

# GOSPEL WONDERS

**A different way to look at the gospels**

## **Zacchaeus (suggested) Order of Service**

1. Hymn 20 – Be still for the presence of the Lord
2. Opening Prayers and Lord's Prayer
3. Story Teller and Mrs. Zacchaeus
4. Hymn 455 – All my Hope on God is Founded
5. Story Teller and Eli and Jonas
6. Hymn 416 – There's a Wideness in Gods Mercy
7. Story Teller and Isaac and Joanna
8. Hymn 615 – Let Love be real in Giving and Receiving
9. Conclusion
10. Prayers of intercession
11. Hymn 215 – Amazing Grace
12. Blessing

(all hymns from Singing the Faith)

## Opening Prayers

Lord you are the centre of our world. You made us and know us all individually.

Your love for us has no bounds, it is so big that when we strayed away from you, in your compassion, you sacrificed Jesus your son to guide us back.

You are indeed a most wonderful God to whom we offer our worship, praise and adoration. We want to learn more about you and to get closer, to be the people you wish us to be. But we are weak Lord and often stray. We sin in so many ways, we even deny you by omitting to pass on your love to other people. This in the way we behave or from fear of appearing different to the people we want to impress.

We come to you asking for your forgiveness for all the times we have let you down.

In the silence of our own hearts let us surrender such times and lay them at Gods feet, asking his forgiveness.

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You are indeed a great God who knowing our human weakness, sent our Lord Jesus to die on a cross but then to rise in glory, so that through him our sins are forgiven.

Amen

### The Family Prayer

## Story Teller and Mrs. Zacchaeus

### Story Teller

He was certainly making a name for himself this teacher from Nazareth. For some time now he had been travelling the countryside talking and doing quite amazing things. Crowds were following him everywhere he went and he was starting to come to the attention of people in high places. Mind you it raises the question of why they were following so avidly. A lot of them came because they were sick and hoped he could heal them and that was all there was too it. Others came to listen to his words, but in many cases when they heard they didn't understand and drifted away in some confusion. Yet others saw in him the Messiah, the chosen one of Israel, the one promised who would lead the nation forward into a new world. A great one following in the steps of Moses and Elijah, continuing their story and stepping further. These latter were forever asking for a sign that He was this man and he was to be followed. It was all a bit complicated really.

At this point Jesus was just going calmly about his work, doing His thing and letting people make of it what they would.

If you watched the healing going on though you noticed one thing. He didn't just throw out healing like a man sowing seeds but he made contact with the people concerned. He understood them. Whatever the ailment he was able to reach down into their hearts feel their pain and only when he understood the depths of their suffering did he effect a cure. He would ask questions such as "What do you want me to do? How can I help?" Making people search for themselves what really troubled them before he dealt with the physical symptoms.

Mind you there were cases where He came across someone who seemed to be in good health but who the teacher could see had a problem in his life that was not going away. Something that not many others would see or be able to understand. The person who had it all but in the final analysis had nothing.

Such a one features in our story today.

## Mrs Zacchaeus

Men! Aren't they all the same. You just get the place tidy and they come in and before they have been in five minutes it's a mess again.

Well, I suppose mine isn't any worse than others but you just never know what they're going to do next, do you?

I mean my father was like that. When he told me he had arranged this marriage I was horrified. A tax collector would have been bad enough but a chief tax collector? Of all the people to tie me to he couldn't have done much worse. The fact that I was five foot ten and Z. was five foot three didn't help. You can imagine some of the comments we got.

"Well" said my father "He's not such a bad man and you'll always have some money and be well looked after"

I suppose he was right Z. might be universally hated and be a bit of money grubbing old skinflint but he's always been good to me. That is when he's been at home and not sitting at his table robbing, sorry, I mean collecting taxes.

I get a bit lonely sometime though. The only visitors we ever have are his friends from work and they, like him, only think of money, and their rather pathetic wives who only think of spending it. I don't go out much because if I do all the women in the street turn their backs on me. Even childhood friends won't be seen talking to me these days.

Anyway, I was going to tell you what happened a few weeks ago. I was just sitting eating a pomegranate when I heard 'himself' come in. "Sweetie" he called, I knew straight away that something was up, "I've just brought a few friends round for a bite to eat"

Well, I went into the lobby and it was full of bodies. There must have been a dozen or more. I recognised one of them. Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth, the one who had become a Rabbi and some were saying was the promised Messiah, the others were, I supposed, his friends.

