

ZACCHAEUS THE TAX COLLECTOR

Summary

The story is told as a dialogue between a narrator and a puppet.

Preparation

Before you start the story, have the children practise shouting “Hurray!” whenever you say, “Jesus is coming” and “Come and eat at my house!” when you rub your tummy (this doesn’t happen until some way into the story, so the children are likely to need a bit of prompting at that point).

Props

2 copies of the script

Zacchaeus puppet/doll

A leafy tree for the puppet to climb

Narrator “Jesus is coming!”
“Jesus is coming!”
That’s what everyone was shouting, that day in Jericho.
Everyone was so excited because Jesus was coming to town.
Well, nearly everyone...

Zacchaeus *I* wasn’t excited. I was sad.

Narrator Poor little Zacchaeus. He *did* want to see Jesus - he really did - but he was scared.

Zacchaeus All those people! That huge crowd! All shouting together:

Narrator “Jesus is coming!”

Zacchaeus I did so want to see him. But I knew he wouldn’t want to see me. Nobody wanted to see *me*. It was my job, you see.

Narrator Zacchaeus was a tax collector. That meant he went round collecting money from people, to give to the Romans who were in charge of Jesus’ country. Nobody liked giving money to the Romans.

Zacchaeus And I didn’t just collect the money they had to pay to the Romans. I cheated. I asked them for more money than I was meant to - and I kept what was left for myself. No wonder nobody liked me.

Narrator When Zacchaeus saw the crowds of people, and heard how excited they were - shouting, “Jesus is coming!” - he felt so alone. He just couldn’t be part of the crowd. You see, there were too many people in it who’d been cheated by him.

Zacchaeus And anyway, even if they didn’t all hate me, there was no point me going out in the crowd. I’m too short. I wouldn’t be able to see Jesus anyway.

Narrator What was Zacchaeus to do? The crowd was getting more and more excited as Jesus came closer and closer.
“Jesus is coming!”
“No! Jesus is *here!*”

Zacchaeus And that’s when I had my brilliant idea. Out of my window, I spotted the tops of the tall, leafy trees by the city gates. That’s where Jesus was! If only I could sneak behind the crowd and climb one of those trees, I thought, then I could see Jesus - but nobody would see me!

Narrator So off went Zacchaeus. He sneaked out of his house and along the streets - and nobody noticed him, because they were all so busy looking for Jesus.

Zacchaeus I climbed a tree as quickly as I could, and peeped out between the leaves. There he was! It was really him, walking straight towards my tree! Jesus *was* coming!

Narrator Zacchaeus could hardly believe it. Jesus stopped right under the tree where he was hiding! Jesus looked tired, and - what was that noise? Zacchaeus was sure he’d just heard Jesus’ tummy rumbling. Yes - he had - he was sure of it - because now Jesus was rubbing his tummy.

Zacchaeus Poor Jesus, I thought. He spends all his time looking after other people. Does anyone ever look after him?

Narrator Jesus rubbed his tummy again.
Now the crowd was even more excited. Jesus was such an important man. No wonder they all wanted him to eat at their house. It would make them feel so special to be chosen by him. Jesus rubbed his tummy again.

Zacchaeus It seemed like I was the only one in that huge crowd who wasn't shouting for Jesus to come and eat at my house. I just kept my mouth shut and tried not to rustle the leaves in my tree.

Narrator Jesus smiled kindly at all the people in the crowd.
"Thank you," he said. "You're all very kind. But I've already decided where I'll be eating my dinner today."

Zacchaeus And you'll never guess what happened next! Jesus looked straight up into my tree and straight into my eyes - and he smiled again - in fact it even looked as if he was trying not to laugh.
And then he said my name. How did he know who I was? He looked straight into my eyes and he said my name.
"Zacchaeus," he called. "Come down. I'm eating at your house today!"

Narrator Well! Can you imagine what the crowd thought about that? *Zacchaeus*?! But he was such a bad man - maybe the worst man in town!

Zacchaeus And there was *nobody* more shocked than me. I climbed down the tree, and my legs were shaking so much that I could hardly walk when I reached the ground. I couldn't understand it. Why would someone as good as Jesus want to have dinner with someone as bad as me?

Narrator Zacchaeus led Jesus back to his house - back through the huge crowd - but now he didn't feel scared any more. Now he felt proud and excited. He flung open the door of his house and shouted out to his servants:

Zacchaeus "Jesus is coming!"

Narrator Well, in they went.
Time passed.
The crowd waited ... and waited.
What could a man as good as Jesus find to talk about with a man as bad as Zacchaeus?
Why would a man as good as Jesus want to spend time with a man as bad as Zacchaeus?
It made no sense!

Zacchaeus But suddenly, as we talked, it all made perfect sense to me. Suddenly I knew what I had to do.

Narrator Zacchaeus looked at Jesus - this good, good man who had shown him such love and trust, even though he'd done so many bad things - and for the first time in his life he began to believe that things could be different. He'd been very bad, but maybe that could change. Maybe, with Jesus' help, he could learn to be good.

Zacchaeus And that's when I said sorry. I owned up to what I'd done - how I'd cheated all those people - and I said how sorry I was. And then I had my second brilliant idea of the day!

Narrator Zacchaeus knew that it wasn't enough just to *say* sorry. We need to mean it - and really try to change.

Zacchaeus I promised that I'd pay back everyone I'd cheated - not just what I'd stolen from them, but four times as much! And whatever money I had left, I promised to give half of it away to the poor people. And I did it, too.

Narrator Zacchaeus had been a very bad man. But Jesus came to share God's love with *everyone*. No matter what bad things we've said or done, if we say sorry and mean it, then he will always give us another chance.