

# Zacchaeus Meets Jesus

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## Scene Summary

Zacchaeus Meets Jesus presents the challenging story of a tax collector who had a change of heart. Scenes include: Zacchaeus collects taxes...he overcharges the people...he hears about Jesus...he wants to see Him...he is too short to see over the crowd...he climbs a tree...Jesus goes home with him...Zacchaeus is sorry that he has done wrong...he makes thing right.

## Scripture

(Luke 19:1-10 NIV) Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. {2} A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. {3} He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. {4} So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. {5} When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." {6} So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. {7} All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" {8} 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." {9} Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. {10} For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

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## Players

- **Narrator** – The play’s “catechist” or teacher should be a good reader with a clear voice.
- **Zacchaeus** – Main character with very beautiful clothes.
- **Jesus** – God’s One and Only Son.
- **Disciple** – Small but important role.
- **Person 1, 2** – In line to pay their taxes.

***Special Props***

- Normal items from the prop box such as cloaks, veils, robes and headdresses.
- Bright, expensive looking clothes for Zacchaeus.

## ***Script – Zacchaeus Meets Jesus***

[The opening scene is in Zacchaeus' tax booth]

**Narrator:** Zacchaeus felt very important as he hurried through the streets of Jericho. He did not like to be pushed by the crowds of poor people. He greeted the merchants, but they were not very friendly. He felt lonely. He smiled as he came to his tax collectors' booth. He placed his writing boards, pins and ink carefully on the table.

**Zacchaeus:** [to himself, with feeling, sitting down at a table] Today should be a good day!

**Zacchaeus:** [to Person 1] What is your name? How much have you made this month? [holding out his hand] Your tax will be 20 dollars. [Person 1 scowls, but reaches into pocket to pay him]

**Zacchaeus:** [to Person 2, squinted his eyes] Your tax will be 30 dollars.

**Person 2:** [with feeling] That is too much!

**Zacchaeus:** You can pay it or go to jail.

**Narrator:** All day Zacchaeus collected taxes from the people. [Zacchaeus goes home, smiling] He knew that he charged the people too much money.

**Zacchaeus:** [to himself] That's how I got to be a rich man!

[Scene change to street and the sycamore tree]

**Narrator:** One day, Zacchaeus heard that Jesus had come to his town.

**Zacchaeus:** [to himself, with feeling] I must see him! Everyone says He is a good man and a wonderful teacher. I must see Him for myself.

**Narrator:** There was such a crowd that he could not get near Jesus. Zacchaeus was so short; he could not see Jesus at all, even when he stood on tiptoes. He pushed and shoved, but the people shoved him back. Then Zacchaeus had an idea.

**Zacchaeus:** [to himself, with feeling] I'll run ahead of the crowd. I know just the place.

**Narrator:** He ran and ran till he came to a sycamore tree by the side of the road. Quickly, he climbed up on a limb and sat down. He sat very still.

**Zacchaeus:** [to himself, confidently] Now I will see Jesus. I hope He walks right below me. [smiling] Jesus would be surprised to see such an important man like me in a tree! But He will never know.

**Narrator:** Zacchaeus looked down as the crowd came close...there was Jesus looking him right in the eye.

**Jesus:** Come down Zacchaeus. I'll come to your house today.

[Scene change to Zacchaeus' home]

**Narrator:** Zacchaeus showed Jesus the way to his big home. He could hardly think of anything to say to this great teacher. The people that had been with Jesus were very unhappy.

**Disciple:** Jesus is a good man. He is a great teacher. He should not go the house of that bad man. Tax collectors cheat the people.

**Narrator:** The dinner was delicious. Zacchaeus had told his servants to server the very best. During the meal, Jesus talked about His father in heaven.

**Zacchaeus:** [standing] Lord, I will give half of all that I have to the poor. And, to every person that I have cheated, I will pay back four times the amount I have taken.

**Narrator:** Everyone was supposed to hear these words. Jesus smiled. He knew Zacchaeus was sorry for the bad things he had done.

