

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-45 Jesus and a Changed Life

This is the final lesson in your first course on the Gospels. The next course, Gospels II, begins with Jesus being anointed by Mary and continues through the events of his last week on earth. In the three years of Jesus' public ministry he changed many lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those he healed or raised from the dead had a new beginning. Those delivered from demon possession could resume normal activities. Any who believed in him as Messiah had their sins forgiven and found a new peace and freedom from bondage. This last lesson looks at one more life that experienced the transforming ministry of Jesus. God sent Jesus to this earth not to amaze us with miracles, but to change our relationship with him to one of love and faith.

Jesus was passing through Jericho, a very ancient city located west of the Jordan River and about 24 kilometers (15 miles) northeast of Jerusalem. In Jesus' time the Old Testament city of Jericho had been abandoned, but a new one had been built nearby by Herod the Great. A man lived there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector, with other collectors under him, and was very wealthy. The warm vacation district around the city was prosperous. Tax collectors worked for the Roman government and were especially detested for helping the pagan conquerors. They frequently cheated their own people too.

Now Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. This kind of sturdy tree grew about 10 meters (40 feet) high, with a short trunk and spreading branches capable of holding the weight of a grown man. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Jesus was implying that it was a divine necessity that he come to his home. So Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed Jesus gladly.

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

In this story Zacchaeus expressed faith in Jesus and he now wanted a personal encounter with the Master. He was rich, but his riches did not keep him from belief in Jesus. He had tried several times to see Jesus, finally climbing a tree over the road. Jesus saw him, addressed him by name, and said he "must" visit his house. This was part of God's plan for his life.

Zacchaeus came out of the tree, 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."

The proof of a changed Zacchaeus was his wanting to be with Jesus and his desire to make amends for his sins. He would give half of all he owned to the poor. Jesus didn't tell him to do this; it came out of a changed heart. As a Jew, he also knew that the law required a fourfold restoration for theft, so he promised to do that as well.

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. Truly the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus was not only of the lineage of Abraham, but one who walked in the footsteps of the faith of his father Abraham. Jesus commended him for this. Even as other Jews complained, Jesus stayed focused on his primary task. The task was seeking and bringing to salvation people who were lost and separated from God. The ‘Son of Man’ was Jesus’ Messianic title in his work of calling people into the Kingdom of God and giving them eternal life.

The gospel story is **important** because it demonstrates that Jesus accepted and forgave the sins of all who believed; the rich and poor, women and men, slave and free, Jew and Gentile.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the Son of Man came to seek and to save lost people who, placing their faith in him, had their lives transformed.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What behavior of Jesus did the Jewish leaders not understand?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the leaders did not understand why Jesus spent time with sinners you are correct.
2. Why could Jesus forgive the sins of Zacchaeus?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said Jesus could forgive Zacchaeus because of his faith, you are correct.
3. What did Jesus say was his purpose for coming into the world?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that the Son of Man came to seek and to save lost people, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn this story so you can tell it to someone else. After telling the story to a friend or acquaintance, ask them these questions, “What is the most terrible sin a person can commit in your culture? Is Jesus able to forgive such a person? If so, how?” Then ask, “Would you be able to forgive such a person? If so, why would you forgive them?”