

Through the Eye of a Needle (Luke 19:1-27)



Jesus said, 'For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' (18:25) 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.' (18:27). Jesus shows how a camel can go through the eye of a needle by God's grace and power!

A. What Did Zacchaeus See? (19:1-10)

1. Jesus was passing through the town of Jericho (v1). This was His last stop before Jerusalem. Jericho was a lovely gardens-like city of many trees and springs, only around 20 km from Jerusalem. It sat on one of the main trade routes, providing lucrative business for tax collectors with custom duties and taxes on the goods passing from Perea to Jerusalem. The term 'chief tax collector' occurs only here, meaning Zacchaeus employed other business associates to do the 'dirty work' for him, taxing their fellow countrymen.
2. This was a 'little man' who was willing to lose all his friends to make it big in the business world. And he did make a small fortune with hard work, determination and grit. He was a '*self-made millionaire*', unlike the 'rich young ruler' in Luke 18, who inherited everything.

What made this man turn to Jesus at this point in his life? We have no way of knowing. But the name Zacchaeus means a good person, a just, righteous and honest person - a good man. It was what his parents wanted him to be as he grew into a man. But somewhere along the way, Zacchaeus decided he wanted to be 'someone powerful', 'someone important', more than 'someone good'. Zacchaeus saw the business opportunity in Jericho, and he built the tax collecting business very few could compete with (v2).

3. One afternoon, Zacchaeus' life would take a radical turn - instantly, completely and permanently, just like the blind Bartimaeus who met Jesus just outside of Jericho. How did his life change so radically?
 - a. Desire: Zacchaeus '*sought to see who Jesus was*' (v3). It started with his desire to see Jesus. He wasn't out to see the 'clout around Jesus' - the excited crowd, fame, hype or even the miracles. He wanted to see 'who Jesus was' with his own eyes.
 - b. Determination: With the same determination that pushed him to the top of his profession, Zacchaeus ran ahead of other people and climbed up the sycamore tree, so he could have a clear sighting of Jesus as He passed by (v4). Never mind looking foolish - a grown man, a businessman climbing up a tree like a little child. But if he could just see Jesus, Zacchaeus wasn't going to be denied, just like the persistent widow. Zacchaeus refused to let anyone get between him and Jesus.

Many people let someone or something get in between them and the Lord. *If that's what Christianity is all about, I don't want it. Are you willing to 'climb up a tree' even if it means looking foolish, so that you can get past all obstacles and barriers and get a clear view of Jesus? The barriers of 'people', 'tradition', 'experience' in the past?* If you really want to see who Jesus is, you must be prepared to climb up your 'tree' too. A sycamore tree is not a difficult tree to climb. It has a large trunk in the centre with many branches extending sideways. 'It is a tree made for short people!'

4. Seven Surprises that awaited Zacchaeus in the 'Clear View of Jesus' (v5)

- a. Jesus took notice of him – Jesus saw Zacchaeus hidden in the foliage of the sycamore tree. The crowd stood in the way of this little man. Nobody made room for him. Crowd always gets in our way and obscures our view of Jesus. But Jesus stopped. He looked up and ZEROED IN on Zacchaeus in the tree.
- b. Jesus talked to Zacchaeus – Nobody would talk to this man. He was the most hated and despised man in town. He made his fortune from ripping off his own countrymen and helping the Romans. But Jesus stopped and spoke to him as a person.
- c. Jesus knew him – They've never met, but Jesus called him by his name, 'Zacchaeus' – a 'good man'.
- d. Jesus accepted him – without any condition, '*Make haste come down.*' 'Zacchaeus made haste and came down and received Him joyfully.' (v6)

- e. Jesus befriended him – ‘For today I must stay at your house.’ (Notice Jesus did not say ‘I’d like to stay at your house’, but ‘I must stay...’ It means ‘divine compelling’ in Greek. This was divine appointment.)
- f. Jesus preferred Zacchaeus over the crowd – Jesus lost a lot of friends that afternoon. ‘They all complained saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’ (v7) Zacchaeus joyfully welcomed Jesus to his house, and that day he became a totally changed man.
- g. Jesus came to Jericho for Zacchaeus - ‘for the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.’ (v10) There are three routes from Galilee to Jerusalem: (a) coastal route; (b) route through Samaria; (c) eastern route. Jesus took the least convenient eastern route, which was a detour, as He came through Samaria (C.f. 17:11). Why? To find Zacchaeus.

