

2026 ALL-AGE TALK, 16.8.26, LUKE 19:1-10

JERICHO – A STORM IN A TEA CUP ?

Don't you just love this story of Zaccheus? A Sunday school favourite. A story unique to Luke's gospel. The only incident in the whole of the Jesus' ministry which actually takes place inside the ancient city of Jericho. Jesus is only recorded as travelling through Jericho in his last days & he is pressing on to his goal in Jerusalem. He is on an urgent mission & is only 'passing through'. The times are just about to reach their fulfilment for Jesus. He knows the time is short for him - but he still has time to find Zaccheus. Jesus still makes time for: 'coming to his house for tea', in the words of that children's chorus... (SING?)

(Now Zaccheus was a very little man, and a very little man was he, so he climbed up into a sycamore tree, for the Saviour he wanted to see. Now when our Saviour came that way, he looked into that tree. He said, 'Now Zaccheus, you come down, for I'm coming to your house for tea... Yes...').

So, what is it with Jesus & tax collectors? He made a point of finding Matthew, while he was at work as a tax collector. Jesus called him to follow him from his tax collector's booth. Outrageous! How shocking – for Jesus to pick a collaborator with the Roman oppressors to be one of his disciples!

And we know that Jesus mixed with 'tax collectors & sinners'. So much so, that the phrase, 'friend of tax-collectors & sinners' became a slur against him, repeated by the teachers of the law. Jesus response is to tell a parable about two people praying in the Temple. The tax collector's empty-handed faith is celebrated, over the pride of the religious person. And finally, in the last days of his life, Jesus makes a point of seeking out – not just any old tax collector – but a chief tax collector... He never made a point of seeking out the Chief Priest in Jerusalem, but he did go to find the chief tax collector of Jericho...

Where did Jesus find Zaccheus? Yes, he was up a tree. We are told this was so that Zaccheus could get a good vantage point, so he could see Jesus over the crowds who gathered to meet him that day. How did Jesus know where to find Zaccheus? How did Jesus know his name? He knew... He knew... This much had either been revealed to him by his Heavenly Father, before he entered Jericho. Or perhaps Jesus had heard all about Zaccheus, from the people. Zaccheus was surely notorious in those parts. The most hated man in that city & beyond. It must have been an unusual sight for a mature, well-dressed man to be up a tree. Perhaps Jesus just put 2 & 2 together when he saw Z 'hiding' in that tree...

Perhaps there is a back story to Zaccheus. This is a stretch, but not too much of a stretch. Perhaps Zaccheus, as a **very** small boy, was bullied as a child. Perhaps he got used to shinning up trees to get away from those bullies. A place where he would feel safe. Also a place he could look down on & spy on others. Maybe this is why in the end he became a tax collector, because he felt alienated from those he grew up amongst. He found a way of gaining not only a vantage point, but of taking advantage of others. It was probably unusual for him have been out & about on the streets, mixing with the people of Jericho...He would have often been cursed & looked down upon by his neighbours.

As we know, our God is a God of surprises... There was no-one more surprised than Zaccheus when Jesus stopped at the foot of that tree. Jesus didn't rebuke him, as he probably expected. He simply told him to come down - to find his place among his people again. **And then** Jesus had the nerve to invite himself round to his place, to be – as the crowds muttered – ‘the guest of a sinner’...

So, Jesus gets to go to Zaccheus' place... Not only him but the crowds too... This is the first time any of his neighbours have got to see inside Zaccheus' luxurious & spacious villa. Until this point, Zaccheus' only visitors would have been fellow tax collectors, fellow collaborators – as well as perhaps some Roman officials... This house would have been a place whispered about, a place out of bounds for the poor people of Jericho. A place many people secretly envied & coveted. So, no surprise that the muttering crowds were **not happy** about Jesus' visit.

And this is the first time Zaccheus gets to see his poorest neighbours surrounded by all his ill-gotten gains. All these fancy pictures & mosaics, all these golden statues... All that **stuff** is suddenly turned - from being objects of pride for Zaccheus - into objects of shame. So, no-one is more surprised than the poor people of Jericho when Zaccheus makes public his whole-hearted repentance. But this is not firstly about the crowds. His words are directed to Jesus, because his change of lifestyle comes from the heart: ‘Look LORD! Here & now I give **half** of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated **anybody** out of **anything**, I will pay back **x4** the amount’. Jesus making a point of coming home with this man, melted his stone-like heart. God's grace showing itself in an unexpected flow of riches - released for the poor of Jericho!

Jesus is good news to the poor – & also to the wealthy too. Only more is required from the rich... One lesson from story of Zaccheus: how dangerous it

is to look down on other people. After all – we are all sinners. All known by our Saviour Jesus, who loves us like his children: ‘This 1 too is child of Abraham’...