



Introduction

What can happen if you privatise taxation? The Romans often contracted out the collection of imperial taxes to local middlemen, who were allowed to keep a certain proportion for themselves. Under this regime, many tax collectors became extremely rich at the expense of their own neighbours, many of whom resented Roman rule anyway. So, it was extremely controversial for Jesus to invite himself into the house of such a person, as recorded in Luke 19:1-9. But then came the surprise...

This retelling of the Bible story explains a little more about the historical background but also guesses at Zacchaeus' back-story, making suggestions about why he turned out the way he appears at the beginning of the story. It makes one significant change: he's sitting in his own tree in his garden, not running along the road. This deliberately references Oscar Wilde's story *The Selfish Giant*, which has clear similarities to the Bible story.

(Note: the mention of Zacchaeus 'feeling taller' at the end of the story is metaphorical, reflecting the change in his own psychological state. There is no mention in the original Bible story of him suddenly having a growth spurt. All prejudicial use of language pertaining to people of different heights should always be challenged in school.)

Preparation

Pupils will need access to copies of the story 'Standing up' (below) and Luke 19:1-9 for the Literacy activities, plus other materials, depending on the activities chosen. Some discussion might be helped if text can be displayed onscreen.

Development

Ask: Imagine having everything you ever wanted. What could go right? And what could go wrong? Here's a story about that, based on something that happens in the Christian Bible.

Standing up

by Chris Hudson

Zack sat on his balcony, breathing in the cool evening air. It had a good view, taking in almost the whole town of Jericho and the distant hills. He often sat there in the evenings on his special raised chair, taking a glass of wine and listening to the noises wafting up from the streets. Sometimes, there'd be the distant roar of crowds cheering on their favourite horses at the stadium, the sound of music and dancing from King Herod's winter palace, or the marching boots of soldiers making their way to and from the Roman citadel that guarded the town.



In his imagination, Zack sometimes felt that Jericho was his town, as if he was a king. This wasn't strictly true, but Zack was important. He could give favours to the people he liked and make life very difficult for those he didn't. It all came down to money, and money can sometimes give you a lot of power over people – especially if you're in charge of their money as well as your own.

'How much did we take today?' Zack called over his shoulder to the servant who was always waiting in the shadows to answer his master.

'Around fifteen thousand shekels, sir. Do you wish me to go and find out the exact sum?'

'No, just get me the brown books.'

The servant went to fetch them. Zack always kept two sets of account books. One set listed all the tax money that he officially collected in this area for the Roman Empire. He was licensed to collect a certain amount from every household, keep a small percentage for himself, then send the rest to the Roman governor's men. This was all set out and listed in seven shiny red leather-bound books marked with the Roman eagle. The other set of books were dull brown, their covers much more shabby because they were used much more often. These listed all the tax money that had *really* been collected, and that was a great deal more. It didn't really matter to the Romans. As long as they received their taxes, they didn't mind if someone else became fabulously rich from collecting too much. After all, business was business.

Zack took another sip of wine, sensed a movement behind, and turned. It was the servant, again.

'The books, my lord.'

'Put them there.' His master motioned at a side-table with a careless wave of his hand. He'd go through the accounts later, checking for errors, making sure that no one was cheating him. He didn't trust anyone – not his servants, not his bodyguards, not even his family, who'd given up on him years ago. '*My son! A tax collector! Working for the Romans!*' his mother had cried. His family had cursed him, but he'd gone ahead and become a tax collector anyway. It was his way of becoming someone big – and Zack quite liked the idea of becoming big, because that was something he wasn't. In fact, for a full-grown adult man, he was incredibly short.

His mother said that he'd been the normal size when he was born, but just stopped growing at round about the age of seven or eight. The other children kept getting taller, but he didn't. At school, he came to hate playtimes, as there was always someone who took fun from teasing him. Zack clenched his fists at the memory of it. Some used to pick him up and carry him around like a pretend toddler while he struggled in their arms.