5. When Jesus is welcomed in, Salvation is worked out.

- a. ‘Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ (v8)
 - I. ‘I give’, not ‘I will give in the future’ It was not an indefinite commitment in the future, which is rarely followed through. Zacchaeus was writing out the cheques right there and then.
 - II. Four-fold restitution – Zacchaeus volunteered for the maximum legal penalty required for theft. The Jewish law required only 20% excess for voluntary restitution (Lev 6:5, Num 5:7). If the theft is forceful and premediated, then two-fold restitution was required. Only when the thief tried to tamper with evidence of the theft, four-fold restitution was required (Ex 22:1).
 - III. Zacchaeus was converted before his feet touched the ground! What did Zacchaeus see on that sycamore tree? That it turned Zacchaeus’ life ‘upside-down’ or ‘right-side-up’?

b. Two Important Things about Zacchaeus’ Decision for Restitution:

- I. Jesus didn’t tell him to do this. Nobody could have made Zacchaeus do this, to let go of the life savings he has accumulated by grabbing from others as much as he could while being called a ‘scum’. Now he begins to give generously and think of the poor. The onlookers must be been stunned. What did Zacchaeus see on that tree, that changed him so dramatically and instantly?
Zacchaeus must have seen the incomparable glory and beauty of Jesus from the tree! He didn’t care anymore about his bank balance. He saw in Jesus the pearl of the great price that no amount of money could buy. He must have seen how utterly unimportant and worthless were the things he held on to all his life. For the first time in his life, the riches of this world must have lost its pull on his soul. He did not want to trade his ‘friendship with Jesus’ for all the money in this world.
‘Today, salvation has come to this house because he also is a son of Abraham.’ (19:9) Zacchaeus became a ‘true Jew’, a righteous man and a good man, as was his name. This camel went through the eye of a needle!
- II. Zacchaeus’ action didn’t ‘earn’ him salvation. Being made right with God, Zacchaeus wanted to be right with people too. This was the fruit of his repentance. After he was made right with God, he wanted to be right with everyone and everything in his life.

A young farmer named Peter received Jesus, and said, ‘I have just read Luke 19. I sold a cow and lied about the cow’s age and got more money. I must give the money back to the man I have cheated.’ The man said, ‘You, fool.’ Peter replied, ‘No, I am not a fool. I am a Christian.’

When Jesus is welcomed in, salvation is worked out.

Zacchaeus learned another thing about the Lord. ‘For the Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost.’ (v10) Jesus came all the way to Jericho just for Zacchaeus. To Jesus, Zacchaeus was the pearl of great price worth seeking and finding. Soon He was going to lay His life down for Zacchaeus. You too are God’s own possession and His personal treasure, not because you sought Him, but because Jesus sought you and found you, and you have responded to him.

B. The Parable of the Minas (19:11-27) – What do You Live for?

1. Jesus told this parable to the same audience in Zacchaeus' house. It was almost the Passover season, and Jesus was nearing Jerusalem. His friends were thinking the Jesus was about to liberate them from Rome. *'They thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately' (v11)*. There was no grid in their thoughts for the impending cross that Jesus faced (18:31-34).
2. This parable was based on the actual political situation in Jesus' days. When a vassal prince had claims to kingship, he went to present himself before the emperor to receive his kingdom. Herod the Great received his kingship this way, and so did his son Archelaus (Mt 2:22). In 4BC, Archelaus left Judea to receive his kingship from Rome, but the Jewish people hated him and sent a delegation to the emperor to oppose him. Emperor Augustus granted Archelaus half of his father's kingdom (Judea proper, Idumea, and Samaria), and the other half was divided among the two of his brothers, Philip and Antipas.

Before Archelaus went to Rome, he assigned small duties to his servants. When he returned as a Tetrarch, he promoted those who did a good job with their assigned duties and demoted those who didn't. The records also show he slaughtered 3,000 Pharisees at the first Passover, who opposed his rule.

