a child to open your Bible. Tell the children that the story today is about Jesus and how he called a man to follow him and obey him. Suggest that the older children take notes during the story and make up some questions about it. Tell the story in your own words.

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

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

Everywhere Jesus went, people wanted to see him. They wanted to hear him speak. They knew he would tell them about God. Jesus came to the city of Jericho. Many people in the city saw Jesus and knew who he was. They started to follow him. Suddenly, crowds of people were following Jesus.

A man named Zacchaeus lived in Jericho. He was a tax collector and he was very rich. Many people did not like the tax collectors. They thought the tax collectors took extra money from them. But Zacchaeus did not care. He had heard that Jesus was coming to town and he wanted to see him.

So Zacchaeus ran to one spot. But he could not see Jesus. He ran to another spot. But he could not see Jesus there either. There were too many people. And Zacchaeus was a short man. What could he do? Zacchaeus had an idea! He ran a little way down the road and he climbed up into a sycamore tree. He looked down the street and he saw Jesus coming toward him. Zacchaeus was glad. He could see Jesus.

Zacchaeus watched as Jesus walked down the road closer to him. When Jesus got to the sycamore tree, he looked up straight into Zacchaeus' face and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. For today I am going to stay at your house." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down the tree. He was so happy! He welcomed Jesus joyfully!

But many of the people along the road were not as happy. They began to complain to one another. "He's going to stay with a sinful man," they said to one another. Jesus heard them.

Zacchaeus stood right where he was. He knew that he had taken too much money from the people. He looked at Jesus. "Lord," he said, "I will give half of everything that I have to poor people. And if I have taken anything extra from anyone, I will give four times as much back to them."

Jesus said to the people, "Today salvation has come to this house. Zacchaeus is the same as you are. For I, Jesus, have come to save all the people."

Review the Bible Story

Show the teaching picture to the children. Ask them to describe what is happening in the picture. Correct any misinformation the children may have about the story. Assign the children to two or more teams for the question period. Tell them they must discuss the answers as a team before they answer. Ask these questions to the teams in turn. If one team cannot answer, the other team may have a turn.

1. Why were crowds of people following Jesus?

A: They wanted to see him and hear what he was going to tell them.

2. Why could Zacchaeus not see Jesus?

A: He was too short; he could not see over the heads of the crowd.

3. Why did the people not like Zacchaeus?

A: He collected taxes and took more money than he needed to.

4. Why did Jesus stop at the foot of the tree where Zacchaeus was?

A: He saw Zacchaeus and he wanted to talk to him.

5. What did Zacchaeus do when Jesus called him?

A: He climbed down the tree.

6. What did Zacchaeus say to Jesus?

A: That he would give half of his money to the poor and give back four times as much money as he took from the people he cheated.

Use "wondering" statements such as: I wonder what Jesus thought when people began to grumble. I wonder what Jesus ate at Zacchaeus' house. I wonder if Jesus spent the night at Zacchaeus' house.

If the older children made up some questions, use them as well. Make sure they cover all the information in the story.

Application

Ask a teacher to come to the front of the group. Ask him to turn his back to the group and put his hands over his ears. Tell the group not to answer when the teacher calls out a name. Instruct the teacher to turn back to the group and call out a child's name. Tell him if the child does not answer to call another child's name. Tell him to call out four or five names before stopping. Then ask the teacher to tell how he felt when no one answered him. Remind the children that just as they answer when someone on earth calls them, they need to learn to listen for when God tells them something. Ask the children who looked up the Bible references to tell the names of other people in the Bible God called to do something special. Ask the older children to tell what God wanted each Bible person God called to do.

Ask: "How do you know if God is telling you to do something?" (Reading the Bible, listening to Bible stories, and learning about God.) Remind them that the Bible verses they learn and the stories they read all help them know what God wants them to do. Tell them that at any time God may tell them to be kind and love others. Ask the children to name some other things God may be telling them (obey parents, honor parents, help others, be friendly, and tell others about God).

