

## A Small Man With A Big Desire

Luke 19:1-10

I live in a family with tall brothers. Next to them I consider myself short, even at 5'10". Somewhere between 1976 and 2015 I lost half an inch.

I don't know if you know any famous short people. Napoleon Bonaparte was purported to be short, but all accounts indicate he was around 5'7".

The Guinness Book of World Records lists Gul Mohammed from New Delhi, India standing only at 1'10".

Dolly Parton and Danny DeVito are 5'.

Yuri Gagarin may not be a household name but he was the Soviet cosmonaut who was the first man in space. He stood at 5'2" as did Yasser Arafat.

French philosopher Voltaire, composer Beethoven, Soviet leader Makita Khrushchev, and steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie were all 5'3".

Gandhi, Vladimir Lenin and Charlie Chaplin were but 5'5".

Turn in your Bibles this morning to Luke 19:1-10 as we discuss another short person. How short, we are not sure because the Holy Spirit did not direct the author of Scripture to divulge that information. No matter your stature you are not at all difficult for God to find.

Our text today is very similar to that of last week as we discussed the healing of blind Bartimaeus. Both were outcasts of society, unwelcome in social and religious gatherings. One was a poor, blind beggar hoping for a little charity from travelers to and from Jerusalem as they passed through Jericho. The other, as we will see, was rich – made that way by his own greed. Both shared a common malady, the same problem that affects us all. They were lost.

Bartimaeus wasn't lost because he was blind and couldn't see where he was going. They were, like us, sinners in need of a Savior.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. It is there that He will celebrate another Passover meal – His last. It is there that the mass of Israel will unite their hearts in praise as they welcome the King into Jerusalem believing that it is time for the Messiah to set up His kingdom.

But it is there that the crowd will turn on Him and cry out for His death.

It is there that He will fulfill the will of the Father by going to the cross.

It is there that He will die for our sin. It is there that the only sacrifice acceptable to God will be made once and for all.

But before He gets there He must pass through Jericho.

Everything that He does has a purpose.

Everything He does is according to the will of the Father.

Everything He does is ultimately for His glory.

It wasn't just circumstantial that a blind man happened to be on the outskirts of the town. Jesus knew he was there. It was a divine encounter. I have said to you on other occasions that every encounter we have is a divine encounter. Jesus passed through Jericho because there were two men who didn't know it when they woke up that day to go about their business that they would encounter Jesus. But Jesus knew it. What happens in Jericho is the summary of why Jesus came. It is here that we find the last recorded conversions happening in Jesus' ministry before the cross. By the way, I believe that there were two conversions at the cross, the thief nailed beside Him and the Roman soldier.

He has now entered Jericho, that city built by Herod the Great which lies about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Some scholars consider Jericho the Las Vegas of its day. It was a resort town, the place where people spent their vacations, a city of palm

trees. Jewish historian Josephus described this city as a little paradise. Not only was it on the northern route to and from Jerusalem, it was also the trade route to Damascus and Arabia. It was also both a commercial city exporting balsam and a military outpost. Jericho was both important and prominent.

Verse 1 tells us that Jesus entered Jericho, the crowd is still with Him, once blind Bartimaeus is alongside Him. From all appearances it would seem that what Luke records is the Lord's intention of just passing through. The Passover is a week away and like other travelers Jericho was the last stop before Jerusalem. But as I said a moment ago, there is always a purpose behind what Jesus does.

He had one more divine encounter to attend to. We read in verse 2 that there was a man named Zacchaeus who lived there. To mention his name we immediately reflect on his reputation. We know him as a tax collector, and not just any tax collector, Luke tells us that he was a chief tax collector.

There's a story about a local fitness center, offering \$1,000 to anyone who could demonstrate that they were stronger than the owner of the place. This muscle man would squeeze a lemon until all the juice ran into a glass, and then hand the lemon to the next challenger. Anyone who could squeeze out just one more drop of juice would win the money.

Many people tried over time – weightlifters, construction workers, even professional wrestlers, but nobody could do it.

One day a short and skinny guy came in and signed up for the contest. After the laughter died down, the owner grabbed a lemon and squeezed away. Then he handed the wrinkled remains to the little man.

The crowd's laughter turned to silence as the man clenched his fist around the lemon and six drops fell into the glass. As the crowd cheered, the manager paid out the winning prize and asked the short guy

what he did for a living. "Are you a lumberjack, a weightlifter, or what?"

The man replied, "I work for the IRS."

That was Zacchaeus.

Tax franchises were sold and tax collectors had to collect a certain amount of taxes for Rome, but they were given free rein to collect more taxes than required. It was a for profit business. They could tax just about anything and set the price. If you didn't or couldn't pay then a lien might be put up on your property or family members sold into slavery.

Zacchaeus was in charge of the district with others working under him and Jericho with its prosperity and vacationers was a very lucrative place for his tax booths.

