

Jesus and Zacchaeus

Do you know what taxes are? It is money we have to pay to our government to help keep things running. Our taxes can do many things: pay for new roads, schools, public transportation, police, firemen, soldiers, and many, many other things.

Do you know what kinds of things we have to pay taxes on? We pay sales tax when we buy things at the store. We pay taxes on the money we earn at our jobs, or when someone gives us a large gift of money. If we buy or sell things online we pay taxes. There are even taxes when you win prizes for being on a tv game show. If you find treasure on a sunken pirate ship or buried treasure chest you still have to pay taxes on what it's worth! Even people who win the Olympics or the Nobel Prize have to pay taxes on any money they win. Even if you rob a bank (which of course you wouldn't want to do!) you are still supposed to pay taxes on the money you stole! So you can probably see why grown ups don't like to pay taxes. It takes away some of the money that you feel like you have earned and have a right to keep.

This story is about a man whose job was a tax collector. Nowadays even though we don't like to pay taxes we still don't usually hate the person whose job it is to collect them, but back in Jesus' day the tax collectors were often dishonest. They would collect more money than they were supposed to, and then keep the extra money for themselves.

Open your Bible to the New Testament and find the book of Luke, and look for chapter 19 verse 1.

1 "Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. 2 There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich."

You can tell by reading these first two verses that Zacchaeus was probably just like most of the other tax collectors in that he was not well liked by the people of Jericho because he had become very rich. People probably assumed he was keeping some of the tax money for himself. Now Jesus was traveling around to different places teaching, telling parables and performing miracles. The news about Jesus had spread all over the country, and it was common when Jesus arrived in a town for people to gather and see him. Zacchaeus had also heard about Jesus and wanted to see him, too. Read verses 3 & 4.

3 "He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way."

Here we read that Zacchaeus was not very tall. Do you know the song about him? In the song we call him a "wee little man". Even though he was short he was still an important person in Jericho. Can you imagine a grown-up you know climbing a tree? Can you picture your school principal or the mayor climbing a tree? It would seem strange to us, and it was probably strange back then to see the tax collector climbing a tree! But Zacchaeus didn't seem to care. He was just interested in seeing Jesus. Let's keep reading and see what happened next. Read verses 5&6.

5 "When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. 'Zacchaeus!' he said, 'Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.' 6 Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy."

Wow – that is pretty amazing! Jesus knew Zacchaeus' name without asking him first! Jesus also didn't care that other people didn't like Zacchaeus; he wanted to visit in his house. The Bible says Jesus said "I *must* be a guest..." which means that God had told him to do this, and so Jesus obeyed. All of this

happened right in front of all the other people who were there to see Jesus. Zacchaeus was very happy about this! What do you think the other people thought? Read verse 7.

7 “But the people were displeased. ‘He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner’, they grumbled.

I think it’s kind of funny that they called Zacchaeus a “notorious sinner” and grumbled that Jesus was spending time at his house. They didn’t understand that they were sinners, too. In fact we all make mistakes. In the book of Romans chapter 3 verse 23 it says that we are all sinners and we all fall short of God’s glorious standards. That’s one reason Jesus came to Earth. He came to help all of us learn how to be better people. I think Zacchaeus realized this too, because he quickly said something that surprised a lot of people. Read verse 8.

8 “Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!’”

It looks like Zacchaeus had a change of heart. He realized that being rich at other people’s expense wasn’t the right thing to do. He also realized his money could be used to help other people. And he also wanted to show how sorry he was by paying back even more than he had taken. He said he would repay four times as much. If he took a dollar wrongly, he would repay \$4! Do you think Jesus was happy about this? Let’s read the last two verses of this story. Read verses 9&10.

9 “Jesus responded, ‘Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.’ “

Jesus forgave Zacchaeus his sins, and even if the other people in town didn’t like Zacchaeus, God loved him, forgave him, and knew that his heart was good. The very last verse is a good verse to memorize. This verse explains the whole reason why God sent Jesus to Earth. Jesus came to find those people who didn’t know God, who were lost in sin, and to show them who God is and to tell them the Good News of salvation!

Cinnamon Applesauce Ornaments

Use gingerbread man and Christmas tree cookie cutters to cut out Zacchaeus and tree ornaments using this recipe. Since you aren’t eating this dough, you can use the cheapest applesauce you can find. Find bulk-size ground cinnamon at warehouse stores or dollar stores. Use leftover dough to make more ornaments so that you can share with friends and family.

2 cups applesauce

2 cups ground cinnamon

1 Tablespoon craft glue such as Elmers

Mix all of the ingredients together. Add more cinnamon if the dough seems too wet, or more applesauce if it is too dry. You may need to place the dough on a counter top and knead it several times to incorporate all of the ingredients and make a smooth dough.

Roll out the dough to about ¼” thick. Cut with cookie cutters, and place ornaments on a baking sheet. Use a toothpick or wooden skewer to open a hole in the top for a ribbon.

Let the ornaments dry on baking sheets overnight, or until completely dry. Alternately you can bake them in a 200 degree oven for 2 ½ hours.

Thread a ribbon through the hole and hang on the tree.

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