Learn a Memory Verse

Ask the children to form small groups. Give each one a memory-verse puzzle. Guide them to use the verse on the wall to help them solve the puzzles. As the groups solve the puzzles, guide them to say the verse aloud. Ask them to guess which of the Bible people God called answered with the memory verse (Samuel).

Pray (and Sing)

D. Application Activities (20 minutes)

1. Listening to God Mobile

Tell the children they will think of things God may be telling them to do. Guide them to print "Listening to God" and "Church, Home, Playground, School, Store, and Car" on different sides of the box. Lead them to look through the outdated learner guides to find pictures of things that they might do (be helpful, be friendly, be kind). Guide children to sort the pictures according to church, home, school, on the playground, in the car, and at the grocery store. They will glue the pictures on the box in the appropriate spots. Tell the children that they may overlap the pictures. When the box is covered, ask the children to tell about the pictures they selected. Fasten the string to the mobile and hang it in the room. As the children work, talk to them about some of the things God may want to tell them.

2. A.M.A.G. Buttons (Ask Me About God)

Tell the children that one of the things God calls us to do is to tell others about God. Tell them they may make "A.M.A.G." buttons to give them opportunities to tell people about God. They will each print "A.M.A.G." on their buttons and color them in any way they wish. When the buttons are finished, tape a safety pin to the back of each one. Tell them that when someone asks them what "A.M.A.G." means, they will say "Ask Me About God," and then share a fact about God.

The Call of Zacchaeus

Focal Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Youth Sunday School Lesson

Written by: Carolyn Jenkins
Downtown Baptist Church,
Alexandria, VA



Luke 19:1-10

¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

⁹Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

Bible Background

Such a familiar story is easy to dismiss. However, there are some subtle points that teens can discern and apply to their lives.

Setting: Note that this story of Zacchaeus occurs as Jesus has set his eyes toward Jerusalem and has told the disciples all that will occur there (Luke 18:31-34). Not understanding but willing to follow, the disciples go with him toward Jericho. Outside of the city gates, Jesus meets a blind beggar and heals him. Certainly, word of this travels fast even without cell phones!

vv. 1-2: Jesus is passing through Jericho on his final trip to Jerusalem. Zacchaeus lived there; he was a tax collector or publican.

Rome controlled a vast group of countries they had taken over. Heavy taxes were levied to keep the government ruling. Roman officials would appoint local people to collect these taxes and set an amount. The appointees would then tell the citizens how much to pay... and add more to the total to pad their purses.

Jews despised the taxes and the tax collectors as the money went to support a government they saw as ungodly. And when the tax collectors were some of their own Jewish kin, they felt great hatred for them, even lumping them into a category with thieves and murderers.

Zacchaeus was a “chief tax collector” probably indicating that he was over a district with other tax collectors reporting to him...and giving him a cut of the profits. Needless to say, he was a wealthy man.

vv. 3-4: Obviously Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus and was anxious to see him. A couple of things stood in the way: huge crowds (remember the blind man outside their city gate being healed) and his short stature. Neither of these hindrances stopped him... He ran (unusual for a wealthy man in the Middle East to do) and climbed a tree (surely undignified for his position in the Roman community).

A sycamore-fig or balsam tree in some translations was an evergreen that could grow to a height of 40 feet. The branches tended to grow laterally so it was easy to climb.

vv. 5-6: It appears that Jesus knew Zacchaeus. Had others talked about him? Did some of the crowd point and call his name? Or was this a divine appointment? When Jesus looked up into the tree and called his name, he told Zacchaeus, “I must stay at your house today”—the term “must” indicating a divine necessity or plan.

vv. 7-8: When the crowd began to “mutter,” consider this as complaining. Perhaps there was outright disbelief that one who called God “Father” would also go to dine with such a sinner. Zacchaeus heard these complaints; he knew what he had done wrong. The attention of Jesus seems to have caused him to look at himself. Zacchaeus declared he would give half of all he owned to the poor, and for those he had cheated, he would repay four times the amount.

