

# APPOINTMENT WITH A SHORT SCOUNDREL

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Luke 19:1-10

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## INTRO.

-- In these weeks leading up to Easter we're following Jesus as He makes His final journey to Jerusalem and to the death on the Cross that awaits Him there. Today, we find Jesus getting closer to Jerusalem as He arrives at Jericho, a town about 10 miles east of Jerusalem in the Jordan River valley.

-- Jesus has two memorable encounters in Jericho:

The first with a man named Bartimaeus, a blind beggar whom Jesus heals as He enters the town. And the second with a man named Zacchaeus. It's this second encounter that I want to focus on today.

Cf., Luke 19

-- The story begins with an account of Zacchaeus' seeking Jesus in verses 1-4.

vv. 1-4

## I. THE SET-UP: ZACCHAEUS SEEKS JESUS (VV. 1-4)

-- There are several important details about Zacchaeus that we need to notice here.

### A. TAX COLLECTOR

-- The first important fact about Zacchaeus is that he was a tax collector. The Romans levied heavy taxes on the lands they conquered in order to support the army and to cover the costs of administering the Empire. As you would expect, those occupied territories resented paying those taxes, and that was especially true in Israel, which was like the Roman Empire's version of the Tea Party.

-- The typical practice of the Romans was to contract with local natives to do the actual task of collecting the taxes. Those "tax collectors" were triply despised in Israel: not only did they collect the hated taxes, but they did so for the enemy, causing the tax collectors to be looked upon as traitors; and most of them were crooked as well (they were allowed to collect more than they had to actually turn over to Rome and thus pocketed the excess).

-- So, as a tax collector, Zacchaeus was a Jew working for the Romans. As most Jews saw it, Zacchaeus had thrown in with the enemy to oppress his own people. Tax collectors in Israel were lumped together with the most despicable people and the worst of sinners in the minds of most Jews. Like Gentiles, they were considered "unclean," and association with them rendered a Jew unfit to attend synagogue or Temple services.

### B. WEALTHY

-- Tax collecting had made Zacchaeus a wealthy man. Jericho was a plum location for tax collectors. Since Jericho was located on a heavily traveled trade route, Zacchaeus was able to collect taxes on all the merchants who did business there.

-- Furthermore, Zacchaeus was a "chief tax collector" (the only one identified as such in the Bible), which probably meant that he got a cut from the take of the other tax collectors. The result was that Zacchaeus was very rich - probably the equivalent of a multi-millionaire in today's world.

### C. SHORT

-- Another interesting observation that Luke makes about Zacchaeus is that he was short. I'm convinced that this is a significant and defining characteristic in regards to Zacchaeus. This is the only time in the NT that someone is described as being short - in fact, the word used here is rather unflattering - it's also used to mean something inferior.

-- I can imagine that as a child Zacchaeus was always being bullied and made fun of and no one ever wanted him on their team. I can imagine little Zach feeling rejected, hurt and angry and saying to himself,

"One day I'll get even with them." The opportunity for revenge came when Zacchaeus became a tax collector.

-- Every time I read the story about Zacchaeus, I think of Louie on the old TV series Taxi. Louie was the dispatcher played by Danny DeVito. He was a loner who was usually in a cage-like office looking over the taxi garage and who would bark out rude remarks over the PA system. Louie was a real jerk who didn't seem to care that nobody liked him. But every now and then you'd see that was just a protective shell - underneath was a little boy desperately wanting to be accepted and loved. That's exactly what I think Zacchaeus was.

## D. SEEKING JESUS

### 1. The Seeking

-- In v. 3a we read that Zacchaeus "wanted to see who Jesus was." Literally, the verse reads, "seeking to see Jesus, who he is."

-- Zacchaeus was a "seeker." He'd heard a lot about this unusual rabbi named Jesus. But to Zacchaeus the most intriguing thing about Jesus wasn't the miracles that He performed but the people He hung out with - the kind of people that no rabbi would think of associating with - outcasts, sinners, including tax collectors. Zacchaeus had even heard that Jesus chose a tax collector to be one of His Disciples. Zacchaeus wanted to see this rabbi, to see for himself what this Jesus looked like and what kind of a person He was.

### 2. The Problem

-- But there was a problem. The road where Jesus would pass by was lined with throngs of people - all of them eager to get a glimpse of this miracle-working rabbi. There was no way for Zacchaeus to see over them, and no one was about to let him through. But Zacchaeus wasn't about to give up - he was determined to get a look at Jesus. Looking around, suddenly he saw the solution. Standing above the crowds was a sycamore tree with branches stretching out over the road. Without even thinking about appearing undignified, Zacchaeus did a completely childlike act - he scurried up the tree and perched himself on a branch above the crowds and overlooking the road.

## II. THE ENCOUNTER: JESUS SEEKS ZACCHAEUS (VV. 5-7)

-- Up to this point it appears that Zacchaeus is the one doing all the seeking in this story, but what we're about to discover is that Zacchaeus isn't the primary seeker at all. To the contrary, he's the one being sought.  
vv. 5-7

### A. THE PRIMARY SEEKER

-- Although Zacchaeus isn't aware of it, his seeking for Jesus is actually a product of Jesus' seeking for him. We seek Jesus only because He first seeks us.

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

-- God's grace is already acting on Zacchaeus, before Zacchaeus is aware of it. It's the gracious activity of the Father that awakens Zacchaeus' desire to seek Jesus and that moves Zacchaeus to climb the sycamore tree.

