

Talks – Zacchaeus – myfishbites.com

Luke 19.1-10

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

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

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

But 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.”

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

Question?

When you pass through your place of influence / the place where you spend most of your time, how do people react? Do they respond to Jesus that's in you? Are you living a life where people know they can relate to you / talk to you / where you'll listen to them / be positive / help them..? This was the kind of impact Jesus had on people. While we're not Jesus, we do have God with us all the time (the Holy Spirit) and we can and should be a force for good in people's lives.

Zacchaeus

Do you ever wonder why any of your mates would be interested in God or church? I do. In the West, so many people seem to have so much. People have computers, clothes with the right labels, gadgets, X-Box/Playstation/Wii and the list goes on. Zacchaeus was one of these people. We read that he was 'wealthy' so we know he was loaded and probably had a house with all the latest gear, wearing the best 'Jericho' label clothes.. He had also 'made it' in his profession, as we know he was tone of the big bosses in the tax collecting business.

BUT.. There was something about Jesus that Zacchaeus couldn't resist. He wanted to see who this Jesus was. There was obviously something deep down inside of him that wanted to know more, see more, hear more about Jesus. But there was one stumbling block – he was short. But Zacchaeus hadn't made it to the top of the business by letting setbacks affect him. Instead, he found a solution to the problem and climbed up a tree, to get up high. But he was even more determined than that. In order to get a good view of Jesus, he even ran ahead of the and probably through the crowd – his little legs whirring away to make it in time.

The greater the effort you make to meet with and reach after Jesus, the more reward there will be. Jesus says that when we draw close to him, he draws close to us.

Jesus

When Jesus reached the spot where Zacchaeus, he stopped, looked up to him and told him to come down immediately because Jesus wanted to stay at his house that day.

What an incredible moment. Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, stopped where Zacchaeus was. If we want to know about the nature of Jesus, we get it from this moment. Jesus stopped and spoke to Zacchaeus. Jesus knows where you are – whether you're up a tree or not – and wants to speak to you, take time with you and just hang out with you. Jesus looked up to Zacchaeus and although he needed to (as Zacchaeus was up a tree), I see this as Jesus honouring Zacchaeus. He didn't patronise him by saying, "Get down shorty" or "What are you doing up a tree? Are you a cat? Shall I call the fire service..?" Instead, he looked up to Zacchaeus, and honoured him. Jesus wants to do the same for you – he loves you and his eyes are on you wherever you are and whatever you're doing.

Then Jesus told Zacchaeus he wanted to stay at his house. Jesus did physically, what he wants to do spiritually – to come and stay with you. He went to the house of Zacchaeus, but he wants to live in your hearts and change you from the inside-out, as the Hillsong tune says. Of course, we have to respond like Zacchaeus, who gladly jumped down and welcomed Jesus to his house.

Jesus is the only one who can change people. Despite our efforts, we can't truly change a person's life. Yes, we can help, encourage and even inspire people. But change comes from within. It can come from a personal decision. But if you want to see a permanent change of someone's heart, only Jesus can do this. When Jesus went to stay with Zacchaeus, something happened in the life of Zacchaeus – he changed dramatically. In front of all the people, Zacchaeus stood up and said, *"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."* We need to know and help others understand that giving is more powerful, satisfying and life-changing than receiving. In the Channel 4 TV programme, 'The Secret Millionaire', a millionaire is sent into a community undercover. After 10 days, they reveal themselves to the people they've met that they are a millionaire. They then give away large sums of their own money. Time after time, the programme found that the millionaires themselves were changed, realising that in their riches they were empty. But they found that giving and serving, helping others was so incredibly rewarding. The same is true for us.

So drastic was the change in the life of Zacchaeus, he even paid back money – losing money himself in the process. Jesus responded by praising God and declaring that, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."* Despite apparently having everything, Zacchaeus gained something far greater – salvation. This means that his heart changed and he said yes to Jesus. This is the heart of Jesus – to find people who are looking for something more than this empty life can offer. His love, truth, time and effort with Zacchaeus was what made the difference. Jesus is still in the same business today – both inside us and by using us to reach others.

Today, like Zaccheus, what are you prepared to give up in order to see God do even more amazing things in and through you?

Us

If we want a model of how to let Jesus use you to touch lives for his kingdom, the story of Zacchaeus gives us one model.

The NIV gives this part of the Bible a heading, "Jesus brings salvation to Zacchaeus' Home". We need to remember that it is Jesus alone who brings people to him and changes them. We have a part to play, but it is about the work of God through the Holy Spirit. That is why prayer is so essential as it can open up doors and opportunities that God can work through, using us. But Jesus changes people by 'living' in us. It's not like some weird demon possession as in the movies but something quite amazing. If we are made up of a mind, a body and a spirit – then what Jesus does is change us in our spirit. Instead of being controlled by evil and darkness, Jesus comes along and lovingly fills our spirit by his Spirit. As a result, our mind and our body is changed to be like Jesus. We start to think and act like him. Not because we're told to – that's called legalism and it's found in all the religions of the world. But Jesus brings something completely unique – he freely gives us life in this world and for ever – as a free gift.

Secondly, Zacchaeus was looking for Jesus. He was searching for something deeper and more meaningful than what he had. We must ask God to show us those people who are searching for truth, who need help and who we can encourage and serve. This can be a simple prayer at the start of and throughout a day – "Jesus, please bring people to me who need a touch from you and who I can serve and allow you to change through me."

Third, while the crowd got angry with Jesus speaking to a 'sinner', Jesus passed no judgement. He simply looked at Zacchaeus and encouraged / valued him, by speaking to him and looking up to him. Jesus was no celebrity Christian, but someone who saw what God his Father wanted him to do and willingly and joyfully did it. Most likely there wasn't a huge queue of people lining up to hang out with Zacchaeus the chief tax collector, especially one who'd ripped off people. But Jesus took a risk (as always) and went to eat with Zacchaeus. His one simple act was enough to challenge Zacchaeus and enable him to turn round a messed up life into a life where he was ready to give to others beyond what he needed to give. This is a picture of what happens when someone who is lost in a screwed up place really meets Jesus. The result is often dramatic. By Zacchaeus calling Jesus, "Lord", he became part of the biggest and best family in the world – the family of God.

Fourth, Jesus changes us even if we are part of God's family. He challenges us to follow his example, to love as he loved, not to judge but to be part of his plan of restoring and helping people back to God. Why is this a good thing? Because without God, life begins to lose its meaning. If you chase after fame, you will be disappointed. If you chase after sex and relationships, you will be hurt or find consequences. If we chase after money, we find that we can lose it. If you don't believe there is a God, then life is meaningless and only able to be lived for the now, as you believe there is nothing when you die. But if you follow God, he promises life to the abundance now, and an eternal life that goes beyond anything you can imagine.

This is why God calls us to be part of his plan – showing people that real life can be found in Jesus alone. Our other job is to live such radical Christian lives, that people want to be part of it. Too often, the church is seen as religious, stuffy, irrelevant and full of small-minded people who judge or hate everyone not like them. We are the ones who have to change this – to show Jesus is real, alive and offers something way beyond anything the world can offer. Jesus – the way, the truth, the light and the life. The only life.