The Mosaic law was clear: a thief had to restore what he took plus 1/5 (Lev. 6:1-7). If something was stolen that couldn't be restored (for example, a sheep that was eaten or sold), the thief had to repay four times the value (Ex. 22:1). Zacchaeus didn't try to avoid the law—he exceeded it by repaying more than the law required.

vv. 9-10: The response of Jesus, “Today salvation has come to this house,” was not affirmed because Zacchaeus gave money to the poor. Salvation came because Zacchaeus had a change of heart and life. The call of Jesus was answered with a new man in Zacchaeus.

The phrase “this man, too, is a son of Abraham” is for the crowd. Because the Jews had so despised one of their own in the role of tax collector, Jesus is reaffirming Zacchaeus' place in the Jewish community. And Jesus reiterates his mission: “the son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” The response of Zacchaeus stands in sharp contrast to the Rich Young Ruler who would not follow the call of Jesus on his life and went away sorrowful (Luke 18:18ff).

Teaching Outline

Thinking Ahead: Teens often think God's call is only to become a missionary or a pastor. As a result of this study, teens will see that:

- God calls each of us to follow him through Jesus Christ.
- God calls people for specific experiences like a mission trip or to be in a particular ministry in your area for a short time.
- God calls Bible teachers to teach in your church.
- God calls and uses anyone regardless of their past.
- God's call may come when a person is not expecting it.
- God calls some people into a vocation that is a lifelong commitment to a Christian profession.

Early Arrival Exercise

As teens arrive, ask them to write on whiteboard or large sheet of paper every profession they can think of: dirty jobs, big money makers, helping careers, jobs that bring fame, even notorious jobs, etc.

Step 1

Divide teens into small groups (2-4) and give each team a marker and paper. Ask the teams to come up with a list of actions to complete to become the winner of American Idol. If you have access to YouTube, you can even show some of the tryouts. (Leader note: some entries on the list may be: sing from an early age, go through tryouts, have people vote for you, learn from criticism, etc.) Have teams read their lists aloud.

Explain that not everyone gets to win on American Idol, and even the winners are not always huge musical successes. However, in God's way of doing things, God selects people who sometimes seem unlikely to be the instrument God will use for a particular task. Zacchaeus is that kind of person.

Step 2

Have a teen read Luke 19:1-10 or share the reading among several youth. After reading, ask the teens if they can give a definition of these words:

- Publican or tax collector
- Jericho
- Pharisees
- Zachariah

After each is attempted, have a teen read the definition on the cards (*Appendix 1*).

Step 3

Have teens re-read verses 1-4 and tell every characteristic about Zacchaeus that they can find obviously written or subtly implied. Make a list of these. You may want to give a small candy or gum to each student who finds a characteristic.

Read verses 5-6. Ask teens to see if the following sentences are true or false:

A. Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house for dinner.

A: True

B. Jesus already knew Zacchaeus' name because the crowd told him.

A: See suggestions in Bible Background section.

C. Jesus called Zacchaeus a putrid thief and felon.

A: See verse 9.

D. Salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus because he gave money to the poor.

A: False. He changed his heart and life to follow Jesus is the correct answer.

Step 4

Let teens choose one of the following ideas to complete:

Comic Strip Group: Ask teens to choose a partner. Give teens a strip of paper and ask them to divide it into four equal parts. Fold or cut the paper to resemble a comic strip in the newspaper. Instruct pairs to draw off the events of the encounter of Zacchaeus with Jesus using stick figures.

Blog Entry Group: Teens may choose to work in pairs or alone. Write a blog entry of this day in the life of Zacchaeus incorporating the sequence of events as well as feelings you think Zacchaeus may have felt. Have someone prepared to read their entry to the group.

"How Could God Use That Person?" Group: Review the stories of unusual people that God has called for specific tasks, such as Joni Earickson Tada, Ken Medema, and David Ring (*see Appendix 2*).

Step 5

Look at the list of professions written on the wall in the early arrival activity. Ask teens to mark which could be used for self and which could be used for God. Is there a profession that cannot be used to glorify God? Is there a profession to which God would not call a person?

