

ZACCHAEUS

The man who climbed a sycamore tree.

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Name meaning: “pure” or “justified” or “righteous one”

He was a wealthy man from Jericho. He was short.

Setting of the story: When this occurs, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem for Passover (the last supper) and the cross. He and the disciples are on the way from Samaria, passing through Jericho.

Jericho: The city of Jericho was five miles west of the Jordan River and 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. This is the first city God gave to Joshua to conquer in the promised land and was the “firstfruits” given back to God (Joshua 6). A curse was placed by God on the man who would rebuild it. The man who rebuilt it in the days of Ahab reaped the curse in all its fullness (I Kings 16). In Jesus’ day it was like a resort area (built up by Herod the Great) – the Las Vegas of that time.

(“Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee” p. 331)

It was the crossroads of the approach to Jerusalem and the crossings of the Jordan River to the lands east. It had a great palm forest and balsam groves. The rose gardens of the city were renowned. Josephus calls Jericho “the fattest in Palestine”. Romans carried its dates and balsam to world-wide trade and fame.

Thus, Jericho was a great taxation center. *(“Gospel of Luke”, William Barclay, p. 243)*

Tax collector (publican): Publicans were the Roman tax-gatherers, of whom there were several classes. The Roman senate farmed the taxes to rich capitalists who agreed to pay a certain sum into the public treasury and reimburse themselves from the collected taxes. These were called *publicani*. They were an influential part of the Romans and occupied a kind of middle rank between the Roman senators and the people. These however, are not mentioned in the New Testament. The “publicans” so frequently referred to there were the *portitores*, or men who were employed by the *publicani* to collect the taxes in the provinces. They were supervised by the *sub-magistri* who made the returns to the *magister* at Rome. Zacchaeus was a *sub-magister* or “chief of the publicans”. Matthew (aka Levi) the disciple, was one of the *portitores* or tax-gatherers. It is said that the Jews would not associate with the tax-collectors, nor allow them in the temple or the synagogue; nor would they permit them to give testimony in Jewish courts. Even the presents which they brought to the temple are said to have been rejected. They were excluded from their fellows. *(Bible Manners & Customs, James M. Freeman)*

Sycamore Tree (Sycomore-fig): Sycamore trees were often planted along roadways in Palestine to provide shade for travelers. Zacchaeus would have found it easy to climb its low-lying branches. It is similar to the English oak.

Note Zacchaeus did two things unusual for a man of his position: ran down the street to see Jesus, like a little boy following a parade! He also put aside his dignity and climbed a tree! (*“Be Courageous” by Warren Wiersbe, p. 71*)

Seek and Find: Zacchaeus was seeking to see Jesus, but Jesus was “seeking the lost” and probably deliberately came to Jericho to seek Zacchaeus. He invited Himself to Zacchaeus’ house, who received Him joyfully. The word joy is one of the key themes in the book of Luke and is used over twenty times in one form or another. The experience of salvation certainly ought to produce joy in the believer’s heart. We don’t know what the interaction was between Zacchaeus and Jesus at that dinner, but we know the result. (*“Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*)

Restitution: Last, but certainly not least, let’s talk about restitution. Zacchaeus was saved because he responded by faith to Christ’s gracious word to him. Having trusted the Savior, he gave evidence of his faith by promising to make restitution to those he had wronged. He pledged above and beyond the legal and expected remuneration. He promised to give half of his goods to the poor and to repay by four times to those he had “robbed” by overcharging taxes. (*“Be Courageous, Warren Wiersbe*) The law was specific about how much and under what circumstances remuneration was to be made. (Exodus 12:6, 22:1, 25; Leviticus 5:16, 6:5, Numbers 5:7).

How can we, today, practically apply the “law of restitution”?

If we have lied to someone? _____

If we have stolen something? _____

If we have started some gossip? _____

If we have broken something that belongs to someone else? _____

If we have lost our temper at someone? _____

If we have deliberately neglected some duty? _____

If we have _____

If we have _____

If we have _____

Read Matthew 5:23-24 and I John 1:9. These two verses put it into perspective for us. First we make things right with our “brothers” then with God.