Z. looked suitable sheepish when he introduced me, it might have been the look on my face, and then I scurried off to tell Jason, our 'Steward', to break out some wine and organise water for the foot washing routine and I went into the kitchen to warn the cook that she had better work her magic over the pots and pans as we had a party in.

Well! All in all, it didn't go too badly. Jesus had the place of honour and spent his time talking quietly to Z. and those near them and the others chatted among themselves. I didn't understand it all, because I was busy doing the hostess bit. There was some sort of joke going around about Z. being found up a tree, but all went well

Until the end of the meal when Z. stood up and said that from now on, he was going to be a changed man. He would give away half his money to the poor and repay anybody he had cheated. I stopped dead in my tracks. The idea of him becoming parted from

any of his money was almost laughable and if he tried to repay everybody back the queue would stretch all the way to Jerusalem. I couldn't believe my ears and if he started giving money away. What about us. The idea of an honest tax collector was laughable.

But he was serious. I had never seen him like this before. His whole being had changed. That sly sneaky look that always seemed to be on his face had gone and he seemed sort of at peace with himself. I realised that he meant it. If I hadn't been there, I wouldn't have believed it.

That was that. Shortly afterwards Jesus said they had to be going so everybody stood up and made for the door. Jesus was the last to go. He did something strange as he went through the door. He turned round, looked at us, Z, Me and the servants and said

"Today salvation has come to this house"

Then he turned, leaving us standing there really quite dumbstruck

Well! Z kept his word. At first nobody believed it. I think everybody thought it was some new money making scheme but when they realized he was serious life changed for us. I found that people started acknowledging me. We had visitors to the house. People even started consulting Z about problems they had with their taxes. Life got so much better. I thought that if he gave away his money where would we be, I found out that where we were was a far cry from where we had been. The most important change was in Z. I would never have believed he could be such nice person. Somehow so at peace with himself.

Mind you he is still able to turn a room into a tip five minutes into it.

## Story Teller, Eli and Jonas

### Story Teller

We can imagine how such a change in a man who was, for better or for worse, a well-known figure in the community. The idea of a Tax collector who began to show a concern for the way he did his job and even give something back. There would have been disbelief, incredulity, mockery and cynicism until those around realised that he was serious.

It isn't difficult to imagine. The story, as we hear it, ends there but we may wonder what happened then. The authorities may have put it down as some form of aberration that 'he would get over' but as his attitude changed, they may even have worried that it would affect their cut of the takings.

Most important though was the way it would affect the ordinary people. Those who in the past had suffered injustice at his hands. Those who wondered if this was just a temporary thing and they would suffer later again and probably badly when Z tried to recoup his losses.

## **Eli a Fisherman**

### **Jonas a Farmer**

**J)** Good morning Eli How's the fishing these days.

**E)** Not too bad but the storms last week kept us off the water a bit, but we are managing OK. How's the farm, I would imagine this weather would have been just what you didn't want at harvest time. Anyway, enough of that but have you heard of the miracle that happened in town today.

**J)** Well! That sounds good to me but what's this about a miracle. What happened to bring about this 'miracle'?

**E)** Miracle it certainly was. I was there when it happened. I tell you it is amazing.

You've heard of that new rabbi, the carpenter from Nazareth. Well! The other day he was walking down the road with a big crowd around him when he looked up and there in a tree is Zacchaeus. He was so short he couldn't see through the crowd so were perched up there like a pigeon. Now I wasn't close enough to hear what was said but suddenly the little rat scurried down out of his tree and set off with the rabbi to his house. What happened there we don't know but the next morning Zacchaeus set up his table and started giving money, Yes! Giving money away. I mean I admit I have always been a bit unsure about this rabbi. Some of the things he was saying, you know, 'loving' your enemies, repenting and that sort of thing. But he certainly seems to have made an impression in Zacchaeus. Now he is giving money away. I have heard of tax rebate but this is ridiculous

**J)** I can't understand that. If you'd asked me to name one person around here who loved his money more than anything including his fellow human beings, I would have pointed straight to him so I just can't think what the Rabbi said to him. Personally, I think it's a trick of some sort and it will suddenly turn round and we will all end up paying more.

**E)** You may be right but aren't you going to join the queue. You might as well get back what you can.

**J)** Not me! I'm not having anything to do with that man. You mark my words there's a catch in this somewhere and all of that lot standing there will regret it.

