

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 19

Narrator: Zacchaeus

Primary Scriptures: Luke 19:1-10

Story Summary: Zacchaeus receives salvation

Location: Jericho

Time: circa 30 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Luke 19:8-9

Luke was not an apostle and never met Jesus. He knew what people had told him. That is one reason most of the book of *Luke* is not written in chronological order. In Luke 17:11, Luke gives us a clue that he is likely shifting to chronological order. He says Jesus is “now on his way to Jerusalem” and was on the border between Samaria and Galilee. He is referring to Jesus being on his way to Jerusalem where he will be crucified.

From that point, Luke tells these stories: Jesus heals ten men with leprosy...one of whom was a Samaritan; he tells the Pharisees about the coming of the Kingdom of God; he tells his disciples the parable of the persistent widow; he tells a crowd the parable of the praying Pharisee and tax collector; Jesus calls the little children to himself; Jesus talks to the rich young ruler; and, Jesus predicts this death for a third time.

Many days have passed, and Jesus is now approaching Jericho, where he heals a blind man sitting by the side of the road.¹ He then enters Jericho, talks to Zacchaeus, and continues on to Bethphage, Bethany, and the Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem. Apparently, the story of Zacchaeus must have been very important for Luke to have included it in this critical portion of Jesus’s life.

Zacchaeus is the chief tax collector in Jericho. He is likely very rich and hated by the Jewish citizens of Jericho because he collects taxes for the Romans. He likely has a reputation for cheating people by collecting more taxes than are owed. Since he is short, he decides to climb a tree so he can see Jesus. Jesus sees him in the tree and says, “Zacchaeus, come down right now. I must stay at your house today.” The use of two strong imperatives implies that Jesus was very firm because the situation is dire.

Zacchaeus replies, “Right now, I give half my possessions to the poor and will pay back anybody I’ve cheated four times the amount.” Jesus say, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

It’s easy to conclude that Zacchaeus’s response implies repentance that led to his salvation. What if that is not what Jesus meant? What if he meant Zacchaeus was saved from the bondage of loving money more than people or God? What else could Zacchaeus have been saved from?

¹ Luke 18:35