

=THE CONVERSION=

Lesson 4
A Tax Collector

Objects to have:

A pitcher

A small piece of cloth

A sign reading BE MERCIFUL TO ME A SINNER

A sheet of paper that has a list of names, beside which is a list of dollar amounts. Have PAID written after some of the names.

A big sign reading HIDE-AND-SEEK

Your Bible.

Introducing the lesson:

(Hold up the pitcher.) A lady was carrying a pitcher, and Jesus was sitting on the wall of the well to which the lady was coming. Remember that Bible story? Jesus told the lady all about herself, and the lady asked Jesus to be her Saviour.

(Hold up the piece of cloth.) This piece of cloth reminds me of a bed—not the kind of bed that we have. Who was on a bed like this? (Let the children respond with details of the man who was healed at the Pool of Bethesda.)

(Hold up the sign which reads BE MERCIFUL TO ME A SINNER. Read the sign to the children.) A man was in the temple, praying this prayer. What kind of job did that man have? What was he called? There was another man in the temple, praying, also. What kind of job did that man have? What was he called? One of those men went to Heaven, and the other man could not go to Heaven. Which was which? (Let the children answer briefly about the story of the Pharisee and the publican.)

(Hold up the sign which reads HIDE-AND-SEEK.) How many of you have ever played Hide-and-Seek? (If the children are quick to respond, let them tell you how the game is played.) Jesus always is “It.” Jesus is always seeking. Jesus is always looking for people who need to be saved. Whenever Jesus is looking, the people whom He needs to save sometimes don’t want to be found by Him. Sometimes they run and hide again, saying, “Leave me alone.” That’s the way the Pharisee did. He said that he was already good; he did not need Jesus. A man in our story for today, however, wanted to be found by Jesus. Listen to see where Jesus found him. Our story is in Luke chapter 19. (Pick up your Bible and show this reference to the children.)

Telling the story:

(Lay down your Bible. Enact the story as you tell it.) A man was leaving for work one day. He lived in a big, beautiful house. He was wearing a suit that cost lots of money. He kissed his wife and he kissed his children and said, “Good bye. I am going to work now.”

The man hurried to his place of work. He probably walked. As he walked, his steps were not as big as the steps of some other men. This man was short. His legs were not as long as other men’s legs. He passed by other people. Other people were saying, “Good morning,” to each other. They did not greet this man, however. They did not say with a smile, “Good morning, Zacchaeus.” Nearly everybody in the town where Zacchaeus lived hated Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus’ job is what made people hate him. Zacchaeus hurried down the street of his town.

Zacchaeus finally came to his office and went inside the door. He sat down at his desk in his office. He got ready to do the day’s job. He got out some papers.

(Pick up your tax list.) On the papers were written the names of the men who lived in his town. Beside the name of each man were written some numbers. There was a word written beside the numbers after the names of some of the men. There was the word PAID written beside some of the numbers. In some places that word was not written. Some men in the town still owed some money. They owed some money called taxes.

Zacchaeus said to himself (point to items on the list), “This man and this man and this man better get in here today to pay their taxes.” A man came in. Zacchaeus looked up from his sheets of paper. “What is your name?” The man told Zacchaeus his name. Zacchaeus said, “You owe \$500.00 to me.” The man got angry! He did not think that he owed so much money to Zacchaeus. In fact, he just knew that Zacchaeus was asking for more money than he should have asked. That’s the way it was with tax collectors. They were allowed to collect as much money as they wanted to collect from the people. The tax collector just had to send in just so much money to the people in the government office, and the tax collector could keep the rest of the money for himself. That is why all the people of the town hated Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was getting richer and richer, and the people of the town were getting poorer and poorer because of all the money that he collected from them. The man argued with Zacchaeus, but it did no good. The man finally paid what Zacchaeus said that he had to pay.

Then Zacchaeus heard some news. Men were standing around in his office, waiting their turns to go up to Zacchaeus’ desk. These men were talking with each other. “Did you hear the news? Someone said that Jesus is on His way into our town.”

“No, I did not know that. Did someone see Him coming?”

“Yes, they saw Him coming down the road that leads into our town Jericho.”

That man decided that he would leave the office of Zacchaeus and come back another time to pay his taxes. He wanted to hurry away to the road that led into Jericho. He wanted to see Jesus. Other people outside the office of Zacchaeus were hurrying down the street, also. The news had spread around the town. “Jesus is coming! Jesus is coming down the road! He is coming into our town of Jericho.”

Zacchaeus took care of the other people who were in his office, collecting their money and writing the word PAID after their names on his pieces of paper. Soon his office was empty. Nobody was in there but he. Everybody was outside hurrying to the main road that Jesus was traveling. Zacchaeus thought, “I want to see Jesus, too. A tax collector friend of mine—another publican—who lives in another town told me about Jesus. That friend of mine is certainly a changed person; he is happy now. He said that Jesus loves everybody.” Zacchaeus wanted to see a Man Who would love him.

