

January 12, 2020  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Luke  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2020 David J. Whitcomb

**NOT SUCH A WEE LITTLE MAN AFTER ALL**  
**Luke 19:1-10**

If I were to say to you, “Okay, let’s sing the song most of us have known since we were children, *Zacchaeus was a Wee Little Man*, including the motions,” you would think that was silly. It would be. The song, which tells the story of our text, is intended for children. And it is a bit trite. Which is sad because this is a very important story. It is the story about God doing the impossible for a very sinful man. By grace God changed him forever.

Because it is such a simple story on the surface, people seldom see the incredible mercy of God in it. In the middle nineteenth century, Spurgeon, who became known as the Prince of Preachers, also established a preachers’ school where he taught young men how to preach. It was common on Friday afternoons for the students to meet with Spurgeon under an old oak tree on his property where they were free to ask questions, and where some would be asked to present an extemporaneous sermon. The story goes that one young man stood up to preach from this text. He said, “Point one, Zacchaeus was a small man. So am I.” “Point two, Zacchaeus was up a tree. So am I.” “Point three, Zacchaeus got down. So will I.” And the fellow sat down to the applause of all including Spurgeon.

Again, this is a very important story by which God speaks to our hearts about the impossible nature of His gift of salvation. To us who are born again, it is a source of rich encouragement about what God has done to us. To those who might be religious but unsaved, the story presents some questions that are difficult to answer. What does Jesus’ meeting with Zacchaeus teach us? How does the story encourage the believer and challenge the seeker?

**The Savior’s Invitation. (vv.1-5)**

Luke tells us the story about an awful sinner’s initiative to see Jesus (vv.1-4). He was a rich man Jesus met in Jericho. The event took place when *He entered Jericho and was passing through (v.1)*. This is the next-to-last event Luke recorded before Jesus arrived at Jerusalem. It is instructive to see how this story follows and is connected with two previous lessons from Jesus recorded by Luke. We can see a connection and contrast with the story about the rich young ruler who also wanted to see Jesus, but who went away unchanged and miserable. We can also see a connection with the story we considered last week of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, who wanted to see Jesus and was changed forever.

The next, and last, event Luke recorded before Jesus entered Jerusalem is the parable of the nobleman who left various levels of opportunity with his servants, then asked for an accounting upon his return. The truth of that parable also fits very well with the stories about the rich young ruler, blind Bartimaeus, and Zacchaeus. They are all tied together with the great reminder that one day we will give an account to our Lord about how we used the opportunities He presented.

In Jericho was a man named Zacchaeus. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich (v.2). Like Bartimaeus, the fact that he is named might indicate that he was known in the early church. Tradition holds that Peter appointed Zacchaeus to serve as bishop over the Church in Caesarea. Like the rich young ruler, Zacchaeus was rich. He was rich because he was a lying, cheating crook. Zacchaeus was short on stature, but his real problem is that he was far short on righteousness.

Those words do sound a bit judgmental or harsh, but they are an accurate description of this evil, little man. His position as chief tax collector gave him much opportunity to become rich at other people’s expense. Jericho was one of three major collection points for taxes in Judea. Capernaum, where Jesus found Matthew, and Jerusalem were the other chief points for collecting taxes in Judea. Because Jericho was situated at the crossing of the Jordan River, in the fertile Jordan Valley, there would be a lot of taxes collected at that spot.

The title “chief tax collector” means that Zacchaeus “farmed out” tax collecting to other agents. Then he made money by what he demanded from the lower collectors, or we would say, “He was taking a cut off the top.” He was at the top of the pyramid. Tax collecting in that day and culture was an elaborate system farmed out by the Roman government. Essentially, Rome told the collectors how much to collect, and anything they could get beyond that was up to them. So typically, the collectors cheated their own people which is why they were so hated. They were considered by their peers to be among the worst, most unrighteous, hell-bound sinners in the world.

The whole system was quite corrupted. Yet Jesus never condemned the work of tax collecting. He condemned cheaters like the money changers in the temple but taught the necessity of us paying legitimate taxes. Jesus would have concurred with John the Baptist’s instruction: *Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do” (Luke 3:12-13).*

The rich man who was small in stature, ethics, morality, and righteousness desired to see Jesus. Luke’s story reveals how there were natural impediments to his seeing Jesus. *And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature (v.3).* Like blind Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus had physical limitations that made it difficult for him to see Jesus. He was vertically challenged. In light of his stature and his reputation, we can’t help but wonder if the crowd intentionally impeded his view of Jesus.

