



# Let's Act Bible Stories!

## Activity Pack No.1

### Zacchaeus

### Introduction

The text of the play and of this Activity pack is based on the text of the Good News Bible.

The pack contains:

1. *I couldn't believe my ears!* A two voice play of a conversation between Seth (one of Zacchaeus' clients) and Zacchaeus
2. *A changed man? Are you sure?* A play for two voices
3. *Jericho Daily News* For pupils to write their own news stories (see separate file)
4. *Zack's story* The beginning of a story for pupils to complete
5. *How well do you remember?* A worksheet to help pupils recall what they have learnt
6. Map of Palestine in the time of Jesus
7. *Seth's story* think spots
8. *When Zacchaeus met Jesus* A picture story to complete and a story to write
9. *Zacchaeus – the little man with a big problem* A play



## Author's Note

This story is found only in the gospel of Luke. Zacchaeus was a very important person in Jericho. He was probably also the most hated because he worked for the occupying power, the Romans. He was a chief tax collector in Jericho. He was rich but small of stature. He must have been yearning for something more satisfying than all his money. He was ostracised by others and probably lonely.

Zacchaeus had to come down from a hiding place in a tree to meet Jesus. When Jesus amazingly called him by name to come down, he obeyed. So a process began that was to change his life – and the lives of many others in Jericho.

We all, including children, pay taxes to our government. These are collected through income tax or through the price of goods and services. Sweets, drinks and CDs for example, all have a VAT element in their prices.

As a student of the Law, Zacchaeus would have been well aware of the legal penalties for theft. He imposed on himself almost the severest penalty the law laid down. (See Exodus 22:1; Leviticus 6:1-7; 1 Samuel 12:1-6)

In the play, I have invented the characters of Silas and Benjamin for dramatic purposes. I have also invented the story of the special party Zacchaeus held to celebrate his fresh start. I have assumed he might have followed Matthew's example. Matthew held a party on giving up his job as a tax collector to follow Jesus as one of his twelve disciples. It is interesting to note that, unlike Matthew who may well have been a perfectly honest tax collector, Zacchaeus became a follower of Jesus but continued to live in Jericho in order to put matters right.



## **I couldn't believe my ears!**

A two voice play

**Zack** Good to see you again, Seth!

**Seth** I never thought I would want to come here, Zack, to your house!

**Zack** I'm a changed man, Seth, all because of Jesus!

**Seth** I'll never forget the day Jesus came here to Jericho.

**Zack** Nor me; I had climbed up a sycamore tree to see him.

**Seth** We had no idea you were hidden, looking down on us.

**Zack** I so much wanted to see Jesus.

**Seth** Then Jesus shocked us all when he suddenly stopped.

**Zack** Yes, he looked up into the tree and called out my name!

**Seth** Yes, he said he wanted to stay in your house. You of all people!

**Zack** Jesus didn't care what people thought. He knew I needed to meet him. Me, the most hated man in Jericho!

**Seth** So off you both went and people started grumbling.

**Zack** Jesus and I had a good talk. I knew I could make a fresh start following him.

**Seth** Then you both came back and you made a sensational announcement.

**Zack** "I will give half my goods to the poor and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much."

**Seth** I couldn't believe my ears!

**Zack** I meant every word of it, and kept my promise!

**Seth** You certainly did. We have a new Zack living in Jericho.

*(exit)*



## **A changed man? Are you sure?**

A play for two voices

**Jacob** Have you heard the news, Ben?

**Ben** What news, Jacob?

**Jacob** The news about Zack our chief tax collector.

**Ben** Oh, him! I hate him! He's a cheat, a liar and . . .

**Jacob** Yes, he was, but now . . .

**Ben** What do you mean was? He is still a tax collector!

**Jacob** Yes, but he's changed!

**Ben** Changed? In what way has he changed?

**Jacob** He's completely different. He's honest and fair!

**Ben** Oh, yes, I've heard the rumours, but how can you be sure?

**Jacob** I know he's changed, he asked me to go and see him. I've just come back.

**Ben** To ask for more money, I should think!

**Jacob** No, just the opposite!

**Ben** Look, I know Zack is a small man, but he has a full sized brain. He works for our enemies the Romans. But he's no fool!



