

What Did Jesus Mean?

Digging deep into Jesus' teachings.



What Did Jesus Mean? Jesus Meets Zacchaeus

September 16, 2025
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Luke 19:1 – 10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “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.”

⁹Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Zacchaeus's Occupation – Chief Tax Collector

To be a chief tax collector, you had to purchase the right from Rome to collect taxes in a certain region. Chief tax collectors had significant power and authority in their assigned territory. They supervised other tax collectors. And the people got nothing for their taxes; it was all sent to Rome.

The tax collectors collected more than the required amount of taxes and kept the surplus for themselves. This system was ripe for corruption and extortion, making chief tax collectors, like Zacchaeus, wealthy individuals—and very much hated by the people.

Jesus and Tax Collectors

Matthew 9:9 - 13

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

What statement is Jesus making when he chooses Matthew, also known as Levi, as one of his disciples? How do you think he was accepted with the other disciples?

Consider also how John the Baptizer treated tax collectors:

Luke 3:12-13

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” ¹³“Don't collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

Also, Jesus told this parable about a tax collector.

Luke 18:9 – 14

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Imagine how revolutionary this story was to the ears of these Jewish people. A tax collector would be justified before God and a Pharisee would not???

Zacchaeus Wants to See Jesus

Like Nicodemus, Zacchaeus would have been instantly recognizable by the people in Jericho, but unlike Nicodemus, Zacchaeus was hated by the people.

Why was Zacchaeus so determined to see Jesus?

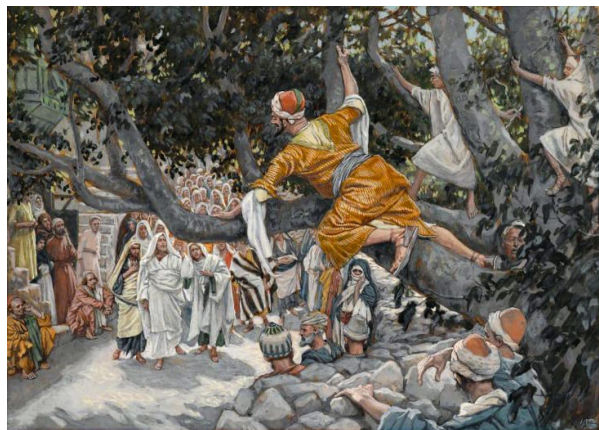
Whatever his driving determination, he was willing to behave in totally un-professional ways to just see Jesus.



I've seen this tree in Jericho many times, which is very old so they claim it was the tree Zacchaeus climbed, but that is unproven. It has become a tourist attraction. But it was certainly a tree like it that he climbed.

Imagine a hot day in Jericho, a short man with lots of hot expensive clothes on, robes not trousers. And he decides the only way he will see Jesus in this crowd is to do the really ridiculous thing—and climb that tree!

This is an idea of what it looked like to see this infamous man, dressed in all his riches, climbing a tree. It gives you some idea of how unusual—and ridiculous—Zacchaeus must have looked to all the people there.



It's apparent that Zacchaeus doesn't care what the crowd thinks of him. He just came to see Jesus—just once. Zacchaeus was hoping just to see Jesus—but Jesus came to Jericho looking for Zacchaeus.



Can't you see that scene—"wee little man" Zacchaeus, leading Jesus to his home with great joy. He was the happiest man in Jericho, for sure, but how did the crowd think about this move? They were shocked. They began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

Can you see how totally befuddled people were to try to understand Jesus? Didn't Jesus know how corrupt and awful Zacchaeus was? Didn't he know how bad it looked for him to go eat at Zacchaeus' house?

Notice what happened just before Jesus met Zacchaeus.

Luke 18:35 - 43

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. ³⁷ They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

³⁸ He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

³⁹ Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁰ Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, ⁴¹ "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, I want to see," he replied.

⁴² Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." ⁴³ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

How did the people react when Jesus healed the blind man? How did they react when Jesus chose to go to Zacchaeus's house?

Luke didn't record the conversation that took place as Jesus was eating with Zacchaeus.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "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" (Luke 19:8).

The next words of Zacchaeus are startling and head-shaking. He says that immediately—here and now—he will give half of his wealth to poor people.

Think of some of the times in scripture when Jesus invited people to follow him.

Matthew 4:19: *"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."*

Matthew 8:22: *But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

Matthew 9:9: *As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.*

Matthew 16:24: *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*

Who is the hardest person for you to say no to?

How much. . . how often do you deny yourself?

Jesus told his disciples that they must take up their cross and follow him. The cross—crucifixion—was this horrendous method of killing people developed by the Persians and Greeks and perfected by the Romans during the time of Jesus. Crucifixion was so horrible that the Romans would not crucify a Roman citizen.

Galatians 3:13: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."*

They would have been shocked to hear Jesus tell them that the cost of being his disciple was to pick up their cross. Why did Jesus use that metaphor?

There is a cost to follow Jesus, but there is a greater cost not to follow. Let's compare the life of following Jesus to the life of not following Jesus. What is the difference?

Did Jesus tell Zacchaeus he must give half his money to the poor?

If Jesus is Lord of your life, it should change your attitude toward money.

What do you pray about mostly? Your needs here on earth—health, financial, circumstantial needs that impact the quality of your life here and now? How much do you pray about your spiritual needs—growing in grace, producing much fruit, having a servant heart, guarding your words and your thoughts?

After Jesus went to his house, Zacchaeus started giving back money he owed everybody and more. What do you think happened to Jericho when Jesus changed one man, gave him a new heart and new motives and new life?

This is what Jesus said:

"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19: 9-10).

Zacchaeus is in heaven now and if you're born again, you'll get to meet him one day.

As far as we know, Zacchaeus continued to be a chief tax collector, but he was a different man after he met Jesus and that changed the way he did his job. When you're born again through faith in Jesus, it should change the way you do your job, too.

This should be our attitude as Christ-followers now:

Colossians 3:23 – 24:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Even though Zacchaeus gave away much of his wealth as a response to the salvation that came to him, that salvation didn't actually cost Zacchaeus anything. But it cost Jesus everything.

Hebrews 12:2: *Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

1 Corinthians 6:20: *You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.*