Step 6

Empty a bag of M&M's into a small bowl. Hold the bowl over the head of a teen and ask them to blindly choose one

M&M. Depending on the color drawn, have the teen answer the corresponding question.

- **Red:** Where are some places you go that God may use to call you to do something special?
- **Yellow:** What do you think Zacchaeus did after Jesus left Jericho?
- **Green:** What prevents teens from hearing God's call?
- **Dark Brown:** What advice would you give to a person who feels called of God?
- **Blue:** What is something that impresses you about the call of Zacchaeus?
- **Orange:** When did God call you to commit your life to God?

Step 7

Closing: Tell your own personal story of when and how God called you. When did God call you to teach youth?

Encourage teens to find a time and place alone to spend some time listening to God and reflecting on the calling of God in their own lives. Close with prayer and encourage teens to have open hearts and ears to hear God's voice of calling and hearts courageous enough to respond.

Bibliography

Bible Exposition Commentary. Warren Wiersbe. Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1997.

Life Application New Testament Commentary. Barton, Comfort, Osbourne, Taylor, Veerman. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2001.

The NIV Application Commentary of Luke. Darrell L. Bock. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996.

Appendix 1

Definitions

Cut apart the definitions and distribute.

Publican or Tax Collector

Romans selected these people to collect taxes in the various provinces. They, in turn, would hire others to collect for them, and add on extra charges for themselves. Usually Romans got these jobs, but occasionally a Jew would be chosen, making him despised by the other Jews. They became wealthy!

Jericho

This may be the oldest city in the world; its name means "moon." Rich soil and a warm climate make this a place known as "city of Palms"...with wonderful trees growing in the desert.

Pharisees

A religious/political party comprised of Jews, this group was committed to keeping the Law of the Old Testament. Many were very strict, missing the *reason* for the law and accenting the *letter* of the law.

Zachariah

Name means "Son of Righteousness" or sometimes, "Yah (short for Yahweh) remembered." "Zacchaeus" is a derivative of this name.

Appendix 2

“How Could God Use That Person?”

Joni Earickson Tada, Ken Medema, and David Ring are three examples of people who might seem to be unusual people for God to have called. Yet Joni, Ken, and David have each responded to God’s call and have chosen to use their God-given gifts to minister, despite physical disabilities. Links to their biographies are available below. Review or download their stories for the “How Could God Use That Person?” group to use in Step 4 of the lesson.

Joni Earickson Tada

Joni’s biography is available in the About Us section of the website www.joniandfriends.com.

You may also want to read more about Joni’s life at www.christianlibrary.org.au/cel/homeschool/joni.html.

Ken Medema

Ken’s biography is available in the About Us section of the website www.kenmedema.com.

David Ring

David’s biography is available in the About David section of the website www.davidring.org or as a PDF document at www.davidring.org/pdf/dr_bio.pdf.

You may also want to read the entry about David in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Ring.

The Call of Zacchaeus

Background Passage: Luke 19:1-10

Adult Sunday School Lesson

Written by: Robert Shippey
First Baptist Church,
Rome, GA



Bible Background

The biblical story of Zacchaeus is one of the earliest faith stories that children learn. Many a child has grown up singing, “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he. He climbed up in the sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see.” I love to hear the enthusiasm of children when they shout the command of the Lord that follows, saying, “Zacchaeus, you come down, for I’m going to your house today!” The song gets at the essence of the biblical story. Each of us is small. Each of us wants to see. And when the Lord passes by, we pray that we will have the faith to invite him into our home. But there is so much more. The story is about an outcast who struggles with selfishness and being good and, most importantly, the story equates the moment of salvation with the calling of transformation.

The context for the story is Jericho. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Soon he will face the culminating points of his life, including his judgment by the authorities, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. As Jesus turns toward Jerusalem, Luke tells three stories. The first of these is the story of the blind man who pleads for the Lord to let him see again (Luke 18:35-43). The third story is that of the parable of the ten pounds, which testifies to the consequences of wasting one’s gifts (Luke 19:11-27). In between is the story of Zacchaeus and his struggle—and ours—to see and follow Jesus.