**Jacob** I agree. But since he met Jesus he really has become a new man!

**Ben** How has he become a new man?

**Jacob** Do you see the bag I'm carrying?

**Ben** Yes, Jacob, I see the bag . . .

**Jacob** Please, Ben, look inside the bag.

**Ben** Alright, I will . . . let me see . . . why, it's full of money! Where did that come from?

**Jacob** Zack gave it to me!

**Ben** Zack gave it to you! Has he gone mad?

**Jacob** I told you he asked to see me. Well, when I went he said that he had made me pay far too much tax. He was giving me back four times more than I had over paid!

**Ben** What about me? I am sure I have paid Zack too much tax as well!

**Jacob** That's right, Ben. Zack asked me to tell you: please will you go and see him at once?

*(exit Ben hurriedly, followed by Jacob)*



## Zack's Story

"Jesus of Nazareth! He's coming! He will be here soon!"

I could hear the shouting from the excited crowd outside. I went to the window. I could see lots of people lining each side of the road. I knew most of them. They paid taxes to me. I saw Seth looking at a big cloud of dust coming towards us not far away. The man everyone was getting excited about, Jesus of Nazareth, would arrive in Jericho very soon. Who was Jesus? What sort of man was he? Most people liked him. He made sick people better. He told wonderful stories. Twelve men had given up everything to follow him. One had been a tax collector working for the Romans, just like me!

The crowd was getting really noisy now. I wouldn't be able to get on with my work. My work, yes, my work was important. I made a lot of money. But, I wondered, was there more to life than just making money? Perhaps this Jesus knew the answer. I put on my cloak and slipped outside to try and find out.

*Now you can finish the story*



## How well do you remember?

Who was passing through Jericho?

Who wanted to see him?

Who did Zacchaeus work for and what did he do?

Why didn't people like Zacchaeus?

Zacchaeus was so . . . . . he could not see Jesus because of the . . . . .

So he . . . ahead and climbed a . . . . . tree

Jesus stopped and looked up and said, " . . . . .

The crowd started . . . . .

Zacchaeus said to Jesus, " . . . . .

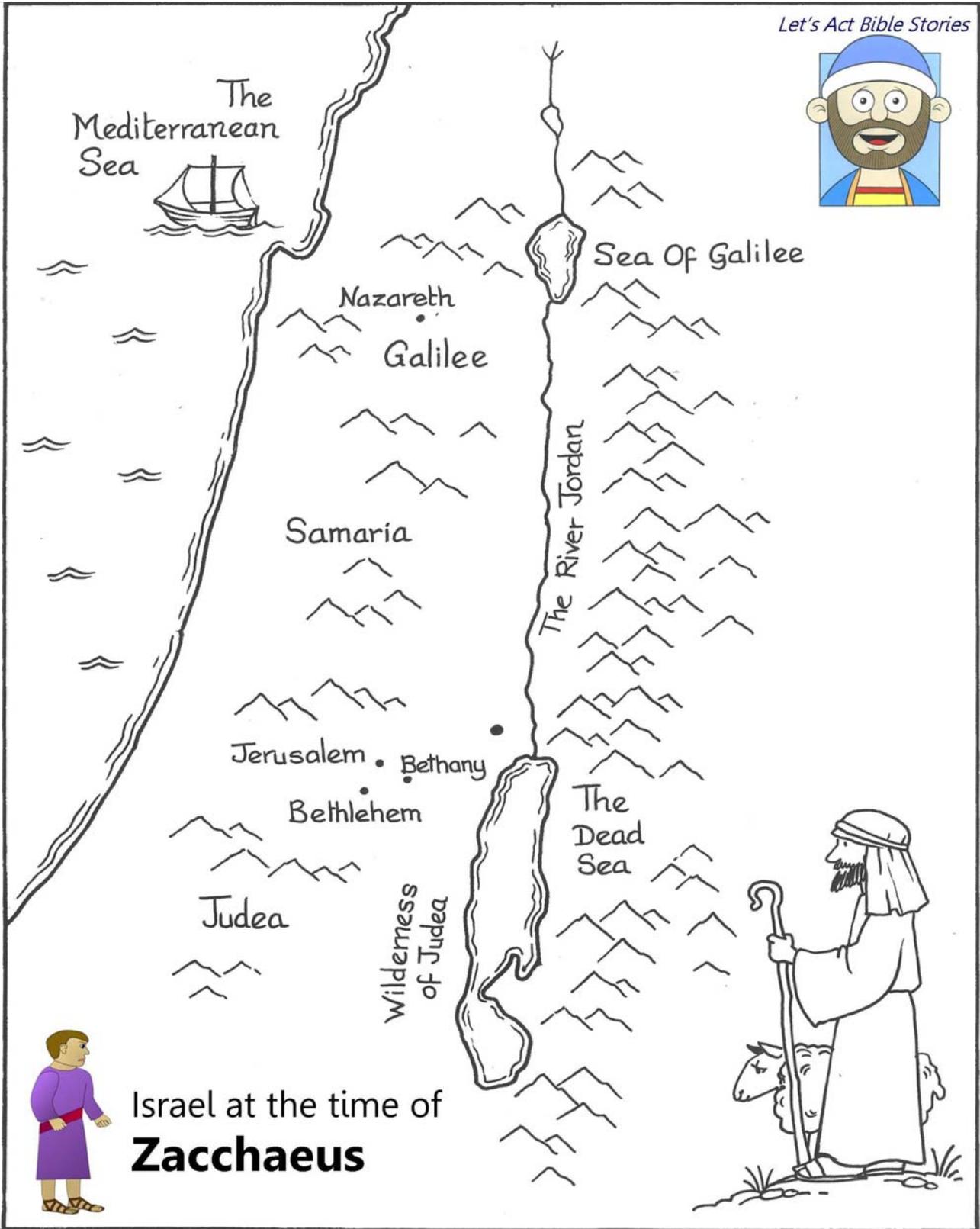
*Write down some words you might use to describe Zacchaeus before he met Jesus and after he met Jesus*



