

Unravelling, Step by Step
on the story of Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10
June 28, 2020

[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So Zacchaeus hurried down and was happy to welcome Jesus. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, “Jesus has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” ⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Jesus, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” ⁹Then Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Today salvation has come to your house, because you, too, are a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

I love HGTV! Particularly renovation shows. The more dated, run-down, stinky or critter-infested the ‘before’ pictures are, the more thrilling it is to see the after, the reveal, the ‘fixed’ and ‘finished’ job. It’s practically mythic in scope, isn’t it!

Almost on par with a frog becoming a prince; or a teenage girl – especially one who’s essentially a servant to her older, overbearing stepsisters – become a princess. Likewise, in today’s text it appears at first glance that a ‘sinner’ can miraculously become a ‘saint!’

Quick fix has become an expected standard. TV transformations happen within 30-60 minutes and Biblical ones in 10 short verses like these from the Gospel of Luke! No wonder some of us struggle to hang in over the long haul. No wonder we sometimes struggle to think and act incrementally. We have been groomed to be more impressed with *grand* gestures.

Let’s consider Zacchaeus himself, for a minute. What do we know or *not* know about him?

He was, like Jesus, a Jew. A chief tax collector, which meant he was wealthy. Because Zacchaeus was a tax collector AND wealthy, he was despised – particularly by other Jews who bore the brunt of the levy because they were fairly wealthy land owners/Jewish synagogue leaders, who were also in bed, so to speak, with the Roman Empire that had no use for poor Jews, non-property owners, who paid very few taxes. The wealthy Jewish landowners/synagogue leaders are likely the ones in this story who grumbled, “Jesus has gone off to have dinner with that sinner.” Any part of this sound at all familiar to any of you?

It’s fair to imagine that Zacchaeus had heard stories about Jesus, and was intrigued, curious. Jesus was, after all, at the end of his ministry, on the Jericho Road toward Jerusalem, where he expected to die. Zacchaeus had had 3 years to wonder who this Jesus was.

It’s also been established that Zacchaeus was short in stature, and he knew that *if* he were going to *see* Jesus, he’d have to find a high spot. And he did. A Sycamore tree, an outcast cousin to a fig tree. Its fruit was bitter. Inedible. . . . And for a wealthy man to climb a tree in his fine garments was unthinkable in Zacchaeus’s day, but he did it anyway. It must have been really important to him to *see* Jesus.

You know what happens next. Jesus walks right up to the tree and calls Zacchaeus by name, and says, “Come on down. I’m going to *your* house today.”

And now we’ve come to the point in the story where the details get a bit sketchy. We are left with a few questions. What happened between the two of them? What did they talk about, say to each other? Did Zacchaeus confess? Did Jesus forgive him? Were they inside the house or on the porch a wealthy man might have?

**Will You Come and Follow Me*

John Bell

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known?
Will you let my Love be grown in you, and you in me?

Will you leave your fear behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare, should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the sightless see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen?
And admit to what I mean in you, and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell that fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around
through my sight and touch and sound in you, and you in me?

God, your summons echoes true when you but call our names.
Let us turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company we'll go, where your love and footsteps show,
thus we'll move and live and grow in you, and you in us.