But why did this man, of all men, desire to see Jesus? No doubt he was miserable in his sin and was looking for help or relief. Almost certainly he had heard about how Jesus changed Levi, the tax collector up in Capernaum. Ultimately, Zacchaeus was responding to the gracious work of God in drawing the sinner to Jesus. This is the case for every single person who is rescued from sin’s dungeon and given freedom of salvation in Christ. Here is a beautiful picture of God literally drawing a sinner to see the Savior. If that has not happened to you, you can be religious but you can’t be born again.

The needy man did what he could to see Jesus. *So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way (v.4).* He was like the rich young ruler who ran

to Jesus and bowed before Him (Mark 10:17). He was like Bartimaeus, who was in the right place crying out to Jesus. This wealthy businessman ran ahead of the procession. No dignified gentleman in that culture would run like that in public. Worse, the guy climbed up into a tree. That was even more unacceptable for a gentleman. Why did this businessman act so unacceptably? Why was he so determined to see Jesus? What was he expecting, what did he desire?

Zacchaeus was not aware of it, but he was about to receive a pre-determined invitation. *And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (v.5).* The rich crook received this invitation because the Son came to do the Father’s will. That being true, Jesus didn’t just “come to the place.” It had been determined in eternity that, on this day, He would confront Zacchaeus the sinner. This was no more coincidental than the day you came face to face with Jesus and had to deal with your sin.

This meeting fit in the context of Jesus being on earth to do the Father’s will. In the larger scope of the Father’s will, the Son came to give His life as the ransom for those who will be saved. But, continually working that will out in life, Jesus was seeking and saving those who are lost. The stories in the four Gospel accounts contain the record of person after person, incident after incident, of Jesus finding people where they were and drawing them into faith for salvation.

So we should not be surprised to see Jesus walking along with the crowd and then suddenly stopping right under this particular tree. Then Jesus looked up to see the hated tax collector. He was hiding in the tree so that he could see Jesus, but it is unlikely that he wanted this direct attention from Jesus. He was also hiding in the tree so that he would not be seen by others. This is the picture of how we will be exposed as sinners when the Heavenly Father sends the Son to save us from sin. Jesus stopped and looked up, making eye contact with the sinner. Then He called him by name, though they had never met. Then Jesus gave the man an astonishing command: *“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”*

Do you cringe at the thought of being Zacchaeus and being so exposed? That kind of public exposure is what baptism is. When we are baptized, we publicly testify that we were sinners but that Christ

has removed our sins at the price of His own blood so that we can live changed lives for His glory. It is testimony to a wonderful sovereign action.

By God's sovereign design, Jesus would stay with Zacchaeus. With the invitation comes the gift to believe and receive it. It almost appears from this story that Jesus didn't give Zacchaeus a choice in the matter. The Lord Creator commanded His created being to come down out of the tree because He must go stay at his house.

The word translated **must** is a little particle that Luke used often to reveal divine necessity. Such as the boy Jesus telling Mary and Joseph that He "*must be in His Father's house*" (Luke 2:49). Or Jesus saying, "*I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose*" (Luke 4:43). Or, that He *first must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation* (Luke 17:25). Or that "*Scripture must be fulfilled in me*" (Luke 22:37). Or "*the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise*" (Luke 24:7).

When God showers saving grace on a sinner, the Savior **must** come and stay with us. There is no other option! It is a must. Saving grace is irresistible grace.

### **The Sinner's Impossible Change. (vv.6-10)**

That day, at that invitation from Christ, there was an immediate and obvious change in the cheating sinner (vv.6-8). The redeemed sinner was delighted with Jesus. He revealed his delight in that he joyfully received Jesus. *So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully (v.6).*

The words *received him joyfully* signify salvation, a changed man. What God did at this moment was the very thing Jesus had called impossible for humans to do in the rich young ruler setting. *Jesus, looking at him with sadness, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:24-27).*

Drawing the tax collector out of the tree, Jesus just pulled the camel through the eye of the needle. This is exactly what happens to you and me at salvation. The miracle of regeneration does not come to pass because we make good decisions. We do not experience new birth because we weigh the pros and the cons and decide there are more benefits in heaven than in hell. All the Bible teaching about sin's consequences and salvation's benefits are intended to make us sinners want to see Jesus. The miracle takes place when God in His mercy pulls us sinning camels through the eye of the needle. It is a miracle that we really cannot explain and which the natural person cannot begin to comprehend.