# Map of Palestine at the time of Jesus

Find the dot and add the town of Jericho

Let's Act Bible Stories



Israel at the time of  
**Zacchaeus**

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## Seth's Story

We were so excited. Jesus would be here soon, in Jericho. My name is Seth. I live, work and pay my taxes in Jericho. Yes, taxes, which I pay to that cheat Zacchaeus. His name means 'innocent' – him of all people! He works for the Romans. They have taken over our country. They make us pay taxes to men like Zacchaeus so they can rule us and build their roads! He makes us pay far too much. He's a grasping, greedy traitor.

I was at synagogue school with Zacchaeus. I didn't like him then. He wouldn't join in any of our games. "Come on, Zack," I'd say, "we're going to play our favourite game, Weddings and Funerals." Someone would play a flute; cheery music for weddings to make you laugh; then sad music to make you cry for funerals. But Zack refused to join in our games. He just sulked on his own. Not that we really wanted him. He was small for his age even then. He couldn't run fast so he got left behind in our games, anyway. But he was clever. He had a lightning quick brain. The teachers liked him: he always had the right answers to their questions. He knew all the laws of Moses and could read and write them all. Leviticus was the first book we studied. Didn't take to it myself, but Zack did, no problem.

When I left school I went to work with my dad. Before long I was earning good wages. I heard Zack had a good job, too. Something to do with money. Later I heard he had become a traitor: he was working for the Romans as a tax collector.



I go past his house sometimes. Quite a grand place on the outside. But when you go inside it smells of rotten fish. I only go when I have to pay my taxes to Zack. I hate doing it. I'm sure he keeps a big slice for himself.

Then Jesus was here, striding along with his followers. What's happened? Why has Jesus stopped? Why is he looking up in that sycamore tree? Everyone is silent. Waiting. "Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must visit your house today," Jesus called out. How did Jesus know that Zacchaeus was up that tree? How did he know his name? Next minute we saw Zacchaeus climbing down the tree. He stood in front of Jesus and together they went off to Zack's home.

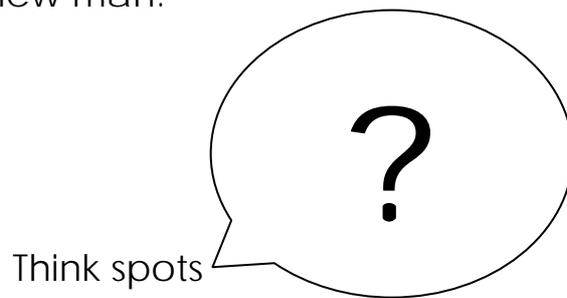
Everyone grumbled about what Jesus had done. Surely he must know that Zack was the worst man in Jericho? We waited and waited and grumbled some more. Then we saw them coming back. Zack drew himself up to his full height, which wasn't much, and spoke to Jesus loud enough for us all to hear.

