

Encounters with Jesus: Zacchaeus Luke 19:1-10

Retell the story

- At this point in the gospel Jesus is well on his way to Jerusalem where he will be crucified on the cross. But Jesus still has time for people along the way as we see in this story
- So Jesus enters this town called Jericho and is passing through. Obviously many had heard that Jesus was on his way since a large crowd had gathered and were lining the street to see Jesus.
- One such person was Zacchaeus. Luke is very quick to tell us about Zacchaeus.
 - We find out his job, his financial situation and his height.
- Because of his height Zacchaeus has a problem, his view is blocked. As a tax collector he wouldn't have been a liked man so no one lets him through to get to the front.
- But Zacchaeus really wants to see Jesus so he runs on ahead and in desperation climbs a tree to get a look at Jesus.
- So Zacchaeus is happily sat up in the tree watching and then Jesus is standing at his tree calling him down and asking to come to his house.
- Zacchaeus responds gladly and takes Jesus to his house much to the disgust of everyone else.
 - They are saying why is Jesus spending time with men like Zacchaeus.
- So Jesus and Zacchaeus spend a little time together then Zacchaeus stands up and makes this declaration.
 - Right here and now he is going to give away half of what he has
 - Anybody he has cheated will receive back four times what he took.
- Jesus explains to the crowd why Zacchaeus is acting in this way and its because of salvation.
 - Jesus came to seek and save the lost and one of the many people he sought and saved was Zacchaeus.

So what does this story tell us about ourselves and about Jesus.

Let's look a little deeper at who Zacchaeus was

- He is a short, wealthy man whose day job was as a chief tax collector so he must have also been successful to become chief.
 - At first glance he looks like he is doing pretty well at life.
 - He is the kind of person you would look at and think you don't have any issues
 - enough money to buy what you want
 - a good job
 - life sorted
- But lets dig a little deeper and see if it is that good.
 - Its not. Zacchaeus has a big problem.
 - He was a despised man in his community
 - We know he was despised because people wouldn't let him to the front to see so he had to climb a tree. They ignored and shunned

him to the back. If you are in a crowd and a shorter person is behind you, you would let them see.

- Why was Zacchaeus despised?
 - He collected tax – we still don't like the tax man
 - He worked for the Romans who were the occupying power at the time making him a traitor to his people the Jews.
 - Roman taxes were excessive and a hot topic in Jesus' day.
 - There were no laws protecting the hard-working taxpayers either.
 - People were required to pay large amounts to a cruel, foreign government, and the tax collectors openly added extra for themselves.
 - Zacchaeus became rich by using his position to take as much as he wanted.
 - This left the people overtaxed and resentful of because he was stealing from them. Making them poor whilst he got rich.
 - And since he had the full support of the Roman authorities, the people were powerless to stop him.
 - So, you think we have it bad with taxes we got nothing to complain about!
- So, although Zacchaeus has money, he is an outsider within his community and we don't know for sure but perhaps he had become weary of money realising it could not give him what he wanted and has started yearning for something better. Well Zacchaeus gets more than just to see Jesus; he gets a personal encounter with Jesus and that is what we are going to spend most of the rest of our time looking at today. How Zacchaeus changed as a result of his encounter with Jesus. I've broken it down into 3 different sections...
 - A seeking man became found
 - A small man became big
 - A bad man became good
- A seeking man became found
 - Zacchaeus shunned by everyone finds refuge in a tree to achieve his goal of seeing Jesus.
 - A despised man hiding in a tree
 - Just imagine for a moment what life for Zacchaeus would have been like
 - People would have ignored him
 - Crossed the street to avoid him
 - Hated him
 - Then all of a sudden the one man everyone is out to see is looking up at him, at little Zacchaeus and speaking to him
 - Calling him personally by name
 - Wanting to come to his house.
 - Notice Zacchaeus doesn't initial this at all. Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus house.

