Illustrations created with Grok (AI) and reviewed by our team

# Zacchaeus Climbs a Tree

Luke 19:1–10 · Bud · Ages 9–12

Jericho, near the Jordan, was one of the richest towns in the region: a crossroads for trade, with palm groves and balsam gardens, and a natural place for a tax office. Luke tells us that Jesus passed through it on his last journey up to Jerusalem (Lk 19:1–10).

Zacchaeus was not an ordinary tax collector but a chief tax collector, and wealthy. Rome sold the right to collect taxes to local contractors, who could charge more than was owed and keep the difference. To his neighbors, Zacchaeus worked for the occupying power and cheated his own people. Luke's word for what the crowd called him is simply 'sinner'.

But he wanted to see Jesus. Luke gives two obstacles: the crowd and his height. So a rich, important man does something undignified. He runs ahead and climbs a sycamore fig, a broad, low-branched tree common around Jericho.

Then the surprise. Jesus stops beneath the tree, looks up, and calls him by name. He tells him to come down quickly: today Jesus needs to be his guest. Luke's Greek has the little word 'must' here, a word he often uses for God's plan (Lk 2:49; 9:22). This visit is no accident. And 'today' is another of Luke's favorite words: salvation is not only in the future; it arrives now (Lk 2:11; 23:43).

Zacchaeus hurries down and welcomes him joyfully. The crowd mutters: of all the houses in Jericho, he picked a sinner's.

Zacchaeus' response goes far beyond what the Law required. Half his wealth goes to the poor. Anyone he has cheated will be repaid four times over. Fourfold was the penalty the Law of Moses set for a thief who stole a sheep. Zacchaeus freely chooses that strict standard for himself.

Jesus declares that God's salvation has entered this home this very day, because Zacchaeus too belongs to Abraham's family. And he sums up his whole mission as the Son of Man: to go after people who have lost their way and bring them home.

Notice the order. Jesus doesn't demand that Zacchaeus change before he will come. Mercy comes first; conversion follows. Yet the change is real and costly, because true sorrow for sin includes making things right with the people we have hurt (CCC 2412).

## Talk about it

1. Why do you think the crowd was upset that Jesus went to Zacchaeus' house?
2. What did Zacchaeus promise, and why was it more than the Law required?
3. Is there something you need to make right with someone? How could you do it?

Key verse: Lk 19:10. Look it up in your Bible.