'I've shown you now!' he thought, angrily. 'I've shown you all!' All those taunts, all those insulting pats on the head, all those years ago. Now, *they* all paid their taxes to *him*, whether they liked it or not. His guards and servants saw to that. Revenge is sweet, especially when you can get your own back on people year after year after year...



'Pay up!' That was one of his favourite phrases when visiting the house of anyone owing money. Zack would get there in the early morning, with some of his servants and bodyguards, when he was least expected.

'But we can't pay!' some of them would say, bleary-eyed from sleep, or, 'We've already paid!' You had to laugh. These people tried everything, but it never worked.

'Pay now,' he'd say, 'plus ten per cent for wasting my time!' He liked saying that too. He liked seeing the desperate wild looks on their faces as these people scrabbled around in moneybags looking for spare coins, or had to stand and watch his servants take away something from the house to cover the debt.

Zack smiled again at the memories. It was only a job, but it paid him well in all sorts of ways.

A shout brought his mind back to the balcony. Somewhere nearby, there was the sound of a crowd. The noise changed, sometimes coming from here, now from over there. What was happening? There was no horse-racing on tonight. The crowd was moving - you could tell from the way the sound filtered, first down this street, then that. Was it a disturbance, a riot? Zack glanced up at the guards on the battlements of Herod's citadel. They were taking an interest but not rushing around, not looking too worried yet.

The crowd was coming nearer. No, it wasn't a riot, it sounded more like a parade. Good grief, they'd be coming past his house. He checked that his household guards were at the main gate... good, yes, they were. No one would get past them. But, as the most hated man in the town, he still had to be careful. He turned.

'Michael!' That's unusual, he thought. I've called him by his first name.

'Yes, sir?'

'Tell them to double the guard at the gate.'

The servant left, quickly. The balcony was high and secure, so Zack stayed to watch. The crowd were in sight now, and straightaway he relaxed. They were surrounding and following a small group of travellers, possibly merchants, probably heading for the boarding houses at the other end of the street. It was a common enough sight, so why the crowd? They were near his house now. Soon they'd be passing, no threat at all. He could hear individual voices, people coming out of their houses and shouting something: 'Please stay with us, rabbi!' and 'This way, rabbi!'

So that was it, just a travelling rabbi, a teacher. Some of them had quite a following, but this crowd was unusual. Why did so many want him coming under their roof? They were outside now. Then Zack stood up. Of course! It's that one! The rabbi from Nazareth! Zack had heard that a tax collector had heard him speak and actually handed in his resignation and left his job, saying he couldn't do the job any more. Now, what was his name? Levi? Matthew? Zack wished he'd taken more notice when the story came round. It was an odd story, interesting, even - and the rabbi who'd caused it all to happen was here.



Zack put his hands on the balustrade and leaned over the edge of the balcony, straining to see if he could spot anyone he knew. Matthew, yes, that was the name, he remembered now; the tax collector had definitely been called Matthew. Zack couldn't see – a tree in the garden below was blocking part of his view of the street – so he leaned out a bit further over the edge, then a bit more. With that, he overbalanced, and fell.

There was a giddy sensation, a heavy thud across his back. He was upside-down, head was full of flashing lights, his little body twisted and hurting. Why? What had happened?

Something was sticking in his face. He focused. A branch, a bush. He'd landed on one of the bushes in the ornamental garden, just under the balcony. How stupid! Ouch! He hoped nobody was watching an imperial tax collector with his bottom hanging out of a bush. Michael would have noticed, surely – where was he? Zack lay in the bush, groaning, the garden filled with the noise of the crowd on the other side of the high garden wall. Nobody came to help – oh well... Slowly and painfully, he carefully crawled out and stood up, checking and rubbing to see that nothing was broken. Idiot! He could have hurt himself!

He was standing by a low tree with branches that stretched higher than the wall. Oh well, he might as well find a better view of the street. He'd come this far to get it, even without using the stairs.

