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## Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector in Jericho whose story is recounted in Luke 19:1–10 (he is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible).

When Jesus passes through the town, Zacchaeus wants to see who he is but isn't able to, because of the crowd and because he is short of stature. He climbs a tree for a better view. Surprisingly, Jesus summons him to come down and goes to his home, presumably for a meal. This prompts a negative response from the crowd, who grumble that Jesus has “gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner” (Luke 19:7).

Zacchaeus offers a comment to Jesus that is somewhat ambiguous: “half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I pay back four times as much.” Some interpreters assume Zacchaeus is defending himself against the charge that he is a sinner by stating what has always been his normal (and righteous) policy. Others think the context implies a transformation: Zacchaeus is stating what he is going to do from this point on.

The NRSV opts for the latter interpretation and translates the present-tense verbs (“I give to the poor”; “I pay back”) as future expressions (“I will give to the poor”; “I will pay back”). This is

grammatically possible since, in Greek, the present tense can be used idiomatically to express inception of future action. The notion that Zacchaeus has undergone a transformation may also be suggested by Jesus's concluding comment: "Today, salvation has come to this house" (19:9), though the rationale stated for that salvation is not that Zacchaeus has repented but that he "is a son of Abraham."

The story is definitely intended to illustrate Jesus's vocation as one who has come "to seek out and to save the lost" (19:10). The interpretive question is whether Zacchaeus was "lost" because he was a sinner needing repentance, or because he had been mislabeled a sinner and needed to be identified as a true son of Abraham.