**Jesus:** Today salvation has come to this house.

The End

## ***Supplemental information***

Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector. He worked for the Romans, who ruled Palestine at this time. His job was to collect the tax that was levied on the people living around Jericho. Probably several publicans worked for him. There were many taxes. Ground tax was one tenth of all grain, and one fifth of all wine and fruit. There was an income tax of about one percent. There was a pole tax paid by all women aged 12 to 65 and all men from age 14. There were taxes on all imports and exports; on everything bought and sold. There were taxes on harbors, roads and bridges. There were even taxes on pack animals. It seemed that tax collectors continually harassed a poor person. These men usually overcharged the people and pocketed the extra money or goods.

The Jews hated the tax collectors, even though many Jews had such jobs. Tax collectors were not welcomed among either the rich or the poor. Everyone knew that they became rich by cheating the people. Zacchaeus was no exception. He overcharged the people and they hated him for it. Zacchaeus had a lovely home, but he probably wished the people could accept him. They would sneer at him on the streets, or else they would avoid him.

Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus, the Great Teacher, but he had not seen or heard Him teach. Zacchaeus was short, so when he went out to see Jesus, he could not because of the crowd of people. When Jesus saw him in the tree, he called him down and invited Himself to his home for dinner. The men with Jesus did not like this. They did not eat with tax collectors. They felt it was not right for Jesus to eat with such a sinner.

Dining customs are much different in Bible times than today. Usually when a guest arrived for dinner, the host kissed him to show that the person was welcome. Then a servant washed the dirt from the guest's feet so that they would be more comfortable and so that they would not get dirt on the furniture. If it were a fancy dinner in a lovely home, it would be served in a special dining room. The table might be round or semicircular. Instead of chairs, simple couches were pulled up to the table. The guest would lay on their side, and prop themselves up on their elbow. The other hand was then free for handling food. Guests were seated according to their importance. The least important person was at one end of the table and the most important person was at the other end. In those days, men and women usually ate separately. When everyone was reclining on the couches, then water was brought so that each could wash their hands. Everyone ate with their fingers, because there was no silverware. There were no napkins either. When a guest's fingers got sticky, they would politely wipe them on a piece of bread.

In rich homes, meals were served in courses. Between each course, the table was cleared and wiped clean. Water was brought to the diners to wash hands between courses. Probably the meal served at Zacchaeus house was elaborate, because he felt honored that Jesus would come to his home. We don't really know what Zacchaeus and Jesus talked about, but we know that Zacchaeus was sorry that he had done wrong and he decided what he would do. After the meal, he told Jesus that he would repay each person that he had cheated. In fact, he decided that he

would repay anyone four times what he had taken unfairly. In addition, Zacchaeus decided to give half of all that he owned to the poor.

### ***About Paper in Bible times***

Was paper known in the days of Zacchaeus? Not as we know it. Their “paper” was made from a plant called papyrus that grew in the marshes of Egypt. The three-sided stems grew 10 to 20 feet high. The pith was sliced thinly and laid side by side, overlapping slightly, on wood. Other strips were laid across these, at right angles. Finally, the strips were beaten with a mallet to weld them together. This “paper” was white and durable, but turned yellow with age.

Poor people wrote on broken bits of clay pots. Others used these as “scrap paper.” Hollow reeds were used as pens. Black ink was merely carbon (charcoal) mixed with oil or a metallic material and pressed into a round cake. Red ink was used, also. Reed pens and ink cakes were kept in a wooden board with grooves for pens and holes for ink. Wood writing boards were commonly used in New Testament days. Boards were hollowed out, leaving a border. Wax was poured into the hollows. When set, the wax made a good writing surface. To erase, wax was gently scraped.

Sometimes several boards were hinged together so they could be folded and carried easily. Clay tablets were used for writing also. A metal chisel was used to form the characters. These tablets were fired for permanency.

### ***For further discussion***

Talk to your pupils about honesty or the value of friendships, or being fair to others. Help you pupils to relate what they learned to their everyday lives.