Carefully, gingerly, Zack climbed the lower branches that offered good handholds. He hadn't done any climbing like this since he was a boy, but it brought back good memories of being high, tall, and looking down on other people. Was that why he liked his balcony?

He could see over the garden wall now. The crowd hadn't moved very far at all – in fact, the travellers had stopped and were talking among themselves while the crowd milled around. Voices were being raised. Somebody obviously didn't agree with... something. Then one voice spoke out, and everyone seemed to go silent. The crowd slowly turned to face Zack. Some were looking up in quiet amazement.

Somebody had mentioned his name. Why? What was going on? He had to be sure. Had somebody asked him a question? Yes, they had. Who? He felt he had to say something to break the awkward silence.

'Er... pardon? Could you say that again, please?' He felt silly saying it, with his head poking over the wall. All the faces turned back to the rabbi, who had a peculiar smile on his face. The holy man repeated himself.

'I said, "Hello, Zacchaeus." I also said that I would love to spend the night at your house. Would that be possible?' The heads turned back.

Zack's mind raced through a thousand clever things that he could say, but couldn't think of anything that fitted this situation. He had a full larder and a very good wine cellar. He didn't entertain guests very often. And he couldn't remember when someone had last given him a good-natured smile, the sort that money can't buy. He decided.

'Er... yes! Do! By all means... um... come round! The gate's just... er... here!' Zack pointed along the wall, feeling very stupid.

'Well, you'd better come on down, then, hadn't you?' That smile again. The rabbi climbed down off his donkey and led the way through the crowd towards the main gate of the tax collector's house. Zack scrambled down, almost falling out of the tree, then raced along his side of the wall in an effort to reach the gate before the rabbi did, so that the guards didn't try to stop him coming in.

The rest of the evening passed in a kind of strange wonderful dream. The house, which sometimes doubled as an office and meeting-room, was transformed into a welter of light, warmth and noise as the rabbi and his friends made themselves at home. Zack's servants looked on aghast. This wasn't normal. The master of the house had ordered that his best food be brought out, his finest wines be placed on the table; and now, their master was just sitting there, talking and listening to the rabbi whose personality seemed to be filling the whole building with a peculiar happiness. The other tax collector, Matthew, he was there too, and talking. What was going on? The master had even brought out both sets of account books, the red and the brown, something he never did in public, it was too dangerous.

Outside, the crowd hadn't gone away. In fact, it seemed to have grown, and the guards looked worried. No matter how popular the rabbi was, he was obviously staying at the wrong place tonight, and word had spread. There was going to be a bit of a scene if something wasn't done. Somebody was talking to the crowd, whipping them up with angry words about tax collectors and Romans. The guards on the battlements of Herod's citadel were watching very closely. In fact, there were more of them now.

News of the crowd filtered into the house, and soon the rabbi was back at the gate, addressing the crowd. Then a voice made everybody turn. It was Zack, tiny Zack, the most hated man in Jericho. His voice carried across the street. He was standing on a chair that he'd brought out.

'I just want to say something to you all.' The crowd went quiet.

'I know what you all think of me and what I do. You don't think that my house is a fit place for Jesus to visit. You think he's too good for it. Well... I've been talking to him – and you're right. It's not.' I didn't know him before today, but now I do... and he's given me a lot to think about. And in front of you all, I want to say that... I've been doing some bad things. Really bad things. And I'm... sorry.'

As he stood there, talking to the crowd, telling them about how he was going to change things, Zack felt something strange happening inside him. He was feeling tall, taller than he had ever felt before.

Religious Education: 'Salvation is...'

For discussion: Display the word 'Saved' on the board. In pairs, then as a class, list as many ways as possible that people can be 'saved' or 'set free' from something.

Explain that the story you've just shared is based on a much shorter Bible story. Now share the actual Bible story, found in Luke 19:1-9. Note how, at the end, Jesus said, 'Salvation has come to this house.' Explain that the word 'salvation' is linked to the Roman word for 'salve' – something that heals (like modern 'lip salve'). Discuss: who has been saved or healed in this story... and from what? What's your most interesting question about this story? What could happen next?

