



Zacchaeus Climbs a Tree to See Jesus

Luke 19:1-10

BIBLE BACKGROUND
FOR LEADERS

Chief of the Despised

Tax collectors are disliked today, but they were even more despised by the Jews of Jesus' day because they represented Roman oppression. Zacchaeus was not only a tax collector, but also a chief tax collector, which meant that he dealt and contracted directly with the Romans. This would have made him the richest and the most despised of tax collectors. He would have been seen as a traitor and as someone who rejected the Hebrew faith and God. Few would've believed that Zacchaeus' sins could be forgiven. Even the wives and children of such tax collectors would have been treated poorly by the Jews.

It was not mere chance that Jesus looked away from the throng of people who surrounded him and looked directly up into the tree at this seeker who wanted to see Jesus for himself. Zacchaeus didn't even have to say anything when Jesus spotted him; Jesus already had a plan for Zacchaeus.

An Unlikely Invitation

Jesus' invitation to Zacchaeus surprised everyone. The people were stunned that Jesus would invite himself to the home of someone like Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was stunned for the same reason! Everyone would have expected Jesus to avoid association with a sinner such as this tax collector. But Jesus wasn't concerned about people's errant expectations. He was concerned about drawing sinful people to faith in him.

After spending some time with Jesus, Zacchaeus was apparently convinced that Jesus was who he said he was. Some question if Zacchaeus' pronouncement that he would give away his riches indicates he was saved by his good deeds. However, we know that salvation is by faith alone. Thus, Zacchaeus' decision to repay those he had cheated must have been a result of his trusting in God's grace—a proof of a

changed heart. Jesus' declaration that Zacchaeus had received salvation confirmed what had happened in Zacchaeus' heart and the fact that God would accept even a despised tax collector if he placed his faith in Jesus!

The Jesus Connection

Read this week's Key Verse, Revelation 3:20. Jesus stands at the door and knocks—and waits for us to open up our lives to him. How have you responded?

Think about the times when, like Zacchaeus, you've pursued Jesus even when others didn't understand what you were doing. What kinds of reactions did you get? How did Jesus meet you? Then take some time to pray about how you need to see Jesus differently this week. You can write your prayer here.



Letting Love In

Reflect on the following questions and how they relate to your life. Use the space after each question to journal your thoughts.

1. What do you find yourself doing to try to earn God's free gift of love and acceptance?
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to receive God's unconditional love? Why?
3. How easy or difficult is it for you to accept people who have wronged you in some way or who are just not particularly lovable?
4. What, if anything, prevents you from receiving more of God's love?
5. What do you think God is saying to you right now about his love for you? about your love for others?

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DIGGING DEEPER

Luke 19:1-10

► Bible Point—Jesus accepts everyone.

Key Verse—“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

Daily Challenges

Choose one or more of these activities to do this week.

- **Pray specifically for someone you know who does not know the unconditional love of Jesus yet.**
- **Think of someone you’ve had trouble accepting. Reach out to this person with kindness. Kindness is a great way to share the love of Jesus.**
- **Have a private worship time that focuses on God’s amazing love and acceptance. Read verses or listen to songs that talk about God’s love for everyone.**

Through the Week

Use the following passages to explore additional biblical perspectives on God’s unconditional love.

Monday—Romans 15:7

- How has Jesus accepted you?

Tuesday—Psalm 6:9

- When have you known God heard your cry for mercy?

Wednesday—John 13:20

- How have you accepted Jesus?

Thursday—Matthew 18:5

- What kids can you show acceptance to?

Friday—1 Timothy 2:1-4

- When you think about the government, who are some people you can pray for?

Saturday—Luke 12:13-21

- Why is forgiveness an important part of acceptance?

Talk Topics

- Talk about the boundaries of Jesus’ unconditional love. If Jesus accepts everyone, does that mean everyone can do whatever he or she wants?
- Talk about what Jesus’ acceptance of everyone means for your church.
- Talk about how to handle the reality of rejection from others, in light of Jesus’ acceptance.
- What are some ways you need to be more accepting of people who are hard to love?