From the perspective of the Jewish people, tax collectors, who were Jewish themselves working for the Roman government, were detested by the people because they were in league with the enemy. Tax collectors were hated probably even more than Rome because they were considered traitors who took advantage of their own countrymen and got rich while doing it by defrauding them. Consequently they were ostracized and even worse were not welcome in the Temple or synagogue to worship. J. Vernon McGee compares tax collectors to modern mafia.

Now that is the Zacchaeus we know by reputation through Sunday School lessons we learned since wee little tykes. But let me just mention one little tidbit about him that you may not be aware of. It's about his name. It means pure or righteous.

The town saw him for who he was, someone who had cheated them. They thought of him as a loser and a scoundrel.

Jesus saw him for who he could become, someone who could have a life that would fit his name. Jesus saw Him as lost, who could be changed through salvation.

I wonder how we see people today. Do we see them through the eyes of the crowd or through the eyes of Christ? Do we condemn them or do we have compassion for them?

How do we look at the person who has more tattoos covering skin than clothes? Do we clutch our wallet or purse a little tighter and conclude that they aren't worth our time or wonder how many gas stations they've robbed?

How do we look at the person who stands on the corner with their wrinkled sign begging for a handout? Do we think to ourselves that they should go get a job flipping burgers or something?

How do we look at the mother who is yelling at her children in the store using colorful metaphors that make our ears ring and the air awkward? Do we quickly exit to the next aisle or do we give them a piece of our mind on how to properly treat children?

How do we look at the neighbor or co-worker who drinks up his paycheck rather than putting food on the table for his family?

How do we look at the person who just came out and admitted they are in a same-sex relationship?

This past week there was a knock on the door. As I went to open it I could see it was a woman I did not know. She had several tattoos. She was looking for some financial help and explained to me that her husband had just worked one week at a new job. She told me that the company had mailed his check rather than giving it to him at work. That seemed a bit strange to me. She said her car was on fumes and needed some gas money and their baby needed some diapers. I sized her up and told her that we didn't have any cash on hand at the church to help her out. She said any help would be appreciated. We talked for about ten minutes. Now I don't like doing this because I don't like getting scammed, but I took out my wallet and gave her some money. I told her this was just a small gift, but then told her the greatest gift she could receive was salvation through believing in Christ as her Savior. I asked her if she went to church. She assured me that she was a Christian having been baptized in another

denomination, but hadn't been to church in a long time. I invited her here. She asked if I would pray with her. I don't know if she will come and bring her family. It's easy to see through the eyes of the crowd.

Folks, we come to church and feel safe and encouraged and we enjoy talking with others who are just like us, but out there, out in the world, out in our neighborhoods, our schools, our shopping centers, our work places, out there are people who are just like Zacchaeus – scorned by others. We look at them and see one thing. God looks at them and sees something entirely different.

I saw an article in Yahoo news this week and was curious. It was about a young lady who had gotten a very unique tattoo. Two words had been etched on her thigh just above her knee. It said "I'm fine." But the style in which it is written has a hidden message. Reading the tattoo upside down it reads "Save me." The message she wanted to convey is that to the world, people can look at her as an attractive, bright, young woman and give all the pretense of having it all together, but on the inside she is hurting, desperately wanting someone to take notice, hoping that someone will help.

They are all around us. There is a Zacchaeus in every town, in every neighborhood, in every school, in every office or plant, and perhaps even in church, maybe even in your family. How do we see them?

Jesus was passing through Jericho and there was a chief tax collector named Zacchaeus. He gave the impression that he was in control and happy. But he wasn't living up to his name. Something inside was drawing him to this one who was passing through. I think Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus, heard about His miracles and teachings. After all, those things weren't done in a corner, in secret. Word about Him spread throughout the region. A large crowd was following him now.

Let's take a little poetic license with the story and surmise that as he is sitting in his tax office going over yesterday's receipts, he heard someone running through town hollering about how old blind Baritmaues had just been healed and now could see. The news distracted Zacchaeus from his abacus, so he got up and ran outside to see what all the commotion was. Someone repeated what had just happened and how it was Jesus who had healed him. We don't know what Zacchaeus was thinking. Maybe he thought he was too busy to go. Maybe he was curious and wanted to see Jesus after everything he had heard about this miracle worker. With all that he had heard about Jesus maybe he began to ponder the lessons he would have heard as a young boy that someday the Messiah would come. Could this be the one?

Maybe he had begun to feel uncomfortable or discontent with all his wealth and thought there must be more. Maybe like Solomon, he began to realize that all this accumulation of stuff was vanity and had a deeper longing in his heart that could not be filled with material possessions.

