

SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES: 30 OCTOBER

Juniors: The story of John the Baptist – God has a plan for each of us

Seniors: Luke 19:1-10 - How powerful is God?

In the Old Testament there are lots of stories which remind us how powerful God is. There we read of how he created a whole world and everything in it; we hear how God protected Daniel from the hungry lions in the lion pit; the list could go on and on. One of my favourite stories is how God broke down the walls of the city of Jericho so that his people could enter the land he had chosen for them. Do you remember the story? (See Joshua chapter 6). Each day his priests led the warriors in a march round the city walls. As they marched the priests blew continuously on their ram's horn trumpets. Then, on the 7th day, the whole procession marched round the city 7 times. As they finished the priests blew a long note, the people shouted and the walls fell down flat. Archaeologists working at the site have discovered that in places the city walls were 6 metres thick! Yet, at God's command, they crumbled. Imagine how scary that must have been – to see God's power at work like that.

But that is only one kind of power. In today's story we see his power in a different way. You probably know this story very well.

It involves a tax collector who lived in the city of Jericho about 600 years later. (God had forbidden his people to rebuild Jericho and so this new city of Jericho was built a little nearer Jerusalem.)

You know by now that tax collectors were the most despised of men. They didn't just collect taxes, they also calculated how much people owed to Rome. Generally they also overcharged, without any mercy. They were also regarded as wicked because they mixed with non-Jews regularly and because their work made it difficult for them to obey the rules of the Sabbath. God-fearing Jews had as little to do with them as possible.

Yet Jesus did not reject them. In fact, it seems as though he went out of his way to befriend them!! Remember how he praised the attitude of the tax collector in the story we heard last week? Jesus even chose a tax collector, Matthew, to be one of his 12 special friends – a disciple. And he was happy to mix with tax collectors despite the fact that he was criticised for doing so.

The tax collector in today's story was Zacchaeus, a wealthy man. He was a Chief Tax Collector and he was hated. No-one would have anything to do with him.

Zacchaeus heard about Jesus and, when he heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, he decided he wanted to see him for himself. But he was too short to get a proper view. So, he decided to climb a sycamore tree. To his amazement Jesus stopped right underneath the tree. Imagine his shock when he heard Jesus call him by name!

When Jesus told him he wanted to come to his house, I am sure he climbed down so fast that he skinned his legs. He would have been so thrilled that someone wanted to visit him! Amazing! No-one else had ever suggested coming to his house! The people round him muttered about this so-called good man who intended to spend time with this tax collector!

We don't know what Jesus and Zacchaeus talked about, but I am sure that eventually Zacchaeus admitted that he was a cheat. And then Jesus must have told him the best news ever – God was prepared to forgive him!!

The joy of being forgiven changed Zacchaeus. God gave him the power to toss his wealth aside. Money was no longer the most important thing in his life. He no longer wanted it. Instead he wanted LIFE with Jesus. Joyfully he began to giving away his money, making amends for his evil deeds.

We never hear of him again, but we can see that he was a changed man, free to love and to live as God directed him.

And this is another example of God's power. God has the power to change people. We still see God's power to change lives. When people come to know Jesus, he helps them to shake off old habits and to become new people.

And if we let him free us from whatever it is which holds us in its power, we too shall know joy unspeakable – now and in God's future kingdom.