

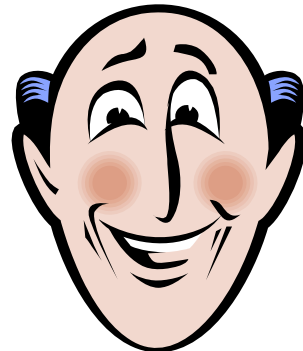
Chosen to be special: Zacchaeus the tax collector

"My name's Zacchaeus. I used to be called all sorts of horrid names until a few weeks ago, when my life changes completely. I managed a team of people who collect for the authorities. I used to spend all my time seeing how much money i could make for myself by fiddling the accounts and frightening people to pay me more than they needed to. It was wrong. I know that now, but it took something amazing to make me see just how bad i was.

It was an ordinary day really, just the usual opportunities to make money. There wasn't much else to think about. I didn't have any friends and no one wanted to talk to me if they could help it. Anyway, on that particular day I picked up some rumours that the preacher I'd heard people talking about was coming through town. Jesus, his name was. Well, i was curious. I wondered what it was about him that make him noticed, so i went down to the main street to see him. You wouldn't believe how many people were there! it was as if the whole town had come out to see this Jesus. The crowd wouldn't let me through and as I'm a bit short, i couldn't see over them all. I was jostled a bit as people recognised me and elbowed me out of the way. I got tired of the jeering and name calling so I legged it up a sycamore tree. well I had a splendid view from up there and no one could see me, which made it even better!

Then the amazing thing happened. As he went past, Jesus stopped on the road and looked up, over the crowd, into my tree. He called out to me...and he knew my name! He told me to come down and then he the most startling thing of all: "Zacchaeus, I'm coming to eat with you today," with me! No one has wanted to eat with me before - ever! Out of all those people, Jesus chose to come home with me. I couldn't believe it. Then suddenly I saw myself in a different light; I felt different. Jesus wanted to eat with me; I mattered to him. It was a wonderful feeling!

'I will give half of all my belongings to the poor,' I heard myself saying as i tumbled out of the tree, 'and i will pay back anyone I've cheated, four times over.' I stretched out my arms and looked around the crowd. They were as surprised as I was! But Jesus took my arm and said that salvation had come to my house today. And it had, because I haven't looked back. The taxes are collected fairly now and I'm a new man, thanks to Jesus!"



Follow-up activities

Questions for discussion

- What do you think might have happened to Zacchaeus if Jesus hadn't found him?
- Jesus saved Zacchaeus from being a really horrible person... so what do you think the word 'salvation' means?
- Who helps you change as you grow up?

Suggested activities

- Hot seat Zacchaeus and explore how it feels to be laughed at;
- Imagine you're a person in the crowd and tell someone else how you felt, or write about your feelings;
- Explore what is the same in the story of the call of the disciples and this story;
- Find and read other stories in the Bible of people whose lives have been changed by Jesus.