Luke 19:1-10
The story of Zacchaeus is only in Luke. The scene describes a spiritual healing. Since Luke was a physician, this would appeal particularly to him.

On the surface I imagine that Zacchaeus was a hard man. But there is a soft spot still left in Zacchaeus. He was as eager as any schoolboy to see Jesus. He ran to a tree and climbed it. A simple thing like that touched the Lord. He noticed it; “of such are the Kingdom of Heaven.” Sometimes perhaps we become a little starchy in our souls. We might hesitate to climb a tree to see anyone. Who would we climb a tree to see? Perhaps it easier to save a soul from sin than it is from starch.

Calvin on Zacchaeus – “Curiosity and simplicity are a sort of preparation for faith. Nay, it was not without a certain inspiration from heaven that Zacchaeus climbed up that sycamore tree. There was a certain seed of true piety in his heart when he so ran before the press, and so climbed into that sycamore tree.”

Jesus had no concern for his reputation. He allowed himself to be served by the most notorious sinner in town. Luke 9:51 “When the days drew near for him to received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

1 - He entered Jericho and was passing through.
Jericho was famous for its walls. (Joshua 6: 1-27). There were walls within Jericho when Jesus came, but these were not walls made of stone and mortar, but walls of hatred and exclusion and greed. But Jesus entered Jericho and just passed right through the walls. He had something in mind I believe, someone to deal with. He has to walk through a wall.

Jericho was on the border of Judea about 15 miles NE of Jerusalem. There would be larger crowds than usual because pilgrims were making their way to Jerusalem for the Passover.

2 – And there was a man named (onamati kaloumenos Zakchais – ‘called by the name of”)
Zacchaeus - the name meant ‘pure or righteous one’ – irony – he bore the name of pure, but his life was the exact opposite – he was a thief and collaborator with the enemy of the people.
he was a chief tax collector (architelwnas – Jericho was “an important trading point for balsam and other things and so Zacchaeus was the head of the tax collectors in this region, a sort of commissioner of taxes who probably had other publicans serving under him” Robertson)
Consider 7:34 – There Jesus is accused by his enemies of being “a friend of tax collectors and sinners”. “As a class, the tax collectors were hated by their fellow Jews. This was almost inevitable. They represented the foreign domination of Rome. Their methods were necessarily inquisitorial. That they often overcharged people and pocketed the surplus is almost certain. In the rabbinical writings they are classified with robbers. In the synoptic gospels they are bracketed with ‘sinners’. This shows the common attitude of the Jewish people toward them. They were considered to be renegades who sold their services to the foreign oppressor to make money at the expense of the own countrymen.” (Tenney)

and rich
Zacchaeus would have been the poster child for a Jewish boy gone bad. If a poll was taken as to the most hated man in Jericho, he probably would be right up near if not at the top. He would have been worse than a gentile; he collaborated with the enemy to rip off his own people.
Consider Luke 18:18-30 – Jesus said “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God …(but) what is impossible with men is possible with God.” Zacchaeus proves the point.

“In the circumstances Jesus’ acceptance of and identification with the despised Zacchaeus constitute a bold public act. No other story gives more vivid evidence of the remarkable liberty exercised by Jesus in his association with people. Where the welfare of a man was at stake, he ignored all the taboos and social protocol.” (Tolbert)

It’s never too late to change and no one is hopeless, and no one is beyond the boundary of God’s grace in Christ, even Zacchaeus. “No one is a prisoner of his track record.”

The town needed to hate Zacchaeus. As long as there was Zacchaeus to hate, they didn’t have to think about their own forms of robbery. “At least I’m not as bad as he is.” Zacchaeus probably was the focus and center for much of the hostility in that town. Jesus has been coming through Jericho for years, and here on his last time through, he decides to deal with it. He goes to the very nerve spot of the town and publically and dramatically deals with the hatred through an act of
friendship. Jesus’ ethical teaching will have an illustration in his ministry. Does this scene with Zacchaeus not illustrate beautifully Jesus’ teaching to “love your enemies.”?

3 – And he sought (zatew – imperfect active indicative – continuous action)
to see who Jesus was, perhaps word had come to Zacchaeus that this strange holy man Jesus was reputed to be “a friend to tax collectors”. Such a rare specimen of a Jew would be a sight to see, perhaps to meet. If anyone needed a friend, it was Zacchaeus. The account of the call of Levi the tax collector is recorded in Luke 5:27-32. Levi threw a feast for Jesus and invited other tax collectors. Perhaps word of this had gone up the tax collector grapevine and reached the ear of Zacchaeus.

but could not on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature.
Even though he is wealthy he is also an outsider. His smallness of soul has marked him as one whom the crowds don’t care about.

One thing about Jesus, when someone wants to see him, Jesus is going to show up.

4 – So he ran on ahead and climbed (anabainw - )
into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way.

5 – and when Jesus came to the place, he looked up (anablepw – aorist active participle – ‘after looking up’)
and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste (speudw – aorist active participle)
and come down (katabainw – aorist active imperative);
for I must stay at your house today.” (sameron gar en tw oikw sou dei me meinai)

There is no precondition, no call to change his ways or else.
Jesus feels compelled to stay with him – dei – ‘it is necessary.’
Perhaps one reason why Jesus felt compelled to visit Z is that the hatred directed at Z would shift to him because of this visit – Jesus is going to Jerusalem to take on the sin of the world, and this visit foreshadows that in a small yet still powerful way.

