

Zacchaeus



Luke 18:1-8

Year C Proper 26

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	▲		●		
▲	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲		▲	▲	●
●	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	▲		●		
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲		▲		
■	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples	■		▲	▲	●
●	servant - (only has a few lines in the whole play)		●			
■	Zacchaeus - the chief tax collector, who is planning to use Jesus' appearance in Jericho for his own profit		■		▲	▲
▲	Baruch - Zacchaeus's best (only) friend; a very steady and trustworthy presence		▲		▲	●
▲	Priest - A priest scheming against Zacchaeus				▲	
●	Jesus				●	▲

Scene 1

James , Joanna , Judas , Matthew , Phillip

{Jesus and the disciples walk up the road to Jericho.}

Joanna Finally back to the big cities! All this wandering in the wilderness has been like...well, like wandering in the wilderness.

Judas Behold! The Promised Land!

- Phillip** [*enthusiastically*] We should march around the city seven times blowing trumpets!
- James** [*with relish*] No, we're saving that for Jerusalem.
- Matthew** [*soberly*] Don't look too far ahead. We've got to make it through Jericho first.
- Joanna** That's right, you're from here, aren't you?
- James** This is where he used to work with the other bloodsuckers.
- Phillip** What's the matter? Are the streets full of robbers?
- Matthew** No, the accounting offices are. Most of the tax collectors for the region make their headquarters here, which means there's a strong Roman presence as well. And then there are the priests and the various religious factions. Enormous amounts of money and power flow through here.
- Judas** But that's exactly what we want. It was important to tour the rural areas, but this is where we'll find the donations and alliances to realize our goals.
- Matthew** Let's just make sure it's us making use of them and not them making use of us.
- Phillip** What use could they make of us? We don't have any money *or* power.
- Matthew** We have the rabbi. He's become quite famous. He's a curiosity, a sought after figure. There are going to be huge crowds chasing after him our entire time here. That makes him valuable. Certain powerful parties are going to want...his attention, or his friendship, or maybe just to be seen with him.
- James** If that's all they want, what's the problem? As long as it doesn't cost us anything, why not let anybody who wants to talk to him have their turn? That's what *he'd* want.
- Matthew** You don't understand what it's like here! There's a meaning in every little thing that people do. How they dress, what they have for lunch, who they're seen with. And there is no action that doesn't embody multiple agendas: plans within plans, plots within plots. The rabbi can't possibly understand this world!
- Joanna** You know, I think it's worth the risk. Sure, people will be coming

to him just to use him, but some of them might truly listen to him. Some of them might change. He might go from being someone's pawn to being their King.

- Judas** It's possible, and a noble thought, but I agree with Matthew. If there's really no way we can see through to all the meanings of a gesture here, then the rabbi could end up aligning himself with parties he would never want to be associated with, or alienating parties we'd like to form alliances with.
- Phillip** What are we going to do, then? We can't not talk to people. That's just about all we do!
- James** But we wouldn't have to stay away from everybody, would we? Just these high rollers, right?
- Matthew** Right. The rabbi could still preach to the crowds and interact with the ordinary people. And there's actually only a handful of people he'd have to avoid. He's a big enough prize that it'll only be the chief movers who'll try to approach him.
- Phillip** Great! [*a sudden worry*] But how will we be able to tell who they are among all the people?
- Matthew** That will be easy. I know them all personally.

Scene 2

Baruch , Zacchaeus , servant

- servant** The message has been dispatched, sir.
- Zacchaeus** Excellent! Has Nathan returned yet?
- servant** Yes, sir. He thinks he found a spot.
- Zacchaeus** Very good! Go get his report.
- servant** Yes, sir.
- {servant exits}*
- Baruch** It sounds like your plan is going well.
- Zacchaeus** So far.
- Baruch** Well, here's my part: I asked around as discreetly as I could, and as far as I can tell, no one has any plans to attempt contact with

him during his arrival. So you'll be the first, if you can manage it.

Zacchaeus Oh, I'll manage it.

Baruch I guess this will be a pretty big score for you.

Zacchaeus Once I'm linked with Jesus in the public mind, I'll be able to raise their taxes at least another two percent.

Baruch Won't your association with him concern the Romans?