**E)** Well, you may be right but something happened that night in Zacchaeus's house. I don't know what it was but I would suggest that you take it seriously. You might not understand that new Rabbi but you have to listen to him. The things he says are very different from what we have heard in the past and he does make a lot of sense.

**J)** You believe that. OK! You go and listen to him. You can tell me all about it. Personally, I think it will all go bad in the end.



## **Story Teller and Isaac and Joanna**

### **Story Teller**

Incredulity, disbelief, surprise are all emotions that could be expected when a person well known for certain types and standards of behaviour makes a sudden change. But such a change can have other unexpected effects. There may be those not directly connected with the events but who experience a different approach to their lives because of its influence.

Our story tells us of a man who makes a very dramatic change to his life. A way that directly changed the lives of those around him, but would everybody be impressed with what had happened. Would there have been any long-time effects for them.

## Isaac - A wealthy merchant

### Joanna – his wife.

**I)** That man. THAT MAN!

**J)** What's he done now? I really believe that if he gave all his money away to the poor you would still find a reason to complain.

**I)** You can scoff, but you don't need to ask who I am talking about and that's just it. He has started to give all his money away and its chaos out there. Oh! Why did he have to move in next door? With all the money he has made, no acquired, he could have moved in anywhere so why next door to us. I would rather have had a Pharisee or some other Holy Joe than that man.

**J)** Look! Calm down, have a bowl of wine and tell me all about it. This morning you set of for the warehouse in a good mood and everything was fine. Now a few hours later you come home spiting feathers and acting as if you want to strangle somebody. What's happened?

**I)** Right! I went to the warehouse and got on with work. Then James came rushing in to say that he had just seen a big crowd gathered around my house. He said there was a crowd of men all shouting and pushing near my door. Well, I ran home as fast as I could and found this mob outside. You won't have heard them, being at the back, but I tell you it was scary. I was worried to death for you and the children. Anyway, as I got close, I realised it wasn't our door they were at but Zacchaeus. He had set up his table and instead of the usual angry mutterings of the queue they were all demanding their money. I asked what it was all about and a man standing at the back told me that the man was giving back all the money he has stolen from people in the past and everybody was there to claim what was theirs.

Oh! The wretched little man. Why does everything that he touches cause problems for everybody else.

**J)** Calm down will you. Tell me, what happened to turn that mean little man who was universally hated into what seems to be everyone's friend. Something must have occurred to make this happen.

**I)** Well! It seems as though he had some sort of religious experience after meeting Jesus the Rabbi from Nazareth. What was said nobody knows but this morning he came out a changed man.

**J)** I heard this rabbi speak the other day.

**I)** What was he like?

**J)** Quite interesting really. He didn't shout and get excited and when he spoke to somebody, he sort of looked at them and you got the feeling that he really listened to what they were saying. You really felt that he understood. A lot of the things he said made sense. I liked listening to him. I would go to hear him again. I can see why some people get upset with him though because he is not talking like the Zealots who want to go to war with the Romans or like the Pharisees who want everyone to be as pure and holy in following the letter of the law as them. He is different. I can understand how Zacchaeus had a major change of heart if Jesus spoke to him but not something as dramatic as giving away all his money. It's a bit difficult to accept but then who knows what was said to him. If it is true and it isn't one of his tricks it can only be for the good.

**I)** Well, I hope you are right. Mind you, if this Jesus is able to turn round a reprobate like our neighbour then he must be worth hearing. Maybe my dear we should make a point of going to listen to him sometime. See what he has to say.

## Conclusion

Now is this not a most amazing story. A man who has spent a life acquiring wealth, literally by fair means or foul. In the process he had alienated his own people, who saw him as, at the very least, a traitor and a thief. Now we don't know why he wanted to hear Jesus and why it was so important to him. It could be that as Jesus was making a name for himself Zacchaeus was wondering about his tax situation or it could be that his life style was getting to him and he was seeking a way out. Something better. Whatever it was he went to considerable trouble to see him and if anyone had seen his scramble into the branches it would have, at least, set him up as a target for derision.

