

## “HE NEVER FORGOT”

(Narnia 13)

Luke 19:1-10 (p. 1017)

*“Hand it to me and kneel, Son of Adam,”* said Aslan. And when Peter had done so he struck him with the flat of the blade and said, *“Rise up, Sir Peter Fenris-Bane. And whatever happens, never forget to wipe your sword.”*

### “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” – Chapter 13

Picture Aslan and Edmund walking and talking together, just the two of them, the morning after Edmund was rescued from the Witch. Something happened on that walk with Aslan that changed Edmund for the rest of his life. What happened between them? Lewis would not say. He simply wrote: There is no need to tell you (and no one ever heard) what Aslan was saying, but it was a conversation which Edmund never forgot.

To me, that is one of the most deeply moving scenes in the book. Maybe it touches me because it reminds me of a similar conversation I had with my Lord – a conversation that I, too, will never forget. Perhaps it’s because I know how much like Edmund’s my own past had been. And, like Edmund, I realized how desperately I needed to be reconciled to those I had offended, although I wasn’t sure how to go about it. Perhaps that’s why it touches me so deeply when Lewis goes on to say: As the others drew nearer, Aslan turned to meet them bringing Edmund with him. *“Here is your brother,”* he said, *“and – there is no need to talk to him about what is past.”*

Transpose that scene into a Gospel key and it sounds remarkably like Luke’s story about Zacchaeus. Both Edmund and Zacchaeus were traitors. Luke identifies Zacchaeus as a “chief tax collector.” If the Jews considered a tax collector a filthy traitor, then a chief tax collector like Zacchaeus was the mother of all scum. Like Edmund, he had sold out his own people for personal gain.

But then a famous rabbi came to town – a rabbi whose reputation preceded him. And may I remind you it was a reputation that, according to Luke, included being called a “glutton and a drunkard and a friend of tax collectors...” I can imagine Zacchaeus was secretly thinking there might be some hope for him after all. Then, of all things, Jesus looked up in that tree and said, *“Zacchaeus, get down here. I require your hospitality today.”* This was probably the first time in years he had been treated with a measure of dignity. Luke says that Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed Jesus gladly.

Now, consider what had just happened. Jesus had come to town. There were any number of respectable homes there. Yet of all the places that would have been a suitable rest stop, Jesus publicly invited himself to the home of the most notorious sinner in greater metropolitan Jericho, a social blunder the likes of which polite society there had not seen in years. We know that because Luke tells us that all the people saw this and began to mutter, "*He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.*"

That must have been a remarkable visit. How do you suppose the conversation went? Did they discuss theology? My guess is that, in the Lord's presence, Zacchaeus was the main item on the agenda. I suspect it was Jesus who asked most of the questions; open-ended questions like: "*How did you get so rich? Who are your close friends? How's the family life?*" Can you imagine yourself in Zacchaeus' place?

Evidently it was a life-changing meeting. Luke tells us Zacchaeus stood up and announced, "*Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor; and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.*" It's one thing to voluntarily pay your debt to society in general by setting up a charitable trust to feed the poor. It's something else to settle your debts with people in particular. It wouldn't be easy; but that's what Zacchaeus proposed to do.

But the thing I want to focus on is Jesus' reply. Jesus said to him, "*Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.*" Why did salvation come to that house that day? Was it because Zacchaeus turned out to be one of the good guys? No. Was he able to buy his salvation? No. Salvation came to that house because, according to Jesus, "*this man, too, is a son of Abraham.*"

Now, what did he mean by that? When Jesus said, "*this man, too, is a son of Abraham,*" perhaps he was saying that Zacchaeus was just as deserving as any other Jew. He might also have meant that Zacchaeus had the spirit of Abraham. In other words, like Abraham, he was willing to venture out in faith, to be vulnerable, to risk disappointment and possible ridicule for the sake of what he believed to be God's call on his life. Maybe that's what Jesus meant by calling Zacchaeus a "son of Abraham." I think there was more to it.

Jesus said, "*This man, too, is a son of Abraham,*" and then he added: "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*" What had been lost? We assume it was a man named Zacchaeus who was lost. And that may be exactly what Jesus meant. But I suspect that, in this particular case, what had been lost was Zacchaeus' true identity as a son of Abraham; and it was Jesus who spotted it, and saved it. Let me explain why I think that's what Jesus was talking about.

In Hebrew, a person's name is that person's identity. In Hebrew, if you know a person's name you know who they are. That is why, when Moses asked God his name at the burning bush, God replied, *"My name is I AM WHO I AM!"* In other words: *"My name is none of your business, because my identity is unsearchable."* But that wasn't the case with the children of Abraham. Abraham, along with each of his descendants, was given a name, and his name was his identity. *Abraham* means "father of multitudes" (that's who he was). *Isaac* means "laughter" (that's who he was). *Jacob* means "the usurper" (that's who he was). *Esther* means "star" (that's who she was). *Ruth* means "faithful companion" (that's who she was). *Barnabas* means "encouragement's child" (that's who he was). *Jesus* means "God's salvation" (and that's who he was). Do you see how it works? In Hebrew, a person's name tells you who that person really is.

How about the name *Zacchaeus*? Do you know what that name means? Is it Hebrew for "shorty" – for "money-grubbing little traitor?" No, the name *Zacchaeus* means "righteous one." It's rooted in the ancient Hebrew word for "pure – clean – innocent." That was the name given to the child who grew up to become the chief tax collector in Jericho. When he was born, his parents gave him the name on which they pinned their hopes. They named him *Zacchaeus*, and prayed that he would grow to be a pure, clean, innocent, righteous man. That was his name, and that was to be his true identity.

Imagine what it was like for *Zacchaeus* the despised tax collector to live with the irony of being stuck with a name like that. And the irony certainly didn't escape the people. They mocked him, they ridiculed him, they took the name that his parents had given him and threw it in his face. *"You call yourself 'Righteous?' Who do you think you're kidding? You say your name is 'pure – clean – innocent?' What a joke! What a hypocrite!"*

The people of Jericho looked at *Zacchaeus* and called him "scum." Jesus came along, looked inside the man and called him by his given name: "clean." People looked at *Zacchaeus* the tax collector and gave him a name: "sinner." Jesus looked inside the man and called him by his given name: "innocent." Something happened to *Zacchaeus* that day. From a place deep inside he found himself saying to Jesus: *"Lord, I want to see me with your eyes. I don't want to be what they see and what I see any more. I want to be what you see in me."* And Jesus said to him, *"the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost. It would appear we just found it."*

Brothers and sisters, there's a lesson for all of us in this encounter. Everyone in Jericho, including *Zacchaeus*, had lost sight of who he really was. Jesus never forgot – and he helped *Zacchaeus* to remember. Aslan did the same for Edmund. And if it hasn't already happened, he can do it for you as well.