Notice that Jesus already knew who Zacchaeus was. He had probably known him or known of him or heard bad things about him for years – maybe for decades. It was now his time to be called down by Jesus. Figuratively many people are ‘up a tree’ in a way. The human condition is sometimes that we get up a tree, get out on a limb, then saw the branch off behind us. Maybe spiritually and emotionally, Zacchaeus is out on that last limb. Here’s a mixed metaphor – he’s up a tree out on the last limb and he is drowning and needs a life preserver. Jesus throws him the rope of grace.

Imagine what the disciples might be thinking, “Jesus, what are you doing? Why Zacchaeus? This will not be a good move for our PR.”

6 – So he made haste and came down, and received ( ‘upodechomai – aorist middle indicative – ‘he himself received him’)
him
joyfully (chairw – present active participle – ‘he personally received him rejoicing continually’)

7 – And when they saw it they all murmured, (diagogguzw – imperfect active indicative – continuous action – the root word gogguzw was used of ‘the cooing of doves or the hum of bees (Robertson)’
“He had gone in to be the guest (kataluw – aorist active infinitive)
of a man who is a sinner.”
The crowd on the road, the good people of Jericho, everyone, became like a swarm of bees. They exhibit a striking example of ‘road rage.’

8 – And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord,
“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor;
and if ( ei and aorist active indicative - a condition of the first class which assumes the fact, could be translated as ‘since’ – He is making a public declaration of his guilt.) Could translate - “If, as is the case …”
I have defrauded (sukophantew – aorist active indicative – verb used in NT only here and Luke 3:14 – John the Baptist told the soldiers on their inquiry ‘What shall we do?’ John told them “Rob no one by violence …”)
anyone of anything, I restore (present active indicative – not the future but the present – he is acting on this now.)
it fourfold.” Fourfold - Possibly a reflection of Mosaic law – Exodus 22:1; Numbers 5:6f. However “Roman law required fourfold restoration in certain circumstances, particularly in cases of wrongful accusation in the courts (Nolland).”
'Fourfold’ may be what Zacchaeus normally extorted so he is seeking to wipe the slate clean. When one is converted, there is a conversion regarding how one sees one’s own stuff or possessions. What we own takes on a different meaning. When the text begins we meet a man who is mastered by a desire to get, after meeting Jesus, he is mastered by a desire to give. He wanted henceforth to live up to his name.

9 – And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation (swtaria – when Jesus healed the ten lepers, Jesus said to the one who came back to thank him that his faith had ‘made him well’ – that was the verb form of the word for salvation used here.) has come to this house, Zacchaeus’ family surely had also been hurt by his activity. Imagine the shame and fear that hid behind those walls. since he also is a son of Abraham, On ‘Today’ consider 4:21 where Jesus preached to his home synagogue – “Today this scripture has been fulfilled …”

10 – for the Son of man came to seek and save the lost.” Luke chapter 15; and Luke 5:32; Ezekiel 34. Jesus sought him, found him, and saved him. From what did he save him? Imagine what the rest of his life would have been if Jesus had not come. He probably would have gone on ripping off his countrymen. Even if he wanted to stop because of remorse eating away at him, he might have gone so deep that he would be unable to extricate himself. The higher one rises in a criminal enterprise, the deeper one finds himself sinking in moral quicksand. He would not only be the target of those who hated him, but there would be under-criminals in the tax system who would be glad to take his life to take his place. Had he stayed in Jericho, he eventually would die unloved, and his death would have been a reason to throw a party.

Maybe the town stayed mad at Jesus for a few hours about eating with Zacchaeus, dismissing Zacchaeus’ words of guilt and restoration as just empty talk – until the checks started coming in, or the poor found a sack of money laid in their laps all over town – Did the townspeople think about themselves then? “Have we treated Zacchaeus all wrong? If just a simple lunch made all this change in the man, a simple show of friendship, maybe we should have tried to be his friend too? If we had showed him the hand of friendship, might he have changed years ago?” My guess is that many cashed their checks and hated Zacchaeus for the rest of their lives.

If we act out of friendship to our enemies, or even to people who just pluck our last nerve, we are not guaranteed that they will change. But in the end, maybe it’s the change that will come in us if we reach out the open hand instead of the clenched fist that we should be concerned with. What would we have to lose in reaching out in friendship? At worst there will be no change, at best we may gain a friend. Jesus took the risk. Zacchaeus could have said “no way” and taxed Jesus and the disciples for an unlawful parade, but that would not have changed Jesus’ destination – he was going to Jerusalem where he would suffer, be crucified, and on the third day rise again. Jesus took a risk that day, and was the object of serious rebuke by the whole town – “How dare he show love to that man.” But Jesus had nothing to lose, he was giving it all up anyway. What could they do to him? Crucify him? And that’s exactly the point. Jesus hated walls, they had no power over him.

William James on conversion in Variety of Religious Experience – “To be converted is a process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.”

The converted in scripture? Abraham the liar, Jacob the cheat, David the adulterer and murderer, Rahab the harlot, Peter the coward, Nicodemus the Pharisee, Paul the terrorist, and here Zacchaeus the tax collector

Lent is associated often with sacrifice – giving something up, letting something go. How about giving up the walls? Zacchaeus’ steps were miraculous that day – he walked out of his house a new man and proceeded to walk to those whom he had ripped off to make restitution. Some think Peter walking on water is an unbelievable story, but in all seriousness Zacchaeus’ steps were far more difficult. Peter was called to walk on water; Jesus called Zacchaeus to walk through walls.