

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, June 11, 2006



Luke 19:1-10 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "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." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

There are many delightful descriptions of great moments in the Bible. We have a tendency to give awards and prizes! **This one would get my vote as an Oscar winner!** It is unsurpassed in description, power, beauty and message! We know that Jesus was a thorn in the flesh of the Pharisees and Church leaders of his time. They were very articulate about their particular religious prejudices and never hesitated to enforce them. They had **a long list of prejudices and strict rules** against just about everyone **but their own sinful lives**. It was unbecoming for a Jew to mix with a Samaritan; Jesus **crossed that barrier** and a poor Samaritan woman found living water – and would never thirst again! It was unbecoming for a Jew to associate with or even to come near a prostitute, **unless you were willing to despise and condemn her**. Jesus crossed that barrier and a broken woman found forgiveness and a Savior. **Have you noticed that there is not a single reference in the bible, where Jesus discriminates against anyone?** What would Jesus do about Zacchaeus, a known sinner and publican? Zacchaeus the head of the tax collectors of the City of Jericho – **a short fellow** – heard that Jesus and some of his followers were going to pass through the city. **He really wanted to see what this so-called prophet looked like**. So he climbed a huge Sycamore tree by the roadside to get the best possible view of the Master who would soon be passing by.

This **unpopular fellow** had some serious problems with the other Jews in Jericho. We believe that his conscience must have bothered him quite a bit. Have you ever been bothered by your conscience? A certain man told his doctor: **"I've been misbehaving, Doc! My conscience is bothering me a lot!"** "So, do you want something to make your **willpower** stronger?" the doctor asked. "O no Doc, I'm more interested **in something to weaken my conscience!**"

Zacchaeus was a hated tax collector. The righteous people of Israel despised the tax collectors. They were looked upon as traitors to the Jewish cause against their oppressors. On the other hand, **there was good money to be made by** any Jew who was willing to collect taxes for the hated Roman conquerors. Their fat commissions and growing wealth became theirs at the expense of their reputations. Zacchaeus' career choice cost him dearly. The other Jews felt that he had turned his back on his own people and on God.

Now, there's something to explain here. Even today, in a divided and torn Israel, Muslims and Jews both call Abraham their **progenitor. Their ancestor in the direct line!** Their common spiritual father! The Bible says that out of the lineage of Abraham ~ **Jesus was born.** The Jews in those days proudly referred to themselves as "**the seed of Abraham**" or "**sons of Abraham.**" The most common insult that poor Zacchaeus often heard was: "**You are no longer a son of Abraham.**"

So the rich, despised chief tax collector was no longer considered a son of Abraham. **This IRS guy gathered his wealth at a tremendous price.** I'm sure the people winked and giggled when the outcast of the city climbed a tree because he wanted to see Jesus. Our kids would say: "He only wanted to check this guy out. He wanted to see the man of Nazareth passing by!"

Can you imagine the electricity in the air when Jesus stopped right under the Sycamore tree and said: "**Zacchaeus hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today?**" The Bible says that this IRS agent did not hesitate. **He hurried down and beckoned Jesus to follow him.** The guilty ex-son of Abraham welcomed his unexpected visitor with joy.

Without a doubt, this meeting behind closed doors with Jesus became the highlight of this publican's entire life. **Since then countless millions have discovered that allowing this Jesus into their homes and lives can also be their lives' greatest moment.** The Bible says that Zacchaeus found the key to becoming a new person. In the middle of the meal he stood up and said: "Listen Lord!" **for it is obvious that Jesus had become his Lord,** "I will give half of my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will repay him four times over. Jesus said: "Today salvation has come to this house." Modern theologians call this ~ "**resurrection!**"

How did the so-called righteous Jews feel when he entered the house of someone whom they branded to be no longer as son of Abraham? Hear the accusation: "**This man eats with sinners!**" Indeed he does. He eats with sinners. Thank God ~ he does. Anytime a lost unhappy person who wandered far away from God decides to allow Christ into his home and life ~ Jesus still gladly walks through that open door. Imagine ~ the prince of peace and glory ~ eats with those who need him most. Today ~ see, the Master is calling us: "Come, get down from your Sycamore tree. **Come on down ~ we need to talk!**"

An anonymous taxpayer recently sent a letter to the IRS saying that she had cheated on her income tax return two years ago and had not been able to get in a good night's sleep since. She enclosed \$25.00 and added, "**If I still can't sleep, I'll send the balance!**"

Isn't that exactly how some folks try to negotiate with God? After meeting and eating with Jesus ~ Zacchaeus threw back the money that he had wrongfully grabbed and offered to pay four times over. Friend that is the real test ~ maybe even the only test. **Does your relationship with God make a real difference in the way you live,** associate with others, and deal with situations and relate to the world around you?

This entire Jericho story centers around the words with which Jesus presented **Zacchaeus to the disgruntled ones who boasted that only they were the ONLY sons of Abraham.** See what a true son of Abraham looks like! **It has nothing to do with your biological bloodline, but has everything to do with your spiritual "bloodline!"** Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham after all! **In Christ ~ lost and dead children of Abraham are being**

resurrected day after day.

Have you so far just **watched** the Master walk by your Sycamore tree? We are living 2000 years after the time of Zacchaeus but the message has never changed. **Instead of allowing him to pass by like so many times before ~ your life can be touched and changed ~ right here, right now ~ even today.**

**Begin or resume your conversation with the Master
and your life will never ever be the same again.**

AMEN