3. Interpretation of the Parable

- a. The nobleman who went to a far country to receive his kingdom is Jesus. Jesus was about to finish his work in Jerusalem and leave this world. He would receive the kingdom from God and return to claim His kingdom as King. But His return would take some time, so He would assign small duties to His servants to be carried out in His absence. Each was given a mina, a Greek coin worth 100 days' wage.
- b. When Jesus returns as King, He will call all His servants to account. The first and the second servants made 1,000% and 500% respectively and they are commended by the Lord as good servants because they were faithful in the little. They were given authority over the cities in proportion to their faithfulness. But the third servant did nothing with his mina, but kept it wrapped in a napkin – he did not care for it much, and his view of the Lord was someone who would milk a stone! The Lord says to him, *'Then you could have at least put it in the bank, so I could collect it with interest!'* (v23)
- c. The Lord took the mina from the unfaithful servant and gave it to the servant who had ten minas. This made them protest. He already had ten minas! But the Lord said, *'For I say to you that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.'* (v26) The rest of the servants would be assessed the same way.

In the Christian life, we do not stand still. We use our gifts and grow, or we lose what we have. And God's kingdom is not a socialist state. The Lord rewards faithfulness in the little things in this life when He comes in His Kingdom. The purpose of this life is for the next.

- d. After the Lord settles the account with his servants, He turns His attention to those who reject his kingship. They are not forgotten. When Jesus returns, He will do three things: (1) reward the faithful servants with greater authority; (2) deal with the lazy servants; (3) and finally, judge his enemies.

C. Our Response:

1. Do you know Jesus? When Jesus comes back, He will deal with those who oppose His rule. This life is the valley of decision for every human being. Zacchaeus made haste down the tree to receive Jesus into his house. Jesus was never going to pass by that street again because He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified. If Zacchaeus didn't hurry down the tree that day, he wouldn't have had any more opportunity in the same way ever again. So, will you make haste and come down from your tree?
2. What do you live for? If you are saved through faith in Jesus, then you have passed from the judgment of hell because of your sin, but you will face God's judgment regarding your life as a believer. His assessment will be accurate. His reward will be according to your faithfulness in the little things in this life. Some people will be given authority over the cities. Some will be saved by the skin of teeth, but they will not be given authority and responsibility. (C.f. Rom 12:6-8) Are you living for God's kingdom?

Gift Testing Chart (based on Romans 12)

Taken from CWR, Waverley Abbey House

On the next page are 35 statements which may help you discover your basic gift or gifts. Rate yourself with the following scale by writing the appropriate number in the corresponding number square. Ask yourself: "Is this statement true in my spiritual life and experience?" **Indicate your score in the appropriate number square on the following scale.**

Greatly 3	Some 2	Little 1	Not at all 0
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After you have completed the text by rating yourself for each of the 35 statements, **add the scores in each horizontal row. Record the number in the Total Column.** Your total score for each row indicates your level of interest in that particular gift. The highest scores may lead you to a clearer understanding of the basic spiritual gift or gifts which God has deposited in your life.

A chart to help you find and develop your unique ministry

						Total	Gift
						<i>(Please fill in after test is completed)</i>	
Row A	1	8	15	22	29	_____	_____
Row B	2	9	16	23	30	_____	_____
Row C	3	10	17	24	31	_____	_____
Row D	4	11	18	25	32	_____	_____
Row E	5	12	19	26	33	_____	_____
Row F	6	13	20	27	34	_____	_____
Row G	7	14	21	28	35	_____	_____

Key to your spiritual gifts
Row A - Prophecy; **Row B** - Serving; **Row C** - Teaching; **Row D** - Stimulating the faith of others;
Row E - Giving; **Row F** - Ruling or Co-ordinating; **Row G** - Sympathy

