

Luke 19:1-10            The Great Story  
Habbakuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4  
November 2, 2025

One of the benefits of consistent church attendance is regular exposure to the great stories of the bible; to the great biblical story. Some of it is anecdotal, as if to say, “oh, by the way, I ran in someone today while I was on the way somewhere else, like the woman at the well in Samaria, or blind Bartimaeus on the side of the road in Jericho, and this is what happened.”

Some of it is historical reporting, like the trial before Pilate or the Baptism by John in the Jordan River or the Babylonian conquest; or stories about people such as Naaman the Leper or Cornelius in Joppa, which just happened to occur when Jesus or Peter or Elisha is nearby. Or perhaps it is a fictional story as is the case with the parables Jesus told, like the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son. The stories are conveyors of theological truth. It is good to keep them fresh in our minds.

Sometimes it is good to make a list of these narratives so that we can be reminded of the storytelling method of the bible; it tells a grand epic story, Creation, and Redemption, and Fulfillment, and does it, by among other things, telling stories.

Just the tip of the iceberg and in no apparent order: Daniel in the Lion’s Den, David and Goliath, the Flood, the Parting of the Sea, Samson and Delilah; Ahab and Jezebel, or Elijah the prophet up on the mountain in a

storm; the stories about Hezekiah, Josiah, Jehoshaphat, all the kings of Israel and Judah really;

One could go on with the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter, or the healing of Jairus’ daughter, the Healing of the Paralytic who is lowered to the feet of Jesus through a hole in the roof, all the stories about healing; the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. The Parable of the Talents, or the mustard seed, all the parables really; the wedding at Cana, Jesus asleep in a boat on the lake in a storm, the Shepherds, the Damascus Road.

Some of it is among the best storytelling in all literature. And each week, in the Bible Study hour and the hour of worship, we keep them fresh and alive in our minds. They illustrate for us the truth about God and the truth about ourselves and the truth about world. They tell the story of Creation and Redemption; Sin and Forgiveness, the coming of the Kingdom in all its fullness, and in a style that can be universally understood and which is engaging, no matter a person’s background or perspective.

One of these stories from the Gospel of Luke has been read today. It is the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector Jesus met in Jericho on the way to Jerusalem to that fateful final Passover. Though it was near the end of his earthly journey, Jesus was still popular enough that a crowd gathered to see him as he came through. Because Zacchaeus was small in

stature, he couldn't see over the crowd, so he climbed a tree.

There is an irony in the name Zacchaeus related to its meaning, "righteous one, or pure one," even though Zacchaeus was ill-fitted for such a high-sounding name.

One of the divisions in a conquered society is between the people who resist the demands of the conquerors, as everyone likes to think they do, and those who are complicit, like Zacchaeus, who as a tax collector worked in tandem with their Roman oppressors, this made him a traitor, not to mention a cheat.

Anyway, seeing Zacchaeus up in the tree, Jesus addressed him to come down, and invited himself to his house, where the two of them would have dinner. The encounter was transformative. Before he even knew what he was saying he offered to give half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back four times what he owed to those he cheated.

As in some of the other stories, this one is accompanied by a brief statement to clarify its meaning.

"Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a Son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

For all his faults, Jesus saw him as one of the family. We are not given any insight into the inner workings of

the mind of Zacchaeus. All we know is that he was curious enough about Jesus to climb a tree, and that when called to come down, it was a different person that descended from the one that ascended. His change of heart resulted in restitution and a changed life, illustrated by changed behavior. Evidently, he lived up to his name after all.

We can learn from this story that the gospel is meant for everyone. God's grace reaches unexpected targets, and should never be underestimated. It is best not to judge, one cannot, after all, judge a book by its cover. One never knows the transformations that might result from an encounter with Christ.

The world has grown skeptical in the present age of such transformations, and that skepticism creeps its way even into our own thinking and into the interpretations of these stories.

Even those who are despised, are candidates for grace, and when the miracle happens, not even the sky is the limit. In the 53rd chapter of Isaiah we read, "We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." There is a little Zacchaeus in all of us. The gospel message from Jesus is that even at the end it is not too late to accept God's grace.

Thus, this story is both one of the most beloved and one of the most challenging in the gospels. It compels us to consider both our own acceptability to God and also that of others, no matter who they are or how we might be inclined to judge them; to consider our

inacceptability to God. Yet In Christ, we like Zacchaeus, have been have been called by name, accepted by God.

Beyond the personal and interpersonal considerations associated with this story, there is another, broader issue to raise. Zacchaeus, like others in the gospel stories, stands for the arrival of the Kingdom, the presence of the eternal God among us.

When what the bible calls the Kingdom of God arrives, and when the Spirit is poured out on all people, the whole world changed and not in ways connected to politics or technology or the application of new vistas of knowledge to everyday life. These changes are real enough, and they have affected our lives, but they are not like this, for they are not capable of producing righteousness, goodness, and love, which is what concern for neighbor is all about.

The presence of Christ wrings out a transformation of the world's heart reflected in the transforming of individual people like Zacchaeus, about whom we have read today in the Gospel of Luke; from one who is selfish, deceitful, and willing to disregard the well-being of his neighbors if it means his own gain, to a person who is generous, honest, and *concerned* about the well-being of his neighbors.

This change declares the presence of God in a new and dynamic way, a presence which has been working its way through time and history ever since . . . it announces the Kingdom, as did the events of the

Passion to which they were on the way, where the cross happened, and the Resurrection, and the other things that became features of the great story.

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