19:1

Jesus ... “was passing through.” The reader should observe that Jesus is passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem in fulfillment of his calling as the Son of God. The Jericho of New Testament times was founded by Herod the Great and was located about 17 miles and 3300 feet below Jerusalem. The city was on the border of Judea and served as a checkpoint for goods coming from the East. The ancient historian Josephus notes that the road from Jericho to Jerusalem was very dangerous (remember the parable of the Good Samaritan). The road itself is a warning of the danger that awaits Jesus as he seeks to be faithful to his calling. [Craig A. Evans, *Luke: New International Biblical Commentary*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990, pp. 178, 282.]

19:2

The introduction of Zacchaeus is succinct. His name means “righteous” or “pure one.” He is the chief tax collector and is wealthy. In essence, Zacchaeus managed the city tollbooth. He was obligated to pay Rome a tax based on anticipated revenue. He then had to recoup his expenses through charging a toll tax on commerce goods passing through his tollbooth. As chief tax collector, Zacchaeus had every opportunity to assess whatever tax he determined, which meant he was able to pay Rome its due and keep whatever overhead he desired, making the system ripe for abuse. [Craig A. Evans, *Luke: New International Biblical Commentary*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990, p. 282.] Know too that in the ancient world there was an understanding of finite resources. To be wealthy meant that someone else had little. The Jews despised tax collectors like Zacchaeus because they believed that their plight was often the result of those who

had taken more than their share. [See David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*, Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000.]

19:4

The sycamore-fig tree, as the NIV refers to it, was a tree that produced a fruit that provided food for the poor. How ironic that Zacchaeus would use the source of food for the poor as a pedestal from which to see Jesus!

19:5

How is it that Jesus knew Zacchaeus' name and why is it that Jesus sought him out? The significance of Zacchaeus' name should not be lost upon the reader. Jesus, who truly is the righteous and pure one, sought out Zacchaeus who is these things in name only. Of importance too is Jesus' willingness to associate with Zacchaeus. He does so unconditionally. Zacchaeus would have been considered unclean and, therefore, untouchable by the Jews. Yet Jesus calls him by name and goes to his home. The one the crowd would have least expected to be called is the one to whom Jesus goes. There is much in this verse to be learned about how Jesus comes to each of us even when we consider ourselves unworthy and how Jesus also calls us to seek out those whom we believe to be less than pure or deserving.

19:6-7

In response, Zacchaeus receives Jesus gladly, but the crowd "grumbled" (NRSV). Evans compares the response of the wealthy Zacchaeus to the rich young man in 18:23 who became sad when he realized what it would take to follow Jesus. There are lessons Zacchaeus teaches us about wealth in the presence of Jesus. Moreover, there are lessons the crowd teaches as well. They cannot believe that Jesus has identified with one they consider to be a sinner. But in doing so, Jesus speaks volumes about the nature of God in light of the covenant of love that has fulfilled the covenant of the law. [Craig A. Evans, *Luke: New International Biblical Commentary*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990, pp. 94-95].

19:8

Does Zacchaeus immediately repent or does he try to justify his actions? The NIV adds the words "here and now" to emphasize the immediate repentance of Zacchaeus. Certainly, this addition is consistent with the larger narrative, as Jesus will announce shortly that "salvation has come to this house" (v. 9). But the Darby translation more accurately translates the passage to read: "But Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I return [him] fourfold." In other words, it would appear that rather than confessing his sin, Zacchaeus chooses to justify his actions over against a crowd that is outside grumbling against him. Observe that the text does not contain a confession of sin. Zacchaeus only welcomes Jesus. A literal reading of the verse would suggest that Zacchaeus stands at the crossroads. We assume in light of the text that follows that Zacchaeus does in fact repent. But this verse dangles us a bit with anticipation. Luke seems to want the reader to ask, "Will he hear the call? Will he follow?" These questions, by the way, loom over each of us as well. [For a fuller discussion, see Craig A. Evans, *Luke: New International Biblical Commentary*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990, p. 280].

