

Luke 19:1-10

Aim of Lesson

To show that Jesus saved Zacchaeus and changed his way of thinking.

Background study

Find out information concerning the collection of the Roman taxes.

Suggested outline of lesson

Tax collectors were even less popular in the time of Jesus than they are today. They had the added stigma of working for the hated Roman conquerors, and it was well known that they took a "cut" for themselves. Ask the children whether they realize that their parents have to pay taxes, and explain the reasons why. Being the chief tax collector in Jericho, Zacchaeus held an important position. However, his apparent wealth belied his honesty and sincerity and gave rise to people's suspicion and distrust of him. He was an unhappy man. His fellow countrymen avoided him, and his feelings led him to realize that something was wrong in his life. Zacchaeus had heard about the preacher and healer, Jesus of Nazareth and, when he learned that this godly man was coming through Jericho, he felt compelled to see Jesus.

Ask the class to imagine ways in which Zacchaeus may have tried to get a better view. The children will have experienced this difficulty. But, whereas children are often helped by being lifted up or invited to the front, Zacchaeus no doubt met with resistance to his efforts because of his unpopularity. Anticipating the route that Jesus would take, he ran ahead of the crowd. Then, with a flash of inspiration, he scrambled up a tree. He had found an ideal observation point, high above the taunts of the crowd.

When Jesus reached the tree he looked up, straight into the eyes of Zacchaeus. He had probably never seen or heard of Zacchaeus before, yet he called him by name. It must have astounded the tax collector to be singled out in this way by Jesus, and to be further honoured by being invited to give him hospitality. Was there pride in his heart as he led Jesus away from the muttering crowd, or did he experience a feeling of humility in the presence of Jesus?

Zacchaeus must have listened eagerly to the words Jesus spoke - words which touched his heart. He felt genuinely sorry for his past way of life, and publicly stated that he would make amends for any dishonesty to the extent of paying back four times any amount which he may have fraudulently obtained. He needed to put right the wrongs he had done so that he could start a new life in Jesus. Having made this commitment to his new master, Zacchaeus felt happy, relieved of his burden of guilt. Zacchaeus, who was lost, depressed and friendless, had been saved, uplifted and befriended by the Lord Jesus. Jesus, recognizing the genuineness of Zacchaeus' conversion, was able to say: "Today salvation has come to this house".

Relevance to the children's lives

At the beginning of the story we learned that many tax collectors like Zacchaeus was greedy, rich and unhappy. At the end, he was planning to give away much of his money and was extremely happy. In what way was he richer at the end of the story than at the beginning? Do we feel ashamed when we have been greedy or have cheated someone? Can we try to remember the example of Zacchaeus and feel so sorry that we want to put things right and start again? We know this will make us feel better, and please Jesus, too.

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us to know and to admit when we have cheated someone because we were greedy. Please give us the courage to say that we are sorry and help us to do our best to put it right. Amen.

Memory verse

"The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).