

The Story:

He wasn't going to give up easy. One more go, he thought, as he scrambled to grab the lowest branch on the tree. Some days it had its advantages, but today, being knee high to a grasshopper was not helping him much. He caught on, pulled himself up, and scrambled to a place in the tree where he could see above everyone else standing in the crowd. On a normal day, he tried to navigate through town without being noticed by anyone, as his job as a tax collector didn't earn him a lot of favor with most people.

Today was different, though. He wanted to be seen and he was determined that being vertically challenged wasn't going to stop him. The people were gathered to see Jesus. He was passing through the city and didn't appear to have plans to stop anywhere. There wasn't a lot of room to move in the claustrophobic, roaming crowd. It seemed like everyone wanted to spend time with Jesus and hear what He had to say. Jesus paused and, in what seemed like a random moment, looked up at the tree and said, "Zacchaeus, come on down, because I have to stay at your house today." Zacchaeus sat like a stunned bird on its perch, wondering if he was dreaming. The smell of the sweaty crowd quickly reminded him that this was reality, so he gathered himself together and shimmied his way down to meet Jesus.

His heart was pounding as they walked through the staring crowd. They arrived at Zacchaeus' house and he made Jesus feel at home. The crowd was left talking amongst themselves, forming judgments of whom Jesus had chosen to socialize with. But this was a strange experience for Zacchaeus, as it was the first time he had felt accepted by anyone in a long time. He had been dying to unload everything that was going on inside him, but no one gave him the permission to speak like Jesus did that day. It didn't take long before he spilled his guts about how he had fleeced people and been dishonest about the taxes he collected. He felt awful and was full of regret. Jesus listened, and before anything else could be said, Zacchaeus announced that he was making some changes. He wanted out of the hole he had dug for himself. He told Jesus that, from that moment on, he was going to pay everyone back - four times the amount he had stolen - and he was going to give away half of what he owned to the poor

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- Have you ever fought your way through a crowd to see someone famous?
 - + What famous person would you like to be recognized by in a large crowd?

Being a tax collector was the bottom rung of the corporate ladder in Zacchaeus' society. It was the first step that a person could take on his way to becoming powerful and wealthy over a long period of time. It was a tough job and it almost necessitated ruthlessness and dishonesty to survive and be recognized. The tax collectors were not liked by anyone and were renowned for their dodgy schemes and harsh tactics that made life difficult for the poor.

- What career do you think you might like to pursue in your life?
 - + What does success look like to you?
 - + How will you determine your own success?

Zacchaeus had obviously begun to make it financially or he would not have made a big deal of giving away half of what he owned. It looked like living the life he had always dreamed of was not working out quite the way he had imagined.

- What mistakes do you think Zacchaeus made along the way?
 - + What realization do you think he was coming to prior to meeting Jesus?

When we live for money or our own dreams, we end up walking over people and using them inappropriately. This only ever leads to a lonely, unfulfilled life. What does it profit anybody if they get all the toys in the world but lose their identity and all their friends?

- What do you think Zacchaeus was longing for most in his life?
 - + Why do you think Jesus made time for him?
 - + What made Zacchaeus take the step into dramatic life change?

Most people know what they want to change in their lives - they just need someone to stand beside them. Yet again, Jesus demonstrated that serving is more powerful than judging.