Having got there, he was stuck as Jesus approached, and when Jesus singled him out he would, I imagine, has felt very much the centre of attention. Then when he was informed that he was to have guests for dinner that would have put the cap on it. Even so at this point he still would have had little idea what was coming. It is one thing to want to make a change quite another for it to become a functioning idea. This must have gone against all he believed in and worked for all his life. What is interesting here is that he thought this one up all by himself. Not that anybody told him to do it. But then life can be like that can't it. We find ourselves in a situation where we are a bit out of our depth and say something and realise that in doing so we have committed ourselves to something a little bit frightening.

Zacchaeus learned an incredible truth that day. A lesson we can all learn. He found that by taking a course of action, that, initially, was costly, in the long run there were great benefits. He had to give up not only an approach to life but also the rewards of it. Suddenly he was standing very much alone and, in many ways, vulnerable. He was left with something to prove and new relationships to grow. Mind you there were many benefits coming his way, the first of which was immediate, he had been granted salvation and from then on his attitude to those around him would improve and be reciprocated. That is one of the main lessons this story tells but, and this is the big one, He learned that it was never too late to acknowledge that he had been wrong in many things and now wished to make amends. That the Lord, the one sitting beside him, was willing to listen. It was never too late to ask for and receive salvation.

But what about the others whose experiences we have shared

His wife. She was a part of all that he had done and in the eyes of her neighbours was very much tarred with the same brush. Though her marriage was arranged, the hatred for her husband was also directed at her. That's the problem with associating with people whose ideas and behaviour are suspect. We run the risk of being seen as just like them.

Then there are those who had dealings with him. His customers or were they his victims. One ready to get what he could the other treating him with suspicion, believing there to be an ulterior motive. If we develop a sense of cynicism we can

encourage ourselves into doing things which though not necessarily legally wrong is morally and ethically wrong. Or, because of our lack of trust, opportunities that are laid before us are missed.

Finally, the neighbours. People who were trying to live a good life and gain the respect of the people around them. Who felt that their neighbours were pulling not only them but the neighbourhood down and found it was difficult to give this troublesome neighbour the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes that is difficult but when you are able to do this then not only their lives can change. Have you ever been drawn into contact with someone you have chosen to avoid and been surprised at the sort of person they really are.

Giving, not only money, but of yourself can present its own rewards as one gets more back than one gives. Times that defy logic and the decisions we make are at odds with common sense these could be among the most important and rewarding times in our lives.

## Prayers of intercession

*Based on Bible Verses*

### **COMMUNITY.**

We know and rely on the love that Our Lord God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in Him.

We pray for our communities Lord. We live in a time of change: People with new ideas, different religions, and different ways of thinking that can leave us feeling insecure and sometimes afraid.

Help us to embrace the good changes and the people who bring them by showing your love, but also have the strength to stand firm against those that are against the good of all.

Deep within us dwells the blessings of our Lord and in his love may we work toward building a new community.

### **NEW HUMANITY.**

But you must return to your God: maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

Lord we live in a fragmented world where it is sometimes difficult to see solutions. We pray that all those who hold their peoples welfare in their hands will rule in justice and love for them and not for wealth and powers for themselves. Let strife end and let peace reign in your world.

May the love of our God give us a new humanity?

### **NEW CREATIVITY.**

Then will all your people be righteous and will possess the land forever.

We are the shoots that he has planted, the work of His hands. There as a display of His splendour.

Lord you created this Wonderful world and put us in charge of it. But we have abused it for our own ends. We have squandered your gifts and now your world is so damaged and we are unsure of how to put it right.

Help us to change our ways and to think more of what your creation needs rather than our own greed.

May our lives give birth to a new creativity.

## **NEW UNITY.**

Father we pray for your church throughout the world, its leaders and members. That they keep your will at the centre of all they do. That they listen to one another with love and grace, in their deliberations, in the voicing of concerns and in their planning.

We pray especially for our churches. May we be open to change and know that God is with us in our concerns?

May our connections with our Lord bring us together and give birth to a new unity.

## **NEW SOCIETY.**

He said: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power will rest on me"

Lord we need to stand up to those who seek to destroy our society

May the love and peace of the lord go with us and stay with us all our lives

## **AMEN.**

## Blessing

We are blessed with holy love.  
A promise made and a promise kept.  
Safely held by one above.  
Made at a time of tears.  
It clears our heart of needles fears.  
Outside these walls, life goes on.  
Inside there is a place of peace,  
Inside we know of victory won.  
The world awakes and we must go  
Back to join life here below.  
So have no fear.  
No harm can come.  
Be at peace the battles won.