

# A Bible Adventure

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## Salvation for a Swindler

*A retelling of Luke 19:1–10*

Contrary to some opinions, Jesus was not against riches, especially not when the owners put them to good use. Today, whenever the subject of affluence is mentioned in the Bible, many people only remember the story of the rich young ruler who went away sorrowfully after Jesus admonished him to share his riches with the poor.<sup>1</sup> But have you ever heard about Jesus' encounter with a certain wealthy businessman of Jericho?

Zacchaeus was an infamous character, especially when compared to the many devout persons who walked the streets of that city. He was

a wealthy tax collector, and to the Jews, tax collectors were likened to the lowest of sinners. They were well known for being extortionists and robbers of the poor. The people also considered them traitors to their Jewish brethren, since they worked for the despised government of Rome as well as pocketing profit for themselves.

One day, however, something changed for Zacchaeus. He had already heard about Jesus and the many miracles that He had performed, yet he was even more fascinated with Jesus' reputation as a friend of sinners. In fact, one of Jesus' own disciples,

Matthew, had once been a tax collector.

For some time, Zacchaeus had wanted to meet the carpenter-turned-prophet.

“How can a man apparently so religious be a friend of people like me,” he wondered, “when the priests, and even many people of my city, spit at the mention of my name? Would Jesus be my friend?”

Zacchaeus had no true friends outside of his immediate family, and he had begun to feel dissatisfied, realizing that it took more than wealth to bring true contentment. After all, he

had a fine home and a stable position, but something in his life was missing, although he wasn't sure what it was.

Then, one day, Jesus passed through Jericho. When Zacchaeus heard that He was in town, he closed his office and hurried off to see Him. A large crowd surrounding Jesus was already moving slowly down the road, but poor Zacchaeus was too short to see anything. He spotted a large sycamore tree up ahead of the crowd, and disregarding what the people would think of his actions, he scurried past them and clambered up into the tree in order to see Jesus.



When Jesus reached the sycamore tree, He turned and looked up.

“Zacchaeus!” he called.  
“Come down, for I must stay at your house today!”

[Image] Zacchaeus was shocked! How could Jesus have known his name? On top of that, the Lord wanted to stay at his house! As Zacchaeus slid down from the tree, it was hard to believe that there had not been some sort of mistake. However, realizing Jesus was serious, Zacchaeus joyfully escorted Jesus to his home.

When they arrived, the crowd that followed stood outside murmuring indignantly. “How can this be? Jesus has gone to be a guest of a man who is a sinner! How could He, Jesus, come to our fair city, a center for religious training, and yet choose to lodge with such a scoundrel as that?”

Nevertheless, Jesus had looked into Zacchaeus’ heart and seen his hunger for love, understanding, and acceptance.

“Lord,” Zacchaeus declared, “I have determined to give to the poor one half of all that I own, and to those whom I have cheated or taken advantage of, I promise to restore unto them four times more than I took from them.”

Here was a man who had lived luxuriously and selfishly, but who, after meeting Jesus and hearing His words, had experienced a dramatic change. During that one encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus had discovered that wealth was unimportant except when its owner shares it with others. For the first time in his life, he felt that he understood the meaning of love and giving.

“Today salvation has come to this house,” Jesus exclaimed

within earshot of the grumbling crowd. “For truly the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost!”

Now it did not matter how bad Zacchaeus had been before. God’s love was more than big enough to forgive him, and this incident marked the beginning of a new life for Zacchaeus. He would no longer be indifferent to the people and

the world around him. Now, instead of treating others as mere opportunities for gain, he would use his wealth to benefit those in need. He had found that giving brought satisfaction. He had learned the truth of Jesus’ words: “Give and it shall be given you, pressed down, shaken together, and running over!”<sup>2</sup>

**Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> See [Luke 18:18-25](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Luke 6:38](#)