Miserable, religious people criticized Jesus for hanging out with such a sinner. *And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner" (v.7).* What did they expect? Of course Jesus would be a guest with those who **were** sinners. He loves to fellowship with the people He changes. The problem with the people's criticism is that it showed their ignorance that by this time Zacchaeus was already not a sinner anymore. They failed to understand that Jesus came to save sinners, not those who thought they were already righteous.

The redeemed sinner killed his idol. *And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (v.8).* Contrast this response with the response of the rich young ruler who walked away in sadness because he could not divest himself of his idol. When Zacchaeus heard the religious hypocrites complaining that he was a sinner, he agreed. He stood up publicly, declared his sin, and vowed to make it right. He didn't say, "I will, sometime in the future, give and restore." No, he used a present tense verb, "I am giving to the poor, and I am restoring fourfold."

Picture the wealthy tax collector emptying his pockets on the spot, and then maybe going to the safe to retrieve bags of money. That is what killing the idol looks like. This is what repentance looks like. The Greek word for repentance in the New Testament (*shub*) means to turn around, to go in the opposite direction. Where there is salvation, there is repentance. Where there is no change, there has been no salvation. Talking about how wonderful Jesus is,

acknowledging God's grace, reveling in good feelings is mere religious chit-chat if we have not walked away from sin and our idols.

The story ends with a very important divine declaration (vv.9-10). Jesus told Zacchaeus that his salvation was illustrated by Abraham. *And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham" (v.9)*. Granted, Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham in that he was born in the Jewish race. But that is not what Jesus meant. Jesus meant that now Zacchaeus was born into the same family Abraham was born into by his faith. He, like Abraham, was declared righteous. Abraham believed God and it was put on his account as righteousness (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6). In the same way, sin was wiped from Zacchaeus' account and righteousness replaced it.

So like his spiritual father Abraham, the tax collector proved his faith by his works. He went to his bank account to make things right. Mark the fact that Zacchaeus was not born again because he became generous. Rather, Zacchaeus became impossibly generous because God did the impossible for him. That is still the work of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is the Son's business. *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (v.10)*. He still is seeking after the spiritually needy. He must give conviction, grace, reasons to cause the sinner to search for Him or they will never see the need. It is all part of the process of drawing the lost to Himself.

This wonderful story illustrates the amazing work of God through the Eternal Son Jesus Christ. God seeks and saves the lost. That is His business, His work, His astonishing sovereign work to grant the impossible to needy, hopeless sinners. Has God done this miracle in your life?

When you have faith in God alone, it will be demonstrated by the change in your life. For Zacchaeus it was a change from greedy, dishonest, thievery to generosity. Have you trusted God with your eternal life, which engulfs your present life? Often the response to that question is, "I cannot trust God completely." To which we wonder, "Why **can** you not trust God?" If you contemplate that question honestly and answer it with Bible truth, you must conclude that there is no reason not to trust God. He proves over and over throughout the Bible that He is faithful to His word and promises. He

has given us multiplied reasons in the Bible and in life's experiences to trust Him.

So the real problem is not that I **cannot** trust God. The real question is, "Why **do** I not trust God?" The real problem is that I do not want to trust God. The answer to that question can be multifaceted. "You do not want to trust God" because He has never removed your spiritual blindness and so you do not see any reason to trust Him. You might have much Bible knowledge. But because you are not born again, you do not have a genuine, meaningful relationship with God through faith in Christ. Where there is no faith, there can be no relationship.

Or it might be true that "You do not want to trust God" because, though you might be born again, your walk with God is disrupted by idolatry. We are our own worst idols. Most of our lesser idols that disrupt our resting in God's care are of our own invention. So we do not rest in God's care because there have been too many times when God has not done what I asked Him to do, so I don't trust Him. Or He has not done what I expected Him to do, so I don't trust Him. Or God has not done what I wanted Him to do, so I don't trust Him. Or God has done things that I don't want Him to do.

So who is the master of your life? Your idol is. And we are generally our own worst idol. God did the "impossible" by saving the rich man Zacchaeus, and the redeemed sinner responded by doing what is humanly impossible. He so trusted God that he divested himself of his personal idol (money). So, do you have idols in your life? Sometimes it is good to take a second to name them. Are you your own worst idol? Is that an indication that God has not done the impossible for you?

Remember the difference between the very sinful small man Zacchaeus and the very religious rich young ruler. Both of them had the same idol. The religious but unredeemed man walked away to be miserable. The redeemed man gave his idol over to God and God used it for His own glory. Which of those two guys illustrate you most accurately?