19:9

"... he too is a son of Abraham." To have one's life opened to the presence of God is the means by which one becomes a true child of God. One's place in society does not a son of Abraham make!

19:10

That Zacchaeus is the son of Abraham must be seen in light of Jesus, who is the Son of Man. Just as the widow seeks after the lost coin, or the shepherd pursues the lost sheep, or the father receives his lost son (Luke 15), so too the Son of Man seeks out those who are lost and wants to save them. Important here is that there is no condemnation; only the call to gladly accept the one who seeks to reside in our home.

Introduction: "Seeking the Sacred Love of Jesus" (10 minutes)

In his book *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others*, Scot McKnight asks what happens when people permit the sacred love of Jesus Christ to enter their lives? We cannot know what curiosity or what stirring of the Spirit caused Zacchaeus to venture out into the crowd to see Jesus. What we do know is what happens when Jesus comes into his midst. Zacchaeus is suddenly changed. Like the blind man in the narrative that precedes this story of Zacchaeus, he receives new sight and a new heart for added measure. The text does not tell us what happens to Zacchaeus, but in the passage that follows we learn of our Lord's demand that we not waste the gifts of which we have been bestowed. That Luke does

not tell us about what follows in Zacchaeus' life suggests that he wants to underscore the spiritual insight about the need for each of us to seek out Jesus, to welcome him gladly, to invite him into the most private recesses of our lives, and to repent and follow him completely. You see, it's not just enough to repent. There is so much more in store for those whom God seeks and saves. The question the text demands of us is what do we do when Jesus comes into our midst? How do we follow or do we follow him at all?

Divide members into groups and ask them to reflect on the ways they have sought Jesus and on the moments when Jesus has come to them. Ask members to think about the relationship between the confession of sin, the moment of salvation, and the larger calling of one's faith.

Read the Text: Luke 19:1-10 (5 minutes)

Read the passage slowly. Ask members of the class to think of themselves as Zacchaeus. Then have someone else read the passage again asking members to see themselves as someone in the crowd. Emphasize the important role Jericho played in the commerce routes of the New Testament world and observe too that Jesus is passing through with a different set of goods that cannot be valued in human terms.

Engage the Text (25 minutes)

Encourage members to listen to the deeper nuances of the text and to contemplate its meaning for their lives from the perspectives of Jesus, Zacchaeus, and the crowd. Encourage members to ask questions and share insights. The following questions might help with discussion.

1. What is the relationship among the narrative of the blind beggar, the story of Zacchaeus, and the parable of the ten among pounds?
2. Ask members to share stories about how they first learned about Zacchaeus as a child.
3. What is the importance of passing through Jericho?
4. In his profession as a tax collector, how did Zacchaeus fail the two commands of Jesus to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and body and to love your neighbor as you love yourself?
5. What is the significance of the story of Zacchaeus in light of the larger journey of Jesus toward Jerusalem?

Applying the Text (20 minutes)

After members have been encouraged to read the text from the different perspectives of Jesus, Zacchaeus, and the crowd, ask members to reflect on the nature of their own salvation and calling.

1. What can Zacchaeus teach us about following God in our own professions?
2. What was Jesus' attitude toward the outcasts? Why did he seek Zacchaeus out and what does this teach us about how we are to relate to those that society deems undesirable?
3. Beyond our confession of sin, what does it mean to be a "son of Abraham," i.e., a child of God?
4. What are appropriate attitudes toward wealth in light of Jesus Christ? How can our wealth be used to serve our calling or serve as a detriment to it?
5. How should faith be lived when the crowd "grumbles"?

Scenarios for Reflection

1. You have an opportunity to receive a significant amount of money. It will require time away from your spouse and children as well as your church. The deal requires shady ethics that will challenge your own principles and integrity. How will you respond?
2. An individual comes to you and acknowledges that he is HIV positive. You can tell from the smell of his clothes that he has been smoking. He comes in need of not just a helping hand but also a hug. He needs a place to worship, although you know most of the folks in your congregation are "different" in their demeanor. How will you respond?