"Listen, sir," he said, "I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much." I could hardly believe my ears. Then I remembered our Law lessons in synagogue school. Zack was giving himself the heaviest punishment the Law of Moses demanded. Zack really had learnt his lessons well and now he was putting them into practice.



Jesus said to Zack, "Salvation has come to this house today, for this man is also a descendant of Abraham. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Jesus left Jericho. He never came back. Zack stayed of course. We soon saw that he meant every word he had said to Jesus. He put everything right. No more cheating. Our tax bills were fair. I even enjoyed my visits to his house. Zacchaeus often reminds us of the day Jesus came to his house. The day he became a new man.



1. How do you feel when you are left out of a game?
2. What makes someone feel different from others in a group?
3. How can you help a newcomer feel wanted and useful?
4. Why did people hate Zacchaeus?
5. How was Zacchaeus different after he met Jesus?
6. What do you think that Jesus said to Zacchaeus in private?

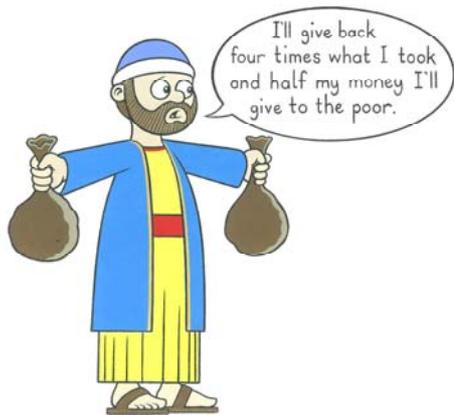
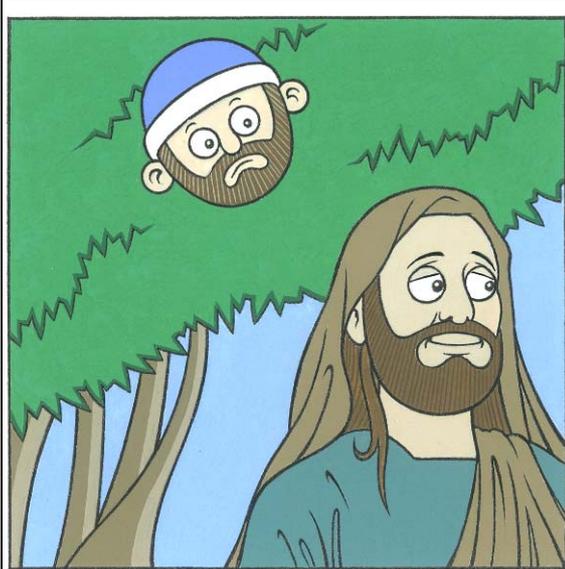


# The story of Zacchaeus (1)


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# The story of Zacchaeus (2)



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## Let's Act Bible Stories No. 3

### Zacchaeus - the little man with a big problem

#### Luke 19:1-10

##### Characters

Zacchaeus - Chief tax collector in Jericho

Silas - A Jericho resident and tax payer

Benjamin - A friend of Silas

Jesus

Disciples

##### Scene 1 - Zacchaeus' office in Jericho

*(Zacchaeus (Zack) is sitting at his desk. Enter Silas carrying a money bag.)*

**Zack** Ah, good to see you again Silas. You got my note about the tax you owe!

**Silas** *(looking very grim)* Of course I did, otherwise I wouldn't be here!

**Zack** Now then, no need to be unpleasant. After all we have been friends since we were at synagogue school together.

**Silas** Friends! We were in the same class, that's all. You wouldn't join in with any of our games like 'Weddings and Funerals'.

**Zack** I got left out of everything. That's what happened. Just because I was smaller than everyone else. I couldn't keep up.

**Silas** You kept up in the lessons in synagogue school.

**Zack** Yes. I think I was the Rabbi's favourite. He was amazed at my memory. Leviticus was the first book we studied.

**Silas** Didn't take to it myself.

**Zack** It has lots of rules and regulations about everyday life. Being honest and fair and that kind of thing.

**Silas** Honest and fair? You? *(standing up looking angry)*



- Zack            Now sit down and calm down, Silas. You know my name, Zacchaeus, means 'innocent' don't you?
- Silas            You? Innocent?
- Zack            I know what people say about me - and other tax collectors - but all we are doing is serving the public - that's why they call us publicans.
- Silas            *(softly)* . . . and sinners.
- Zack            Now let me see. Yes, here's your tax bill. I worked it out and sent you a copy. Ah yes . . .