1. I enjoy presenting God's truth in an inspired and enthusiastic way.
2. I am always ready to overlook my own personal comfort in order that the needs of others may be met.
3. I find great delight in explaining the truth of a text within its context.
4. I am able to verbally encourage those who waver and are spiritually troubled.
5. I am able to manage my financial affairs efficiently so that I can give generously to the Lord's work.
6. I find it easy to delegate responsibility and organise others towards spiritual achievement.
7. I readily find myself sympathising with the misfortune of others.
8. I am conscious of a persuasiveness of speech when encouraging people to examine their spiritual motives.
9. I have the knack of making people feel at home.
10. I delight in digging out facts concerning the Bible so that I can pass them on to others.
11. I have a deep concern to encourage people toward spiritual growth and achievement.
12. I am cheerful about giving material assets so that the Lord's work can be furthered.
13. I am able to effectively supervise the activities of others.
14. I enjoy visiting those in hospital, or the shut-ins.
15. I am able to present the Word of God to a congregation of people with clarity and conviction.
16. I am happy when asked to assist others in the Lord's work.
17. I am concerned that truth should be presented in a clear fashion with proper attention to the meaning of words.
18. I am at my best when treating those who are spiritually wounded.
19. I have no problem in joyfully entrusting my assets to others for the work of the ministry.
20. I am able to plan the actions of others with ease and supply them with details which will enable them to work efficiently.
21. I have great concern for those involved in trouble.
22. I find myself preaching for a verdict whenever I present the truths of the Word of God.
23. I delight in providing a gracious haven for guests.
24. I am diligent in my study of the Bible and give careful attention to necessary research.
25. I am able to help those who need counselling over personal problems.
26. I am concerned over the question of financial assistance being available for all sections of the church.
27. I am deeply sensitive to the need of a smooth running of administration so that every phase of activity is carried out decently and in order.
28. I work happily with those who are ignored by the majority.
29. I find my preaching brings people to a definite point of decision.
30. I enjoy taking the load from key people so that they can put more effort in to their own particular task.
31. I am able to explain well how the Bible hangs together.
32. I am acutely aware of the things that hold people back in their spiritual development and long to help them overcome their problems.
33. I am careful with money and continually pray over its proper distribution in the work of the LORD.
34. I know where I am going and am able to take others with me.
35. I am able to relate to others emotionally and am quick to help when help is needed.

1. **Prophecy – or the God-given ability to present truth.** *Taken from CWR, Waverley Abbey House*
A persuasiveness and power in speech which brings to light things previously concealed.
Dangers
 - a. Proud of rhetoric or persuasive speech.
 - b. Dependent on ability to speak rather than on the Holy Spirit to convict.
 - c. Seeing people as groups – not individuals.
 - d. Judgmental and a sharp tongue without love.
2. **Serving or demonstrating love by meeting practical needs so that others can be free for service.**
An ability to detect personal needs; to overlook personal comfort so that the needs of others can be met. Romans 12:10.
Dangers
 - a. Proud of good deeds.
 - b. Pushy or premature in attempting to meet the needs of others before they themselves realise what those needs are.
 - c. Bitter when good deeds are not appreciated.
 - d. Over emphasis on practical – neglect of spiritual.
3. **Teaching or clarifying truth by ensuring the accuracy of context, etc.**
An ability to research and unearth facts from Scripture. Romans 12:11. This involves diligence, fervency in study and careful research.)
Dangers
 - a. Boasting of knowledge one has accumulated.
 - b. Concentration on details rather than principles.
 - c. Captivated by research rather than responses.
 - d. Believing truth is discerned through intellect.
4. **Stimulating the faith of others in specific action toward definite goals.**
An ability to counsel others and encourage them toward spiritual growth. Romans 12:12.
Dangers
 - a. Boasting about personal results.
 - b. Discouraged when progress is slow.
 - c. Indiscretion in sharing results.
 - d. Giving too much time to the wrong people.
5. **Giving or joyfully entrusting personal assets or possessions to others for the work of the ministry.**
An ability to organise personal business; able to wisely invest and make quick and sound decisions about the right use of money.
Dangers
 - a. Becoming proud of one's generosity.
 - b. Measuring spiritual success by material gain.
 - c. Attempting to buy influence with money.
 - d. Overlooking long-range goals.
6. **Ruling or co-ordinating the activities of others for the achievement of a common goal.**
An ability to preside or lead; seeing future consequences of one's actions; able to distinguish major objectives and help others visualise them.
Dangers
 - a. Proud of power over people.
 - b. Using people to accomplish goals.
 - c. Overlooking character faults in those who can be useful to reaching goals.
 - d. useful to reaching goals.
7. **Empathising by an ability to identify with and comfort those in distress.**
An ability to sympathise deeply with the misfortunes of others; mentally and emotionally relating and giving aid.
Dangers
 - a. Proud of ability to sympathise.
 - b. Resenting others who are not sympathetic to needs.
 - c. Failing to be firm – guided by emotions, not logic.