Whatever was going through the mind of Zacchaeus at that moment encouraged him to want to see Jesus. Perhaps he felt that only Jesus could truly satisfy an otherwise empty heart. So he did what any curious person would do – He went to where all the commotion was occurring. He went to see Jesus.

Verse 3 identifies two problems.

The first one was his size. He was short. He wasn't the shortest man recorded in the Bible. There is of course Knee High Miah, but the shortest man is the guy who slept on his watch. Height was a problem.

The second problem was linked to the first. There was a crowd. No matter how hard he tried the crowd was so large and thick he couldn't see through them. It's like a kid going to a parade but can't see through all the adults, so the father hoists him up on his shoulders only to block the view of

those who are behind. Zacchaeus was short and he was not going to allow any barrier stand in his way. You know the song, right? Will you sing it with me?

Zacchaeus was a wee little man,  
A wee little man was he.  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree  
For the Lord he wanted to see;

And as the Savior passed that way,  
He looked up in the tree,  
Zacchaeus you come down  
For I'm going to your house today  
For I'm going to your house today.

He was curious and wanted to see Jesus. I want you to underline in verse 5 an important, but missed point. "Jesus was coming that way."

This past week Robyn and I went to a private screening of a movie titled *Woodlawn* that is coming out in October. It's a true story set in Birmingham, AL during 1973 and the height of High school integration. It's a story about a young black boy who played football and became a star. A chaplain courageously went to that school and shared Christ with the football team. Racial tension was volatile and wanted to give up any hope that integration would work. Both looked at each other with contempt. They saw each other through the eyes of hatred, but the chaplain believed that Christ could make a difference. He spoke to the football team and challenged them to put their animosity aside and trust Christ. Almost the entire team gave their life to Christ and eventually so did the coach. Later on this chaplain spoke to the rival team and almost that whole team and their coach were saved. A theme that is shared throughout the movie is this, so listen, because I don't want you to miss it. It's what we see here in Jericho. **BIG THINGS HAPPEN WHEN GOD SHOWS UP!**

Jesus was coming that way.

This movie comes to theaters October 16 and I want you to go and see it and I want you to take someone with you.

It is a message of courage.  
 It is a message of conviction.  
 It is a message of conversion.  
 It is a message of change.  
 It is a message of Christ.

That's the message here in Jericho. Jesus was coming that way and He stopped. What do you suppose went through the minds of the crowd who were following Jesus when He stopped? What's He doing? Everyone be quiet, Jesus is going to speak. Shhh, we can't hear what He has to say. "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down. I want to spend the day with you."

Look at verse 4. Maybe the crowd thought that Jesus was going to let old Zacchaeus have it. Finally someone was going to put him in his rightful place. Instead He told Zacchaeus to hurry down because He wanted to spend the day with him. They were stunned.

Two things happened when Jesus invited Himself to the home of Zacchaeus. Incidentally this is the only time recorded where Jesus did that. Revelation 3:20 reminds us that Jesus is the door, He has come to the door of our heart and He is knocking. He won't ever force His way in. Zacchaeus had a choice in that moment. He could make up some excuse. He could have said that he wasn't worthy to have someone like Jesus visit. He could have said no to Jesus. Or... He could welcome the opportunity. He could cancel his meetings. He could accept the invitation.

Jesus wants to stay with you.  
 Oh, not just to save you.  
 He wants to change you.  
 But you must make the choice.  
 You must open the door.

He is not just looking in your direction, He is looking at you, speaking to you. And notice from verse 5 that it is today. He didn't want to schedule something for another day or another week. It was that day – today. Hebrews 3:7 "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..."

So two things happened:  
 First, he hustled down the tree.  
 Second, he gladly welcomed Jesus. It is a word that means to rejoice. He was filled with joy that Jesus wanted to spend the day with him, in his home. I want you to understand something here. Jesus met Zacchaeus where he was. He didn't tell him to go and sell his tax business or clean up his life. He meets us where we are and when we accept that invitation, then other changes will take place.

Now that word "gladly" which also means to rejoice is the same word that that is used in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. When they were found, the owners rejoiced. (Luke 15)

It is the same word used by Jesus when He speaks to His disciples that they should rejoice that their names are written in heaven. (Luke 10:17)

It is the same word used in Luke 24:52 of the disciples who returned to Jerusalem rejoicing after the ascension of Jesus.

It is the same joy we are to exhibit when we experience all kinds of suffering. (James 1:2-4)

The response of the people was the same response given by the Pharisees whenever Jesus met with someone of ill-repute. They complained. Jesus didn't go to the home of the religious elite. He didn't go to the home of the political leaders. He didn't go to the home of anyone in the crowd. He went to the home of a sinner who gladly welcomed Him, a sinner who needed Him.

You know what? I'm glad Jesus went to the home of a sinner like Zacchaeus. That means He'll come to my home and to your home.

Don't let the criticism or the jealousy of the crowd keep you from meeting with Jesus. Don't let busyness rob you of meeting with Jesus today.

