

What was it that Zaccheus did that was so extraordinary it got him his own story in the bible? So he climbed a tree so he could see Jesus - big deal right? He was NOT the only person who went to some lengths to seek out this teacher, this man called Jesus... people all over the country travelled far, and fought the crowds, and I imagine there were other short people who climbed trees to get a better view. So What was it that Zaccheus did that was so extraordinary?

It wasn't what Zaccheus did that day that makes him worthy of biblical mention, it was what he did everyday before, on, and then after that day...

One of the notable things about Zaccheus was his height, he was a short man. We actually tease him about this over a thousand years after his death! "Zaccheus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he..." I imagine he was teased a bit while he was alive as well. Hearing things like, "I feel sorry for short people, when it rains they are the last to know." or those general ribbing comments like Zacchaeus was "vertically challenged", or "height impaired", or "Zaccheus, how low can you go"... And Zaccheus could go pretty low; but when I say that, I'm not talking about his height. He was a liar and a cheat - that kind of low. Another notable thing about Zaccheus was that he was a tax collector and back then, tax collectors made their living by charging more than they had to for the current government and they would keep the difference. And Zacchaeus was not only a tax collector, he was head of the department, the "chief tax collector." As a result, Zacchaeus was filthy rich, despised by just about everybody, very lonely, and very lost...

It was Zaccheus beginning to understand how "lost" he really was that brought him to the sycamore tree that day. You see, Zaccheus got curious. Not curious like taking the polar plunge to see how cold the water really is, but curious about this man called Jesus that made him curious about his own life, and his own choices... The best way I can think to describe this curiosity, is to compare it to some of the therapy that Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - or PTSD - experience. In some of my readings, I discovered that part of the therapy in working through PTSD is that Veterans are asked to get curious, curious about some of the thoughts they have concerning their trauma. As these veterans become curious, they begin to put some of those beliefs they've taken from their war experiences to the test. Their curiosity about their own thoughts begins to actually change their thought patterns. This becoming curious that they do has saved many Veterans; and that's the kind of "curious" that Zaccheus got... That same kind of curiosity that saves Veterans lives, is the kind of curiosity that saved Zacchaeus's life. Verse 3 says: "He wanted to see who Jesus was.", he was curious about this man and his teachings and how they related to his own life ...

Zacchaeus had heard of this famous rabbi who was healing people and preaching to the masses. This man who had recently raised Lazarus from the dead - only 15 miles away from where he was right now. And Zacchaeus wanted to check Jesus out firsthand. He was not going to listen to the stories of others who saw him, and he wasn't going to let anything stand in his way - not even his "height impairment"... Zacchaeus decided to climb a tree. This could have been very "uncomfortable" for Zacchaeus - he was putting himself out there in the public eye, making himself vulnerable... Here was this public official so desperate that he would climb a tree to see some guy walking all over the country talking about God the Father...

And then we get to the real story of this day in Jesus' teaching. Zacchaeus got a personal invite from Jesus. Jesus personally invited himself over to Zacchaeus' house for dinner... Not as rude as it might seem, Jesus was a VIP. Imagine Aaron Rogers coming up to you in a crowd saying, "Hey, I'm coming over to your house for dinner tonight, okay?" After you recover from the initial shock, you would be thrilled! And if you are at all like me, pictures of the public spaces of your home would be flashing before your eyes as you begin to panic about the state of cleanliness or chaos that would greet such a man... So, maybe a little nervous, but ecstatic! So here was Jesus, the "Time magazine Man of the Year" inviting himself over to Zacchaeus's house. And Jesus made it seem rather urgent, "Zacchaeus, come down

immediately. I must stay at your house today." (Luke 19:5) It wasn't like Jesus was giving Zacchaeus a choice... And Zacchaeus welcomed him into his home.

This is where we see great change... Jesus announced, publicly, that he was going to the house of someone that everybody knew as a liar and a thief - a corrupt and even unpatriotic man. This was very difficult for the people. To dine with someone, implied- just as it does today - acceptance of that person. Verse 7 records the reaction, "All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'" But lucky for Zaccheus, Jesus didn't really concern himself with public opinion.

Lucky for us Jesus likes to hang out with "sinners" right?

Back to the story... How did Jesus know Zacchaeus's name? Do you ever wonder about that? And then the whole event begs the question: Was Zacchaeus seeking Jesus or was Jesus seeking Zacchaeus?

It was God's will that brought those two together that day. We don't always clearly see where God's will has orchestrated different events, but I believe that is pretty clear here because this is the only place in scripture where Jesus did this, where he invited himself to someone's house for dinner. Zacchaeus thought he was looking for Jesus, but even more than that, Jesus was looking for him. I may not have been able to see that at the time, but hindsight is 20/20, right?

We struggle with what is going on in our lives and why things are happening ... only to figure it out later. But as I'm struggling... and seeking God... I have to remember He is always looking for me, looking out for me, and wanting me to have fellowship with Him. He gave His only Son so that our fellowship might be restored back with Him through Jesus.

Isn't it ironic that we talk about how we finally found the Lord, but in reality, long before that awareness, God was seeking us out?

Look how radically God saved Zacchaeus' life! One minute he was gypping his fellow countrymen to line his own pockets. The next minute he had a conversation with Jesus—details of which we do not have—and then announced (in verse 8), loud enough for onlookers to hear, "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."

If he had cheated people—which he undoubtedly had—the law required him to pay back an extra twenty percent (Leviticus 6:5; Numbers 5:6-7), not four times what he took.

This is why the story of Zacchaeus is in our bibles. He was a sinner, He sought Jesus, He repented of his sin and engaged in relationship with Christ. That is the whole picture, that's what we are to do in our own lives.

Zacchaeus' whole life had been turned upside down by that single encounter with Jesus. And Jesus summed up the entire thing in just 12 words, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

Jesus came to seek and to save Zaccheaus. He came to seek and to save you and me. He sees us hiding in that sycamore tree, checking him out from afar, and he calls us by name and says, "Hurry down... because I must stay in your house today." (Luke 19:5) Jesus seeks and Jesus saves.

How powerful it is to have one true encounter with Christ... He is the agent for our salvation, for our entry into God's family. He saves us the moment we put our full and complete trust in him, the moment we give him all our sin and all our pride, and receive God's forgiveness in return. And when we find Him, it is because he wants us to... "Before you even thought about God, he was pursuing you." (Psalm 139:16-17)

So, who is seeking who? I don't think it really matters; we all need to find, and we all need to be found.

AMEN.