Zacchaeus They'll have no concerns at all about getting an extra *one* percent in taxes.

Baruch It sounds like you have all the angles worked out. But can I ask you something? Why did you ask me to scout this out for you? Not that I wasn't happy to do it, but you could have hired a spy to get the same results or better, and then you wouldn't have had to reveal your plans to me.

Zacchaeus There's always a risk with spies.

Baruch Meaning I'm trustworthy?

Zacchaeus I hate to break the news to you, but yes, you are! First, you're a friend. Maybe the only real friend I have in this snakepit. Second, you're the only person here who has no ambition beyond a comfortable life. Neither my enemies nor I can buy you off with anything. And third, you have no inside information to give to anyone anyway. Nobody will be surprised to hear that I'm trying to get the jump on everyone else. That's what they're all trying, too.

Baruch But I know about your inside man. Isn't he your secret advantage?

Zacchaeus Matthew? No way! He knows me well enough to not let me within a mile of his new boss.

Baruch Then why did you send him the message asking for a private audience?

Zacchaeus So he'll know that I tried and failed! He'd be suspicious if I never tried. And who knows, maybe he's not as principled or wary as I thought and I'll succeed with him after all. But I'm not expecting it. It doesn't matter, though. One way or the other, by this time tomorrow, Jesus of Nazareth will be a guest in my

house!

Scene 3

James , Joanna , Judas , Matthew , Phillip

{The disciples discuss the message they received from Zacchaeus}

- Matthew** Zacchaeus! I should have guessed he'd try something like this!
- Joanna** Is he one of your high rollers?
- Matthew** The highest. He's the chief tax collector. My old boss and friend.
- James** *[in stunned disbelief after reading the message]* Oh my God, look at what he's offering us! That can't be right, can it? It's got to be a mistake!
- Phillip** *[looking over James' shoulder]* Wow! It looks like he accidentally added a zero. Or two!
- Matthew** No, that's pretty much the amount *I'd* offer us if I were in his place - and had his money.
- Joanna** *[in a quiet voice after looking at the message]* It's a lot. But yes, I could name a half a dozen individuals in Jerusalem alone who could afford it.
- Judas** *[despairingly after reading the message]* I knew things were bad, but how did they get *this* bad? How can a handful of "high rollers" amass so much wealth? Now I know more than ever that the great Day must be upon us. Things can't go on like this!
- James** The question is: what do we do about his offer?
- Matthew** What do you mean, "what do we do?" We tell him to go to hell!
- James** But he just wants the rabbi to visit his house. That's it, right? Unless there's some fine print too small for my eyes to see.
- Matthew** There's always fine print.
- Judas** For the rabbi to be seen hobnobbing with a tax collector would be the worse thing that could happen to us. It would alienate every possible donor or ally we could think of!
- Phillip** *[half to himself]* If we had all that money, why would we need *any* donors or allies?

Scene 4

Baruch , Jesus , Judas , Matthew , Priest , Zacchaeus

{The next day, Jesus enters Jericho. This scene jumps around among various parties observing events from different vantage points.}

{JUDAS AND MATTHEW}

Matthew Trouble. I just heard that Zacchaeus is planning to issue his invitation in person, somewhere along the road.

Judas Won't take No for an answer, will he?

Matthew He probably guessed that we never brought his message all the way to the rabbi, and he's going to try a direct request now.

Judas And you know the rabbi will listen. He'll probably even agree to go to the guy's house!

Matthew We have to stop that. Spread the word to everyone to watch out for Zacchaeus and not let him within fifty feet of the rabbi!

Judas Will do. How will we recognize him?

Matthew That'll be easy. He's about four foot ten!

{BARUCH AND PRIEST}

Baruch There he is, up in that tree.

Priest Clever of him! I wondered how he would even manage to be seen by Jesus, much less heard.

Baruch He never told me about this part of his plan, but I got it out of one of his servants.

Priest This is perfect for us!

Baruch Yes, I've already informed your colleagues. They'll be waiting nearby with a contingent of the temple police.

Priest We appreciate all that you're doing for the nation.

Baruch I certainly want the nation to endure, but don't forget the other part of our deal.

Priest Of course, of course. When he's arrested, we'll make sure you're given his position.