Whether or not there was a delay between verse 6 and 7 or between verse 7 and 8 is not clear. We don't know what kind of private discussion Jesus had with Zacchaeus, but however long it took or whatever was said to him, one thing is clear from verse 8. Zacchaeus was a changed man.

That he could afford to give half his possessions to the poor shows just how wealthy he was. That he could afford to obey the Old Testament law which says if you have stolen from someone you are to restore the stolen goods fourfold shows just how wealthy he was. (Exodus 22:1)

A few weeks ago we saw a rich man come to Jesus and wonder what he had to do to be saved. Notice the difference between that meeting and this one. Zacchaeus was willing to part with his wealth, the rich man was not. Money was their god (little g), but one had a changed heart, that led to changed actions.

Up to this point you may have noticed that I have not given you an outline. That does not mean the last 20 minutes or so was just my introduction and now comes the message.

My closing remarks will lead us into our time of communion. In the remaining two verses there are three thoughts I want you to see.

The person of Jesus  
The purpose of Jesus  
The promise of Jesus  
Let's read the verses.

## I. THE PERSON OF JESUS

Jesus was the only one who could meet the need

that was buried deep within the soul of Zacchaeus. He is the epitome of the very kind of people Jesus came for.

Jesus is the one described by Gabriel to Joseph as the one who would save His people from their sins. Jesus is the one who said of Himself that He is the way, the truth and the life and that no one can come to the Father except through Him.

Jesus is the one of whom it was said that there is no other name given among men whereby we can be saved.

He is the one who is the friend of sinners.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF JESUS

We see it there in verse 10. He came to seek and to save those who were lost. That means all of us as a collective whole.

The word lost literally means to be destroyed, to be ruined. Metaphorically it means to give over to eternal misery.

Jesus came to seek those who were lost. The word seek implies searching with the intent of finding. Suggested is the idea of patience and diligence in the search.

But His purpose does not end once He has found us. His purpose also includes saving us, to give us eternal life. Only through Christ can we avoid the pending judgment and wrath of God who must punish sin, who will punish those who have refused to trust Christ as Savior. His purpose was to come in search of you to save you. If He can save the likes of a Zacchaeus, He can save you.

No sin you have committed is too great for Him to forgive.

You can never commit so many sins that He cannot forgive.

He has come to seek and save the lost.

That not only is His purpose, it is also His promise.

## III. THE PROMISE OF JESUS

All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

He has promised to any, even the ones we think are beyond hope.

Isaiah 55:1, 6-7 “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake His way and the evil man His thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon.”

How do we know Zacchaeus was saved? Jesus said so in verse 9. Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham. It wasn't because he was born a Jew, but because, like Abraham, he had faith. The evidence was in his actions – making restitution for past indiscretions.

Here's the thing – when we let Jesus in, He abides with us forever.

Lord Kenneth Clark, internationally known for his television series Civilization, admitted in his autobiography that while visiting a beautiful church he had an overwhelming religious experience. He wrote: “My whole being was irradiated by a kind of heavenly joy far more intense than anything I had never known before.” But, as he described it, the “gloom of grace” created a problem for him. If he allowed himself to be influenced by his spiritual yearnings, he knew he would have to change and his family would think he had lost his mind. And so he concluded, “I was too deeply embedded in the world to change course.” As far as we know, he died without putting his faith in Christ.

How many people are missing out because they refuse to invite Jesus in as He is passing by?

Zacchaeus didn't miss the opportunity.

To the Jews, Zacchaeus was a loser, someone to be scorned.

To Jesus, Zacchaeus was lost, someone to be saved.

Warren Wiersbe has written “A seeking Savior will always find a sinner who is looking for a new beginning.”

It's true that according to his size, he didn't measure up, but then none of us measures up, we are all short according to God's standard. Unfortunately, many have measured themselves by the wrong standard and only when it's too late will they realize they have fallen short.

I want to close with a challenge to each of us.

The first is to ask if you know Jesus has been seeking you and if you have responded by faith to trust Him as Savior.

If not, make today the day Jesus comes to stay with you.

If so, then here is the second challenge. Jesus is no longer physically with us, in body, but He has left the task to us to be His representatives to go and seek for the Zacchaeus' of the world so they might know Jesus is seeking them with the purpose of saving them.

The music group Casting Crowns has given us these lyrics.

Oh Jesus friend of sinners

Open our eyes to the world at the end of our pointing fingers

Let our hearts be led by mercy

Help us reach with open hearts and open doors

Oh Jesus friend of sinners break our hearts for what breaks yours

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Zacchaeus was lost to the crowd, but Jesus saw him. He sees everyone who is lost and He is seeking them to save them and we may be the means by which they come to Christ.

Do you know anyone like Zacchaeus in your neighborhood?