3. You know Jesus comes to seek out and save the lost. And you know you are saved, but sometimes you feel a bit lost along the way. You feel that there is a larger purpose to your life. You enjoy what you do most days, but want desperately to understand how your activities can better honor God. You sense the Spirit of God speaking to you and calling you to a more holy way of living. How will you respond?

Special Follow-Up Opportunity for Each Individual

1. In terms of one's calling, the Christian life can be thought of as a journey into a deeper awareness of God's presence. The Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggeman speaks of the journey as a movement from being oriented to becoming disoriented to being surprisingly reoriented again (Walter Brueggeman, *Praying the Psalms*, Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1982, p. 17). This was true of Zacchaeus as well. He went from being perfectly situated in his profession to being disoriented in the presence of Jesus to becoming surprisingly reoriented in his new calling. In this way, how is Zacchaeus like each of us?

2. Read Psalm 27. Reflect on meanings for you in each phrase; for example, "The Lord," "is my light," "and my salvation."

Respond to the question, "Of whom shall I be afraid?" Tell the Lord the fears that control you. Personalize each verse as a way to talk with God; then listen.

Finally, rest in God's light with an affirmation such as verse 14: "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage."

Sheet Music/Tabs for "Follow You"

Verse 1

G C2 D4 G/B C D4
Am I just going through the motions every hour, every day?
G Am C2 Am G/B D4
I am looking for direction but I always try to do things my own way.

Verse 2

G C2 D4 G/B C D4
I wish I knew why I was here and what You've called on me to do
G Am C2 Am G/B D4-D
I need to let it go and let You take control and I need to spend more time with You.

Bridge

Em B/Eb G/D A/C# C2 D
I know that I must listen to Your still voice. Open my heart, Lord, and help me

Chorus

G C D
To hear Your voice, I'll hear Your voice and I will follow You
G/B C Em D
I'll hear Your voice, I'll hear Your call, and I'll do what You ask me to
G C D C2
When will You call, when will You call so I may follow You? I want to follow You.

Verse 3

G C2 D4 G/B C D4
We are weak, but You are strong. We are small but You know all.
G Am C2
We need to let it go and let You take control
Am G/B D4
So we'll be ready for Your call.

Bridge

Em B/Eb G/D A/C#
Lord, let us listen to Your voice, Open our hearts
C2 D C2/E D
That we may know You, that we may seek You,
C2 D
That we may hear You.

Chorus

G C D
We hear Your voice, we hear Your call and we will follow you
G/B C Em D
We will be strong and not afraid. Give us the courage to see it through.
G C D4
We hear Your voice, we hear Your call and we will follow You.
C2
We will follow You (repeat last chorus)
C2
We will follow You.

2008 Theme Song

NEW!

The audio file, lyrics, and sheet music can be downloaded from www.consideryourcall.org.

“Follow You” by Gathered by Grace

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”

Isaiah 30:21 (NIV)

Am I just going through the motions
Every hour, every day?
I am looking for direction
But I always try to do things my own way.

I wish I knew why I was here
And what You’ve called on me to do
I need to let it go and let You take control
And I need to spend more time with You.

I know that I must listen to Your still voice
Open my heart, Lord, and help me

To hear Your voice, I’ll hear Your voice and I will follow You
I’ll hear Your voice, I’ll hear Your call
And I’ll do what You ask me to
When will You call, when will You call so I may follow You?
I want to follow You.

We are weak, but You are strong
We are small but You know all
We need to let it go and let You take control
So we’ll be ready for Your call.

Lord, let us listen to Your voice, Open our hearts
That we may know You
That we may seek You
That we may hear You.

We hear Your voice, we hear Your call and we will follow you
We will be strong and not afraid
Give us the courage to see it through
We hear Your voice, we hear Your call
And we will follow You
We will follow You
We will follow You.