



Jesus is Coming! Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

“Jesus is coming! Jesus is coming!” Zacchaeus whispered to himself as he hustled along the road. He had been waiting for days to see this man that so many people were speaking about.

Zacchaeus was **excited**—his heart was pounding in his chest, and he was almost out of breath. He didn’t know if he’d be able to wait even a minute longer. He had to find a good place to stand, so that when Jesus went by, he’d be able to see him. Even to catch a glimpse of him would be enough. Then he could say to everyone, “I saw that man Jesus with my very own eyes.”

But would he even see him? Zacchaeus wondered about that as he looked at that big crowd. There were so many people. Where had they all come from? And why did everyone have to be so tall? You see, Zacchaeus was not very tall himself. In fact, even though he was a grown up man, he was not much taller than a tall child. And **he felt a bit lost** in such a big crowd. He wished he had a hand to hold, but he didn’t. He was all on his own.

Who could he tell about seeing Jesus? Zacchaeus wasn’t sure. He wished he had a friend to talk to, but to be honest, he didn’t have very many friends. In fact, people didn’t like him very much at all. They believed he stole money from them. They thought he was a thief. It was his job to collect money from every single family in the town of Jericho, and then to give that money to the Emperor, the ruler of the country, so that he could do good and helpful things with it. The people didn’t like having to give away their money to the Emperor, and they didn’t like thinking that Zacchaeus kept some of it for himself. That made them **angry**.

Zacchaeus ***felt a funny, swirly feeling in his tummy*** as he thought about that. He knew stealing was wrong. And he knew pretending that he wasn't really taking some of the money for himself was also wrong—even if it was only the very littlest, tiniest bit each time. But he liked to have nice things. He liked to be rich and to have a great big house to put all his nice things in. Zacchaeus knew that even though he had lots of fun stuff, even with all that money, the one thing he didn't have very much of was friends. He tried to pretend like that didn't bother him, but it did, actually. Everyone needs a friend.

Zacchaeus tried to squeeze his way between two men. He was careful to push very gently—just a tap on the shoulder really—and he even said in his most polite voice, “Pardon me. Excuse me. May I just squeeze between you two so that I can see Jesus too?”

But the men just looked at him with a frown on their faces and they didn't move at all, not even one little bit. Zacchaeus could tell that they didn't like him, and that ***made him sad***. But he also ***felt worried*** because Jesus was coming, and if he didn't find a place to stand in front of all the tall people, he wouldn't be able to see. And the thought of not getting to see Jesus made him ***so disappointed***, he almost couldn't move.

But he couldn't just give up. Not now. He'd have to think hard and come up with a plan—and he'd have to do it quickly, because Jesus would be there any minute. He was too short to see anything if he stayed there at the back of the crowd, and it seemed that no one was going to let him move to the front of the crowd. If he wanted to see anything at all, he'd have to find a way to see over the tops of all those heads. His eyes moved quickly around him, looking this way and that, trying to come up with a plan.

Aha! That's it! Zacchaeus had spotted the solution to his problem. He felt very **proud** of himself. What do you think he saw?

It was a tree. A strong, shady, sycamore tree. With a nice sturdy branch just above the head of the tallest man on the road. Zacchaeus hadn't climbed a tree since he was a boy, but he hadn't forgotten how to do it. He gripped, and scrabbled, and shuggled, and pushed, and grunted, and groaned, and then gave **a great sigh of relief**. He'd done it! He was in the tree, out on the branch. And he was just in time!

Jesus was coming. Zacchaeus could see a little group of people walking down the middle of the road, with one man out front. That must be him! Oh, how **exciting**! Whoops! Careful, don't fall out of the tree! He felt a little bit **dizzy** being up so high.

Jesus was almost there, moving towards the tree, when suddenly—he didn't quite know why—Zacchaeus felt himself kind of crumple inside. One minute he'd been so excited and wanted to be out in front, but now all he wanted to do was hide. He felt **shy**. What if . . . what if Jesus wouldn't like him either? What if Jesus just got angry and frowned at him like everyone else did?

Just as Zacchaeus was about to pull back into the leafy shadows, Jesus stopped right below that sycamore tree. And he looked up. Up into the tree. He looked straight at Zacchaeus. There was no hiding now! Zacchaeus held his breath. He thought his heart was about to explode inside his chest. He really didn't want to know what was going to happen next. He **felt very nervous**.

"Zacchaeus!" Jesus called out.

Zacchaeus was **stunned** to hear Jesus say his name. How did he know that? Jesus' voice didn't sound angry or disappointed. In fact, Jesus had **a huge smile**

on his face. He was grinning at Zacchaeus as if he had known him all his life. As if he were his best friend. And they'd never even met before.

Everyone standing underneath the tree turned around and looked where Jesus was looking, and saw Zacchaeus up in the tree. They certainly didn't have smiles on their faces. No they did not. They were still **frowning** at him. Zacchaeus felt a hard lump fill his throat.

But Jesus called to him again, "Zacchaeus, come down. I want to go to your house with you."

What! Zacchaeus couldn't believe his ears. Jesus wanted to go to his house? No one ever wanted to go to his house. How **glad** he felt inside! Zacchaeus scrambled quickly down from the tree and dropped to the ground in front of Jesus. And he saw that Jesus was still smiling at him.

Zacchaeus could hear a low grumbling, mumbling, murmuring sound. It was the crowd. They **were not happy**. Not with him. But also not with Jesus. Why did Jesus want to go to Zacchaeus' house? Didn't Jesus know that Zacchaeus was not a very nice person? Didn't he know that no one liked him very much? That he stole people's money? Didn't Jesus know any better than that? Someone should tell him. The people were complaining and muttering to themselves and to each other. They were **in a very bad mood**.

Jesus must have heard the grumbling too and Zacchaeus held his breath unless Jesus changed his mind about him. But he didn't. In spite of what the crowd was saying, Jesus still wanted to go home with Zacchaeus, and in that moment, nothing else in the whole world mattered. He felt **so joyful**. He began to walk away from that crowd, and Jesus walked right there beside him. He talked to

him about this and about that, about friendly things, and Zacchaeus **felt his heart growing warm**.

“This is what it’s like to have a friend. It **makes me feels good all the way through**,” he thought to himself. He looked up at Jesus and smiled.

Later, after they had eaten a meal together at Zacchaeus’ house, Zacchaeus was feeling so **contented**, so **pleased** to be right there in the same room with Jesus, his new friend, that something deep inside him—he couldn’t have told you exactly what if you had asked him—something made Zacchaeus say the amazing thing that he said next.

He said, “Jesus, I’m going to give away half of everything I own to people who don’t have very much. And if I have ever taken anything from anyone that I shouldn’t have, I’m going to give back four times as much as I took.”

Jesus looked at Zacchaeus, and his face was like the sun shining—all warm and glowing and good. “Zacchaeus, that’s the best idea I’ve heard all day! What a friendly thing to do! Do you realise that you are part of God’s great big family? God has sent me to look for people like you, and to make sure you know you belong, to remind you that you are not alone.”

“I belong. I have a friend,” Zacchaeus whispered, **wrapping his arms around himself like a hug**. “And I think that if I am a little more careful about how I treat others, I might begin to collect some friends instead of just money and nice things.”



Jesus wanted to be Zacchaeus’ friend. And he wants to be your friend too. **How does that make you feel? Show each other.**

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