

Luke 19:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

Analysis

And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. Luke's *idou* (ἰδού, "behold") draws attention to this unlikely character. The name Zacchaeus (Ζακχαῖος, Zakchaios) derives from Hebrew Zakkai, meaning "pure" or "righteous"—deeply ironic given his profession. He was *architelōnēs* (ἀρχιτελώνης, "chief tax collector"), a term appearing only here in Scripture. This wasn't a common tax collector but the overseer of multiple collectors, making him doubly despised—both a Roman collaborator and an exploiter of fellow Jews.

The detail "he was rich" (καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν πλούσιος, καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν πλούσιος) explains how he obtained his wealth: through systematic extortion. Roman taxation was farmed out to the highest bidder, who then extracted as much as possible to profit beyond the required amount. Zacchaeus's riches came from oppressing his own people. Yet Luke presents him as the unlikely recipient of grace, following Jesus's recent teaching that what is impossible with men is possible with God (Luke 18:27)—even a rich man entering God's kingdom.

Historical Context

Tax collectors (publicani) were among the most hated figures in first-century Judea. They collaborated with Rome's occupation forces and enriched themselves through oppression. A chief tax collector in Jericho would oversee a lucrative operation, collecting customs on balsam, dates, and other goods passing through

this major trade route. Jewish religious law grouped tax collectors with prostitutes and Gentiles as those ritually unclean and outside covenant faithfulness. To dine with such a person was to incur ceremonial defilement and social disgrace.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What is the significance of the name 'Zacchaeus' (meaning 'pure') given his profession as a chief tax collector?
2. How does Zacchaeus embody Jesus's teaching about the difficulty of rich people entering God's kingdom (Luke 18:24-25)?
3. Why would a chief tax collector risk public humiliation to see Jesus?

Interlinear Text

καὶ οἶδού, ἀνὴρ ὄνοματι καλούμενος Ζακχαῖος καὶ

And behold there was a man named Zacchaeus And

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αὐτὸς ἦν ἀρχιτελώνης καὶ οὗτος ἦν πλούσιος.

And he was rich

G846 was the chief among the publicans G754 G2532 he G3778 was G2258 rich G4145

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