*(Silas hands over his bag of money, reluctantly)*

*(Zack empties the bag and carefully checks all the coins)*

- Zack            Yes, that's exactly right Silas. No more to pay 'til next time.
- Silas            I don't understand why I have to pay so much. I am just an ordinary working man. I can hardly afford to feed my family with all I have to pay you!
- Zack            Not me, Silas, the Romans. You see Roman citizens don't have to pay taxes. But we, (you and me) do.
- Silas            But what for? What do I get out of it?
- Zack            Peace, Silas. No fighting. Lovely paved streets and fine straight roads, so everyone should be happy to pay.
- Silas            Happy! Paying all this money! How can I be happy? And the other day a Roman soldier made me carry his heavy pack for a whole Roman mile. That's what makes us hate them. People say one day our Messiah, our King, will come with a great army and throw the Romans out. Maybe he will be Jesus of Nazareth, who is on his way here today.
- Zack            Oh! I've heard of him. Done some good things. Healed people. Doesn't sound like your kind of King. I even hear he has a man called Matthew who was a tax collector as one of his 12 special friends. And he said, so I hear, that we should pay taxes to the Roman Emperor! So perhaps us tax-collectors aren't as bad as you say!
- Silas            Matthew was different. He was honest. He didn't lie and cheat and . . .



**Zack** I hope you aren't saying that about me. The Romans are very funny about who they employ as tax collectors, you know. I was very fortunate to get this job. I was always good with numbers . . . and this Jesus . . . he's coming here. To Jericho?

**Silas** Yes, today! He's on his way here now! The crowd outside is lining the road. He could be here at any moment. I want to see him for myself.

**Zack** Well, we have finished our business, so you can go. I should like to see Jesus too, I wonder . . .

**Silas** You! See Jesus? He won't want to have anything to do with you because . . .

**Zack** Thank you, Silas, 'til the next time we meet.

*(exit Silas looking angry)*

**Zack** Mmm . . . yes. I would like to see Jesus. I have heard so much about him. The wonderful stories he tells. A real Rabbi. Most people love him. Even some of the Romans. Not the Pharisees though. But I'm short; how will I be able to see him? No one will let me through the crowds. I won't be able to see over people's heads. Let me think . . . yes I have a plan. I may be small, but I have a full sized brain! Where's my oldest cloak?

*(reaches for cloak and puts it on)*

*(Zacchaeus looks carefully out of the window and exits)*

**Zack** Well, here I am outside in the road. What a huge crowd! All waiting to see Jesus! I'm glad they don't know I'm here. They hate me. There's Silas and Benjamin over there. I must keep well away from them! So, now to do what I have planned.

*(Zacchaeus hurries past the crowd)*

I know this road very well, of course. I know every tree. There is one tree that is in just the right place. Ah, here it is. I am still fit and agile. Jesus will have to pass by this very tree. So now I will climb up . . . and get safely among the branches. There I am. Now I am safely hidden from everyone. But I can see the road and all the people eager to see Jesus pass by. I can see a big cloud of dust not far away. Jesus and his disciples will soon be here. I will be able to see Jesus and find out what he really looks like. Something I have wanted to do for a long time. And nobody will know that I am here!



Scene 2 - the road outside

*(Silas and Benjamin enter from the opposite direction)*

**Silas** Phew! I'm glad to be in the fresh air. Zack's office is dark and smells of rotten fish!

**Benjamin** *(grinning)* Is Zack a friend of yours?

**Silas** Friend! All right, I know you're joking! I just went to pay my taxes - or rather overpay my taxes. I am sure Zack makes a huge profit out of us.

**Benjamin** Yes, I'm sure you're right. But we just have to pay our taxes to him or else we'll be in trouble with the Romans.

**Silas** What a big crowd! Everyone in Jericho must be here to see Jesus pass through, everyone, that is, except Zack.

**Benjamin** Here comes Jesus now! Look he is walking along the road towards us. He and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem.

