



awake to Jesus! sunday school resources

5: Jesus the People Person

Sunday school lesson 5: Luke 17-20

Teacher's notes / Devotional for teachers

This is perhaps one of the most famous of Jesus' meetings with minor characters in the Gospels. The story of Zacchaeus is one of the stories we hear time and again from the earliest age at home and in children's ministry. Perhaps this is so for good reason. Children seem to identify with being small and being unable to see very much in crowds. They rely on the shoulders of family to give them a good vantage point; Zacchaeus had to rely on a tree.

He had to do this for good reason. No-one in his community would have given him a second look, and certainly not a helping hand, because they had already given him too much of their money. He was the chief tax collector in the locality. He was in league with the Roman oppressors and the other tax collectors under his control. He had grown filthy rich at the expense of the ordinary people who would gladly have strung him up on a tree!

But Zacchaeus has to see Jesus. He is at least intrigued by all he has heard of this Jewish Rabbi who has developed the reputation of inviting even the most marginalized into his community. Perhaps more than that, he is tired of the emptiness of his ill-gained wealth. He may have been rich financially but he was evidently impoverished in terms of relationships and the state of his soul.

Intriguingly, Jesus seems to know that he would have this meeting with the notorious tax man. Jesus comes into Jericho which was a major city of the time. The custom of the day was that any travelling Rabbi would be the recipient of extravagant hospitality by the leaders and rabbis of the city. Jesus would have been expected to receive this kindness, which would have been prepared in advance, once it was known Jesus was en route.

But Jesus dispenses with the custom and moves rapidly through and out of the city. The civic authorities would have been fuming and humiliated. I'm sure they would have been asking why he was in such a rush. In fact, he had better have a good reason for turning his nose up at them. You can just imagine then the shock and anger they experienced when they realize that Jesus had snubbed them for Zacchaeus of all people. He was the most detested of the local 'sinners'. Such people, be they tax collectors or prostitutes or other societal low lives, had not only been cut off from the local community, but they had also been rejected as being members of Israel.

But Jesus wanted to reveal that even people such as these were at the heart of his new Kingdom family. Zacchaeus is invited by Jesus to provide the hospitality he has refused from the 'acceptable' people of the city. And of course, in Jesus' day, to sit down to eat with someone was a symbol of their acceptance. Zacchaeus responds immediately and welcomes Jesus into his house for a meal.

The irony here is that Jesus had eaten at the houses of many rabbis and 'A List' people during his

ministry. But they had offered their hospitality often for all the wrong reasons. They had no intention of joining Jesus' new family, full as it was with 'sinners'. Very often they used the opportunity to try to embarrass or entrap Jesus. But here is Zacchaeus, a really 'bad' person, who welcomes Jesus for all the right reasons and he becomes a member of Jesus' new family, the new Israel. It is Zacchaeus and not the others in this story who actually is a 'son of Abraham.

And how do we know this to be true? It is because of Zacchaeus' genuine repentance. He not only accepts Jesus into his home, but he makes huge recompense to all he has wronged in his career as a tax collector. Repentance is not simply a change of heart and mind. It also entails restoration and making amends.

And so Zacchaeus has a new life. He is going to follow Jesus whatever the cost. And so must we.

And part of that cost is reaching out to those we don't like or want to be near us.

I wonder who we identify with most in this story? Too often I see myself not as Zacchaeus, but as the others who are furious at Jesus. I don't want 'those sorts of people' in my church. I don't want those sorts of children in my children's ministry!!

And yet I am reminded that not long after this meeting with Zacchaeus Jesus ends up on a tree.

Nobody called him down and offered Him kindness. He died alone. And he went to the cross because he had welcomed the likes of Zacchaeus, the sinner who the people of Jericho would liked to have strung up on a tree.

And then I remember that I'm so often wrong in my judgements about others. I am Zacchaeus, an outsider to God because of my sin but welcomed into His family because Jesus was strung out on a tree and not me.

This is our God and Saviour. This is the one who has already come to homes of our hearts and we knew on that day, that, like Zacchaeus, 'Today salvation has come to this house'.

- **Explanation of Lesson**

- This lesson is looking at how Jesus interacted with and changed the people that He came into contact with. The lesson concentrates on the story of Zacchaeus, an amazing story in the Bible of love, forgiveness and the healing of relationships.

- This is probably a story that the children will have heard before and may know very well but help them to try and see it anew as they look at Jesus actions of love and Zacchaeus' response of I'm sorry and then the forgiveness that he receives.
- Again this is a very interactive lesson in this series of six. It is number 5 in the series but again can be used as a standalone lesson.

