

Who was Zacchaeus in the Bible?

Zacchaeus in the Bible was a man whose life-changing encounter with Jesus was recorded by Luke (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus was one of the head tax collectors in the region of Jericho, and the Bible says he was a rich man. Jewish tax collectors like Zacchaeus were scorned by their countrymen for a couple of reasons: one, they were known for cheating the taxpayers; and, two, they worked for Rome. The other Jews saw Jewish tax collectors as collaborators with the enemy—traitors to their own people.

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus as the Lord passed through town, but, because Zacchaeus was a short man, he could not see over the thronging crowd. Knowing that Jesus would pass by a certain sycamore tree, Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed the tree, figuring he could see Jesus passing below. This action is interesting. First, Zacchaeus did not think himself important enough for Jesus to notice. Second, he wanted to see Jesus anyway. Like an eager fan going to extreme measures to catch a glimpse of a movie star who he knows will not notice him, Zacchaeus climbs a tree just to get a glimpse of Jesus passing by. To the complete astonishment of Zacchaeus and the crowd, Jesus stopped under the tree, looked up, and said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

Zacchaeus was overjoyed, but the crowd grumbled because Zacchaeus was a tax collector, and they could not understand why Jesus would choose to associate with such a man—a “sinner” as they called him (Luke 19:7). Zacchaeus, however, was so affected by the incident that he stood up and declared, “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” (verse 8). Jesus happily proclaimed that salvation had come to Zacchaeus’ house, and that even the tax collector was now “a son of Abraham” (verse 9)—a

reference to Zacchaeus' faith because those who have the faith of Abraham can truly be called the sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). Then Jesus responded to those who had murmured against Him, saying, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). As Jesus said elsewhere, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Matthew 9:12).