

Zacchaeus' Tree

“Ordinary Object, Extraordinary Meanings”



“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

The story of Zacchaeus is many times just considered a story for kids and is written off by adults as just a story about a short guy ran ahead and climbed up in a tree like kids would do to see a parade.* But it has a much deeper meaning for adults.

Zacchaeus was not well liked. He took advantage of people for his own selfish interest. As a tax collector for the Romans, he was obligated to collect enough to satisfy the Roman officials, but there was no limit to what he could charge as long as Rome was satisfied, so he evidently had been greedy in his collection of monies from the people and was very rich at their expense. Because they were benefiting financially for their alliance to Rome, they were also sympatric to the Roman rulers. They were not nice people!

Earlier in this same book of Luke, Christ talked about different people who were taking advantage of those less fortunate. He told about the poor widow, the blind man, the Pharisee, and even how people had rebuked children and didn't want them to bother Christ. Now Christ is being friendly to a tax collector!

When Christ called Zacchaeus and told him He was going to his house for dinner Zacchaeus was accepting an invitation that would lead to his forgiveness and eternal life. That is a nice reward for giving someone dinner.

Zacchaeus was eager to see this guy that everyone was talking about. I believe that in his heart he was seeking to know Christ, but he didn't know how to go about it. But he was curious enough to go to see Christ and then Christ did the rest. He called to the short man in the tree. He didn't just say “Hi!” He invited himself for dinner. This was not usual. Christ was a Jew and Jews did not go into the homes of people like Zacchaeus, let alone have dinner with them. This was an initial forgiveness by Christ of Zacchaeus.

The people standing around were really upset. They were stunned and began to grumble. Why was Christ going to have dinner with this man who had taken their money and was leading the good life? Why him? He was the worst of the worst. He was a criminal. But Christ didn't call him a criminal. In fact, Christ didn't even call him a sinner. He just invited Himself to the home of Zacchaeus. The people saw a sinner who had taken advantage of them. Christ saw a friend and a sinner who was lost, but now was found.

Immediately Zacchaeus responded “Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if I’m caught cheating, I pay four times the damages.” Luke 19:8 Zacchaeus was evidently doing good work, he thought, by giving away half of his income, but he was trying to do things by good works, not love of God. That is the real story behind Zacchaeus. We can’t earn our way into Heaven by giving away money. That won’t cut it!

Christ responded and told him that he would have salvation that day. That was quite a change. Zacchaeus was in God’s hands, and he was safe.

Does Christ invite Himself to our home? I think the answer is “Yes, every day.” I’m not sure that Zacchaeus had the opportunity to refuse Him. We do also, but the consequences are not too good! He could have refused Christ. Christ does not push His way into our lives, but the invitation is there. We have the opportunity to accept or reject the dinner invitation to partake of the Lord’s Table.

I wonder how the people received Zacchaeus after that. Are we eager to forgive and forget someone who has taken advantage of us? Evidently Zacchaeus had been very good at collecting money and leading the good life. Now everything was going to change for him. I wonder how the Roman rulers would treat him when he wasn’t sending them the money they wanted.

When we accept Christ as our Saviour, our lives change. We no longer run in the same crowds. We think differently about what we do and how we will speak. It is quite a decision.

The life of that little man was totally changed that day. He put himself out on a limb, both figuratively and actually. The door must be opened from the inside. He opened the door and accepted Christ into his home. We must make that decision because we have Christ waiting to come in every day. As the old song says “He’s only a prayer away.”

Prayer: Spirit of the Living God, please come into my heart. Save me from myself because I am often my own worst enemy. Give me the courage to start today and let You come into my heart, and then lead my life as a changed person who knows Your love and salvation. Amen

1. For Zacchaeus, was it a no-brainer to welcome Christ into his home?
2. Is the choice as clear to you? Do we sometimes think we can earn our way to Heaven?
3. Is there something keeping us from giving up our old way of life?
4. Many times we are comfortable with our life, but we need to improve it by showing how God has given us that assurance that He is always with us. How can we do that for others?
5. Does following Christ sometimes put us “out on a limb”?

*“Zacchaeus”

"Zacchaeus was a very little man ,
And a very little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see.

And when the Savior passed that way
He looked up in the tree.
And said, 'Zacchaeus, you come down!
For I'm going to your house today!
For I'm going to your house today!'

Zacchaeus was a very little man,
But a happy man was he,
For he had seen the Lord that day
And a happy man was he;
And a very happy man was he.”