Baruch Any minute now. As soon as Jesus passes under that tree, Zacchaeus is going to call out his invitation to him. That's when your men will move in. By the way, isn't "attempting to conspire with a suspected revolutionary" a pretty flimsy charge?

Priest It doesn't have to stick. Don't worry. It'll be enough to oust him from his position and put you in his place. Just don't forget your part of the deal: You've got to ease up on the taxation, or there really *will* be a revolt!

Baruch Don't worry. As Zacchaeus himself pointed out to me, I don't have anything close to his ambition.

{JUDAS AND MATTHEW}

Judas He's stopping! Why?

Matthew Zacchaeus slipped through! Come on!

Judas No, wait. He's going to preach.

Matthew Oh, good! *[on second thought]* Or not so good. This is going to give Zacchaeus more time to home in on him.

Judas Hey, I've got an idea! See that tree right over him? What if we climbed it? I've been worried how we're going to spot your short friend working his way through the crowd, but from above, it'll be much easier.

Matthew Good idea! Let's go.

{BARUCH AND PRIEST}

Baruch I'm sure he'll make his move as soon as the sermon is done.

Priest It's too bad the it's been so harmless so far.

Baruch Yeah, I'm a little disappointed. Love and comfort? Rest for the weary? So much for your revolutionary.

Priest Don't worry. We have plenty of incriminating material already. We're just waiting for the right time to move against him as well.

{MATTHEW AND ZACCHEUS}

{Matthew climbs the tree and encounters Zacchaeus already up there}

Matthew You!

{But Zacchaeus is mesmerized by the sermon and doesn't even notice him.}

Jesus *[still preaching his sermon]* Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest!

Matthew Hey! Zacchaeus!

Zacchaeus *[snapping out of it]* Huh? What? Matthew! What are you doing up here?

Matthew I might ask you the same question, but I already know the answer! You make one move to speak to him and I'll pull us both down if I have to!

Zacchaeus *[still in a state of confusion]* But I'm not...I mean, I was, but...but no, I still have to talk to him! Please! I must!

Matthew Not for half your portfolio! I'm not about to let you endanger our mission just so you can make a few bucks.

Zacchaeus But I don't...I see...of course...I won't say a thing. But please, can I talk to him later? In private if you like, so I can't gain a thing from it.

{Matthew is caught at a loss for words. At that moment, Jesus looks up into the tree.}

Jesus Zacchaeus!

Matthew Rabbi, no!

Jesus Zacchaeus! (And Matthew!) Come on down. We need to set off at once if we're going to reach your house by sundown!

Scene 5

Baruch , Jesus , Judas , Matthew , Zacchaeus

{At the house of Zacchaeus.}

Judas Rabbi, you can't be here!

Jesus Why not?

Judas You don't know what messages we might be sending by being here. It could hurt our mission.

Jesus *My mission is to seek and to save that which was lost.*

Judas *[suddenly worried]* Is it?

Matthew But he's faking it! This is all a part of some scheme of his.

Jesus There were some who said the same thing about you when you came to join us.

Zacchaeus *[shyly to Jesus]* Sir?

Jesus *[gently]* What do you want from me, Son of Abraham?

Zacchaeus I don't know...I thought I knew...but now...I don't know, maybe just to hear more of your teaching?

Jesus My disciples think you have ulterior motives.

Zacchaeus I don't! *[more meekly]* I did. *[decisively]* But I can at least prove that I don't any longer. *[calling out to the crowd in his house]* Baruch! Baruch, come up here!

Baruch *[nervously]* Yes?

Zacchaeus *[to the crowd]* I want to announce to you all that I'm retiring today. And my replacement will be Baruch here.

Baruch *[incredulously]* You're...*giving* me your position?

Zacchaeus Yes, old friend. I know it's the last thing you want, but you're the only person I can trust to meet the one condition I place on it: that you take it easier on the people than I did. Will you do me this last favor?

Baruch *[a little dazed]* Yes. Yes, of course.

Zacchaeus *[to the crowd again]* As for the money I earned in my career - the money I stole and extorted - I give half to the poor right now, and will spend the rest making restitution to anyone I've wronged. *[to Jesus]* Will you stay now? At least for a little while?

Jesus *[to Matthew]* What do you think? Has salvation come to this house today?

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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