For writing: Title: 'Salvation for Zacchaeus'

1. Copy: 'Salvation' means being saved, or set free.
2. Using sentences and quick drawings or diagrams, write responses to the following questions:
Why is Zack hated at the beginning of the story? What do you think caused Zack to change?
What did he do to put things right?
3. Who has been saved in this story, and from what? (Key question for RE assessment purposes.)
4. How do you think local people would have reacted to the story? What might they have said?
5. What other interesting questions do you have about this story – and possible answers?

Plenary: When somebody gets into trouble, they might need to be rescued. Christians believe that whatever troubles people may have, God wants to step in and offer a way out for his people (or a way through) if they are open to the idea of being saved.

Literacy: Adapting a text

'Standing up' is based on the Bible story found in Luke 19:1-9. Read both stories to note down any key differences, listing:

- Names of characters
- Details of setting
- Key plot points

List what you think are the three most important details added by the author of 'Standing up'. Did they help explain the Bible story more clearly – or not? As extension, compare the Bible story's key plot points to those found in Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*. Are there any similarities or contrasts?

Literacy: Dialogue and conversations

1. Create a storyboard (eight frames, with pin-men drawings) for 'Standing up', with selected action and dialogue. Circle the key scene, and explain your choice.
2. The story doesn't include the actual conversations between Jesus, Matthew and Zack inside the house. What do you think was said? Recreate that scene as a short conversation.
3. What do you think the servants might have been saying in the kitchen? Create the dialogue for a conversation that could have taken place as the meal was going on.



Literacy: Using metaphors in writing

'As he stood there, talking to the crowd, telling them about how he was going to change things, Zack felt something strange happening inside him. He was feeling tall, taller than he had ever felt before.'

In this part of the story 'Standing up', the author is using metaphor ('picture language') to explain a complicated idea. Zack wasn't getting physically taller, but something inside him was feeling bigger and stronger. (Note the story's title, too.) Re-read the story, listing any words or phrases that show how Zack's attitude to other people might have been coloured by being treated unfairly as a smaller person. Write about a time when you felt 'smaller' or 'larger' inside because of the way other people treated you.

Literacy: Writing a news report

Zack's story would have been big news in Jericho, his local town. Reporters ask themselves these questions when news-gathering: *Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?* List some quick answers to the questions, then construct a short news report about this story, closing with a personal comment from somebody who was there at the end. Then create an eye-catching headline.

Literacy: Writing poetry

Study this poem, looking especially at the structure. It is a Nonet, where the pattern starts with nine syllables per line, then works its way down to one. Create your own alternative recipe for 'Someone who cares', using a similar verse structure.

Recipe for a bully
Take a broken heart that's been beaten
Extract the raw feelings and cool
Until they lose all their warmth
Add a large spoonful of
Slowly distilled fear
With one drop of
Anger, then
Gently
Stir

Values: Saving a community

Questions for discussion and writing:

1. Money can mean different things to different people. What do you think Zack was using it to 'do' at the beginning of the story – and at the end?



2. Do you think there are important things that money can't buy? What are they?
3. Think of your School Values. Values are big ideas that guide the way people make personal choices in life. Which new values do you think Zack has learned as part of the story?
4. How do you think this could change the way he lives his life in future?
5. Why do you think Jesus chose to visit him instead of someone else?

Values: Forgiveness

Questions for discussion and writing:

1. What is forgiveness? (*Choosing not to be controlled by anger at the hurtful things done to us?*)
2. What are the different ways that people use to show that they are sorry, or to show their forgiveness of others?
3. Can we name any famous examples of 'sorry' or forgiveness?
4. Do we think it is possible to forgive someone who isn't sorry? How? (Note Jesus' prayer on the cross, found in Luke 23:34: 'Forgive them, Father. They don't know what they are doing'.)
5. How could forgiveness make a difference to our life together in school, or outside?