- **Aims of lesson**

- To help the children see that even though Zacchaeus had done things wrong Jesus loved him despite all these, but wanted him to change his life.
- That in coming into contact with Jesus, Zacchaeus saw how wrong his life was and he said sorry for what he had done and made drastic changes in his life to show how sorry he was.

- That when we are sorry Jesus forgives us for what we have done and helps us to do better.
- Equipment needed
 - Poster paper/whiteboard and pens to make a list
 - Printed Bible passage (at end of lesson)
 - Kitchen towel roll
 - Whiteboard/blackboard that can be cleaned with kitchen towel

Introduction

Tell the children that you are going to think about some of the really important things that we can say to people. Make a list where all the children can see it. Make sure that you include: thank you, I'm sorry, I love you, you are special, you are really good at..., I like you, well done, etc.

Explain that today we are going to look at a person that Jesus met who needed to say one of these things and whose life was changed because of meeting Jesus.

The man in the story was a tax collector – someone who collected money from the people to pay the rulers. They were always seen as thieves who took too much money and they were very unpopular with the ordinary people who lived in the country.

Part 2

Read the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 (printed at the end of this lesson).

- Have the children act out the story of Zacchaeus. This is a good story to make use of all the children as you need crowds, Pharisees and dinner/party guests within the story. Have the child playing Zacchaeus stand on a chair (as long as you feel this is safe) to represent being in the tree.
- Explain that using this story you are going to look at three important things that were said or shown through this story – important phrases that we like to hear or that we should say to God and to other people.

Ask the children: Of all the phrases that we listed before, what is the most important? (Hopefully one of them will say “I love you”!!)

- Zacchaeus was a man who had done things wrong – things that hurt other people by stealing their money and things that hurt God by being selfish and hurting people. However, one of the first things that is “said” in the story that is important was done through actions rather than words. Explain to the children that sometimes things are said by doing instead of saying and Jesus showed Zacchaeus that although he had done things that were wrong, Jesus still loved him as a person and wanted to spend time with him. It is very important that even when people sometimes do things that hurt us, we still must show them that we love them just as when we do things that hurt God, He still loves us and wants to spend time with us.

- It's important to remember that even when we do things wrong, before we say sorry to God and ask Him to forgive us, He still loves us and will always love us. His love does not depend on us asking for forgiveness but He loves us because that is who He is!

Part 3

(Before this activity write "I'm sorry. Please wipe away my sin" in large letters on 6-8 sheets of kitchen towel, once on each sheet and then roll it up again.)

- Ask the children what Zacchaeus has to say to Jesus to turn his life around? Answer: I'm sorry. Explain to the children that we all do things wrong and it is important that we tell God that we are sorry and then change how we do things to try and live better as a follower of Jesus.
- Together make a list of some of the things that we may do that make God feel sad (i.e. fighting, not being helpful, stealing, being greedy, etc.). Write their suggestions on a list on a whiteboard (or something that can be wiped clean so that everyone can see like an acetate sheet, blackboard). Explain that God wants to forgive us for these things and help us to make a fresh start. All we need to do is say sorry to God and really mean it and He will forgive us.
- Read Psalm 51:5 (CEV) which says, "You are kind, God! Please have pity on me. You are always merciful! Please wipe away my sins." Say a simple prayer (or have a child/ren) saying sorry to God for all the things on the list. Show the group the kitchen towel roll, tear off a sheet and invite a child to rub out one of the words with it. Do the same until the whole list has been wiped away. Remind the children that when we say sorry to God he not only forgives us, but he also forgets and wipes the slate clean.

Part 4

- When we know that God loves us and that all we have to do when we do something wrong is say sorry when we mean it, God forgives us for the things we have done wrong.
- Jesus forgave Zacchaeus for stealing and for hurting people, but when he met Jesus and realised how wrong he had been, Jesus forgave him and helped him to be a better person.
- Spend some time at the end of the lesson praying with the children and asking God to forgive them for things they have done wrong. Either pray specifically for things that they name or generally and encourage them to pray and ask forgiveness in their daily/regular prayers.

Bible Readings

Luke 19:1-10

¹Jesus was going through Jericho, ²where a man named Zacchaeus lived. He was in charge of collecting taxes and was very rich. ³⁻⁴Jesus was heading his way, and Zacchaeus wanted to see what he was like. But Zacchaeus was a short man and could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree. ⁵When Jesus got there, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down! I want to stay with you today." ⁶Zacchaeus hurried down and gladly welcomed Jesus.

⁷Everyone who saw this started grumbling, "This man Zacchaeus is a sinner! And Jesus is going home to eat with him."