### B. THE UNEXPECTED "INVITATION" (V. 5)

-- Surprisingly, Jesus has just invited Himself to be Zacchaeus' house guest. There are several important aspects to this simple but shocking self-invitation.

#### 1. The Initiative

-- To begin with, it's important to notice that it's Jesus who takes the initiative. Jesus could have easily passed by, and if He had there never would have been an encounter with Zacchaeus. Instead, Jesus does something totally unexpected by everyone except Jesus - He stops and invites Himself to Zacchaeus' house.

#### 2. The Urgency

-- And Jesus speaks with a real sense of urgency. The New American Standard expresses more literally what Jesus says:

"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down&hellip;"

-- Jesus wants Zacchaeus to hurry because something important and life-changing is about to happen.

#### 3. The Personal Quality

-- Jesus' statement here is surprisingly personal: He calls Zacchaeus by name. They've never been introduced - they've never even met before, but Jesus knows who Zacchaeus is and knows him by name.

More than that, Jesus wants to go with Zacchaeus and spend the day at the tax collector's house, visiting with Zacchaeus. Jesus has only a short time left on earth. Every day is precious, and He's choosing to spend one of those precious days with the most despised man in Jericho. That's a stunning indication of Zacchaeus' worth to Jesus.

#### 4. The Divine Plan

-- And this encounter is a divine plan. Notice that Jesus says, "I must," or literally, "It is necessary." Why? Because the encounter was God's planning. It was no accident that Zacchaeus was in that tree as Jesus went by.

And it's no accident that you're here today. God has a purpose in your being here today to hear this story.

### C. THE DIFFERENT RESPONSES (V. 5)

-- There are two very different responses to Jesus' intention to go to Zacchaeus' house.

#### 1. Zacchaeus (v. 6)

-- Like a kid whose friends are calling for him to come out and play, Zacchaeus scampers down from the tree, so excited he can hardly contain it.

-- But not everyone is so excited.

#### 2. Everyone Else (v. 7)

-- "All the people" certainly includes the Pharisees and the crowds in Jericho but may well include Jesus' Disciples, who are concerned that Jesus is alienating the crowds and risking His popularity. None of that is a factor with Jesus because He has a divine appointment to keep and kingdom work to do in Zacchaeus' life.

## II. THE RESULT: ZACCHAEUS IS SAVED (VV. 8-10)

-- For Zacchaeus this was the day he had wanted all his life - when someone would really want to be with him. But it was even more than what Zacchaeus had dreamed it would be.

vv. 8-10

### A. ZACCHAEUS' TRANSFORMATION

-- Jesus says that "salvation" has come to Zacchaeus. That salvation is demonstrated in a wondrous transformation that brings 2 new realities into Zacchaeus' life.

#### 1. A New "Lord"

-- Zacchaeus calls Jesus "lord." Up till now Zacchaeus has lived for himself, for the pursuit of wealth. But now Jesus has become his Lord, the one whom Zacchaeus is going to follow and for whose pleasure and glory Zacchaeus is going to live.

And Zacchaeus gives powerful witness to the radical transformation that has taken place within him.

v. 8b

-- Zacchaeus is giving half of his money to the poor, but he doesn't stop there. He doesn't reserve the other half for himself. When he says, "If I have cheated anybody," he says it in a way that admits he has. So he's going to repay everyone he's cheated - and do so fourfold! The Law only required him to repay restitution plus 20%. Instead, Zacchaeus volunteers to repay 400%--twenty times more than was required!

What Zacchaeus is doing is amazing and will almost certainly leave him with very little. What the rich young ruler failed to do in response to Jesus' instruction Zacchaeus now does spontaneously and voluntarily.

#### 2. A New Identity (v. 9b)

-- Zacchaeus' transformation also brings him a new identity.

v. 9b

-- Zacchaeus, of course, had already been a son of Abraham physically, but now he is a son of Abraham in an even more important way - spiritually. Zacchaeus is now like Abraham, a child of God, possessing a new relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

### B. JESUS' MISSION (V. 10)

-- Verse 10 is the key verse in this story.

v. 10

-- Jesus makes it clear here that His mission is to "seek and to save the lost." That's why He came to earth - to find those separated from the Father, to find the lost sheep and bring them back to the sheepfold, to find lost sons and bring them home.

## CONCLUSION

Johnny Lang was one of those lost sons. Lang is an amazing guitarist and blues performer who started performing when he was 13. By the time he was 20 he was a world-famous, successful musician and also addicted to alcohol and other drugs. He was not just irreligious; in his own words, he "hated Christianity" and "couldn't stand to hear about Jesus."

All that changed unexpectedly one day, the day his girlfriend's father died. Jonny was very close to her father and his death was a very hard experience. That night Jonny was talking with his girlfriend when suddenly something seemed to hit him, and he suddenly started saying the name "Jesus." Here's how Jonny describes what happened:

"It was like [Jesus] just came up and introduced himself to me &hellip; I kept shaking, and I knew when it was done that I had been completely set free of all my addictions, and I knew that I didn't have to smoke or drink or do drugs anymore. All I could do was fall on the ground, and I gave my life to him right there. I was just in shock. I thought, 'I totally despised you, and you just did this to me. It's been a process ever since &hellip; I said 'God, nobody is going to believe me,' and then I read about Paul, and I thought, 'Okay, maybe they will.'"