- We don't know exactly why Zacchaeus was there that day. Maybe mere curiosity and he may not have realised how much he needed Jesus. But Zacchaeus whether he knew it or not was lost in life.
 - Lost without knowing it
- We like Zacchaeus are lost and need God to find us and save us. And just as Jesus stopped and found Zacchaeus if you are lost this morning and are looking for a new beginning, Jesus will find you.
 - God doesn't say clean yourself up then come to me, he comes to us in our mess and loves us.
 - Jesus is willing to come to our house, but will you let him in?
- A small man became big
 - It's not Zacchaeus fault that he was short and couldn't see over the crowd.
 - But he did what was necessary to overcome his handicap but putting aside his pride and climbing a tree.
 - People must have laughed seeing Zacchaeus having to climb a tree because he was so short.
 - Zacchaeus wasn't just little in stature physically but also came up spiritually short.
 - Zacchaeus was a bad man. A thief and a cheat. A traitor to his people, so they rejected him and couldn't understand why Jesus would spend time with a man like that.
 - We probably like to think that we are nothing like Zacchaeus but the reality is we are just like him.
 - But we all do bad things and deserve to be rejected by Jesus
 - The Bible tells us that we have all fallen short of Gods standards. We are all naturally bad.
 - Romans 3:23 tells us – for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
 - We are all little in stature when we come before God, too little to enter heaven and that will be hard for some to hear.
 - We all to often measure ourselves against man's standards
 - Money, position, authority, popularity
 - And the result is you come out looking 'big' and thinking you have everything when the reality as Zacchaeus came to see is that you have nothing.
 - Mans standards are not Gods standards.
 - Gods standard is do you love him and follow him. You cannot earn your way into heaven, Jesus is the only way. Without Jesus we will always fall short.
 - Zacchaeus decided to follow Jesus, will you?

- If the answer is yes then you receive the greatest gift ever of being a child of God and you are as 'big' as they come
- If the answer is no then you are in grave danger.

A bad man became good

- The story of Zacchaeus concludes with his life being distinctly different from how it started.
- For years Zacchaeus had been lining his own pockets with other peoples money through dishonest means. But a short encounter with Jesus changed all that.
 - Immediately he cleaned up his act and sought retribution for all his wrong doing.
 - He gives away half of his wealth and pays back people more than he took.
- Why does he act in this way?
 - It is certainly not to earn the favour and approval of Jesus but it is in response to the love Jesus shows him.
 - In gratitude for what Jesus has done, Zacchaeus acts.
 - When you truly encounter Jesus he utterly transforms your life from lost to found, sinner to saved and that impacts how you live.
 - The Bible tells us that faith without deeds is dead.
 - Those deeds are not earning your salvation, Jesus did that fully on the cross but the deeds are symbols and signs of your salvation.
 - Love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all.
 - That is the reality of knowing Jesus.
 - When you understand the cost of salvation being Jesus death on a cross you cannot hold back from giving all to Jesus in return. It is an irresistible desire.

So, we have seen the effects on Zacchaeus from an encounter but what does it tell us about Jesus.

It tells us that Jesus:

- seeks us in our mess
- knows us personally
- sees value in every person
- saves those who seek him
- transforms our lives fully.

Jesus tells us at the end that he came to seek and save the lost. That hasn't changed, that is still what Jesus is doing. So the question is are you willing to be found?

Just like Zacchaeus, we all need to encounter Jesus. He has no requirements for us to meet first. We don't have to make all things right with all our dealings before letting him in. He already knows who we are and what shape our lives are in. He wants to meet us anyway.

In this series we have seen a roman official, a desperate woman and now a wealthy man who have all encountered Jesus and had their lives changed. It doesn't matter who you are, what you are like Jesus arms are wide open to you? Will you accept his invite to become one of his.

His presence alone and his love for us will lead us to do things we never thought we could do: even admitting where we have been wrong and making things right.