*(watch as Jesus enters leading his disciples)*

**Silas** I can see him. Good thing we are so tall, we can see over the heads of the crowd.

**Benjamin** Just as well Zack isn't here, he is so small he wouldn't see anything!

**Silas** There Jesus goes, walking steadily on . . . but . . . why has he stopped?

**Benjamin** And why is he looking up at that sycamore tree?

**Silas** He's saying something, listen!

**Jesus** Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today.

**Benjamin** Look, well, would you believe it? Zack's hidden himself up in that tree!

**Silas** We all know Jesus is clever! But how did he know Zack was there and how did he know his name?

**Benjamin** I don't know, but only Jesus would dare give Zack an order!

**Silas** Zack is certainly obeying. Look he's hurrying down.

*(watch as Zacchaeus meets Jesus)*



**Benjamin** Zacchaeus is welcoming Jesus. You can see joy in his face. Never seen him like that before!

**Silas** Now what's happening? Look, Jesus is going off to Zack's house!

*(Jesus and Zacchaeus walk off)*

**Benjamin** Listen, people in the crowd are grumbling, "This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!"

**Silas** How on earth could Jesus go to his house?

**Benjamin** Perhaps Jesus has something important to say to Zack.

**Silas** Do you think he will listen? He never listens to me when I protest about paying too much in taxes!

**Benjamin** I don't know. But certainly Zack was very keen to see Jesus. I am sure that he never expected to meet him!

**Silas** Zack was very clever in school. Top of the class. I wonder what Jesus is saying to him?

**Benjamin** Look, they are coming back. I think Zack wants to say something.

*(Jesus and Zacchaeus re-enter. Zacchaeus stands before Jesus.)*

**Zack** Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much.

**Silas** Did you hear that, Benjamin? Does he really mean what he says?

**Benjamin** I hope so. Now Jesus is speaking.

**Jesus** Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham. The Son of Man came to see and to save the lost.

**Silas** We have all heard what Zack said. We will soon find out if he will carry out his promises.

**Benjamin** Jesus and his disciples are walking on, going towards Jerusalem. Zack's gone back to his home.

**Silas** We'd better be off too. What a day it's been!

*(all exit)*



Scene 3 - Zacchaeus' House

*(Zack sits at a table with four bags of money. Silas enters looking puzzled and nervous.)*

- Zack            Welcome, Silas. Good to see you again. I hope you and your family are well?
- Silas            We are all well. But why have you sent for me again so soon. I have just paid my taxes.
- Zack            Yes, you certainly did. That is why I asked you to come and see me again. I wanted to put something right.
- Silas            Put something right? Whatever do you mean, Zacchaeus?
- Zack            You remember what I said to Jesus when he came here to Jericho?
- Silas            Yes, I remember it very well.
- Zack            I made Jesus a promise.
- Silas            Yes, we all heard it very clearly. You said that you were going to give half your belongings to the poor and if you had cheated anyone you would pay him back four times as much.
- Zack            Exactly. The first part I have done. Now I have been looking through all my records, checking, you might say.
- Silas            Checking what for, mistakes?
- Zack            Not mistakes, Silas.
- Silas            What were you looking for then?
- Zack            I was looking to see where I had cheated people, demanded too much money.
- Silas            What did you find?
- Zack            I found out . . . exactly . . . how dishonest I have been . . . I was shocked.
- Silas            I don't know what to say, Zack.
- Zack            All I can ask is for your forgiveness . . . and for you to have these four bags of money . . .
- Silas            *(astonished)* Why are you doing this?



- Zack** Because of my meeting with Jesus. He looked at me as we sat here in my office. I just knew that as he looked at me, he knew what I had been doing. All my lying, cheating, stealing had to stop.
- Silas** Why?
- Zack** Because I wanted to become a follower of Jesus, like Matthew and the other disciples. But I knew I had to stay here in Jericho to clear up the mess and put everything right. Can you help me to do that, please, Silas?
- Silas** Of course, Zack, of course. I will forgive you and thanks for all my money back, plus all the rest!
- Zack** That makes me very happy, Silas. I've seen a lot of people and they have all forgiven me, so I can make a fresh start.
- Silas** That's great! You know when I came in just now I was very puzzled. The whole house is different. It used to be dark and horribly smelly. Now it's full of light . . . and happiness!
- Zack** That's because of my meeting with Jesus and the difference he has made to me. Oh, just one more thing, Silas. I shall be sending out invitations. Here's one for you. *(hands him a piece of paper)*
- Silas** Invitations, Zack, what for?
- Zach** I am making a fresh start. So I am having a party to celebrate. Everyone I have cheated will be invited. I hope you can come.
- Silas** Of course I will, Zack, I look forward to it. I'm sure it will be the best party ever!
- Zack** Good. I will see you to the door.
- (exit both)*