Zacchaeus went to the office door. He took out his keys and locked the door. He hurried down the street of the city of Jericho. He got to the main street. My, but a lot of people had gathered there already! It was as if they were lined up to see a parade. Zacchaeus tried to see the road, but he couldn’t. There were too many people. Well, he would just move along to another place beside the road. He would watch for a place where he could get up close to the road and see. There’s an opening; he could get in there! People saw him coming, however. They pushed over and would not let Zacchaeus though. He hurried on to another place. He could begin to hear the excitement in the crowd now. “He’s coming. Someone said that He is coming!” Zacchaeus hurried on ahead of where Jesus would be coming. He wanted so much to see Him. He just had to see Jesus, but there was just no place in the crowd where he could get up close to the road. Zacchaeus would jump up, trying to see over the heads of the men and women who were lined up along the road, but he could not see even by jumping up and looking toward the road. What could he do? He could not get through the crowd, and he could not see over the heads of the crowd because he was so short. He looked around for some high place—maybe some stairs on a building. Then he got an idea.

There were many trees lining the road that went through Jericho. The trees were taller than the people, but grown men don’t climb trees, especially men who are dressed in nice suits. Climbing that tree, however, was the only way. Zacchaeus ran to the tree. He grabbed hold of the trunk of the tree and put his feet up on the trunk. Zacchaeus was climbing a big, broad sycamore tree. Was he up high enough yet to see over the heads of the

people? No, he had to climb higher! He climbed higher. Here the leaves were very thick. He would have to go out on a limb to see through the leaves. He looked up to be sure that he was climbing out onto a branch that was strong enough to hold him. He found one. He found a strong branch. He climbed out onto that branch. There he could see the road. Zacchaeus found a good spot among the leaves on the branch of the tree. He sat down. He could see the road. He waited for Jesus to come down the road. There, down the road Zacchaeus could see Jesus coming! Jesus was coming closer and closer. There were people all around Jesus. Children were skipping and running to keep up with Jesus. Jesus noticed the children, because He always noticed children. Mommies and daddies were walking along beside Jesus, but even though there was such a crowd around Jesus, Zacchaeus could still see Him. Jesus was almost close enough now for Zacchaeus to see His eyes. Jesus did not look different from some of the other men. Jesus had short hair. Jesus looked like a strong man. He was walking with big manly steps down the road through Jericho. He was talking with the people. He was smiling at the children. Jesus was showing how much He loved everybody. Closer and closer He came until He was almost right under the tree—the very tree in which Zacchaeus was sitting!

If you did not know that Zacchaeus was up that tree, you might not have seen him there. There were many, many leaves on the branches of the tree, and the leaves were big.

What was happening? Jesus had stopped walking. Jesus stopped right under the branches of the tree where Zacchaeus was. Jesus looked up into the tree. He looked right at the branch where Zacchaeus was sitting. He looked straight at Zacchaeus. “Zacchaeus, come down. I am going to your house today. Hurry!” Zacchaeus could hardly believe his ears. Jesus was talking to him! Jesus saw Zacchaeus in that tree. Jesus called his name. Zacchaeus hurried down out of that tree. He jumped down onto the ground. Down on the ground, beside Jesus, Zacchaeus said, “This is the way to my house.” Jesus went with Zacchaeus to his house. Zacchaeus threw open the door to his house. “We have a Guest today,” he called. “Jesus has come to our house!” Zacchaeus told his servants to get a meal ready. Zacchaeus’ family and Zacchaeus and Jesus all sat at the table to eat together.

Zacchaeus said, “Now that You are here, Jesus, I see what I’m really like. I know that I have not always done right. Whatever money I have taken from people and should not have taken from them, I will give back to them. I will give back to them more money than I took from them, even. I will give back to them four times as much as I took! Jesus, I want to do right. I love you.”

Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Now that you have told Me of your sins and now that you have told Me that you trust Me, you are saved, Zacchaeus. When you die someday, you will go to Heaven to be with Me. Now you belong to Me, Zacchaeus,” Jesus said. “Now, do right.”

What a happy day that had turned out to be for Zacchaeus! It had started just like any other day, a rather sad day for Zacchaeus because everybody outside his family hated him. Then Jesus came! Jesus had come looking for Zacchaeus. Jesus looks for people who need to be saved; Jesus seeks the lost. Jesus came “to seek and to save that which was lost,” Luke 19:10. Aren’t you glad that Zacchaeus trusted Jesus as his Saviour? Have you trusted Him?