

## Get Shorty Luke 19:1-10 (ZCC 10.6.13)

*1 He entered and was passing through Jericho. 2 There was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, and couldn't because of the crowd, because he was short. 4 He ran on ahead, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was going to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." 6 He hurried, came down, and received him joyfully. 7 When they saw it, they all murmured, saying, "He has gone in to lodge with a man who is a sinner." 8 Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone, I restore four times as much." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." (World English Bible)*

I have a cousin who is almost a year younger than me—but he comes from bigger and taller stock on his dad's side, so by the time we were 8 or 9, he was as big as me and after that, he was bigger. For some reason that was extremely important to him and every time we'd all get together, the first thing he wanted to do was check to see who was tallest. You'd think that it would be hard to cheat when two people are standing back to back, but I think both of us tried—like this: [push arm up and away at the same time.] Then we'd both yell, "I'm taller," "NO, I'm taller!" "I'm taller!" NO, I'M taller!" for all we were worth—and then the wrestling would start.

For some reason, no boy wants to be shorter than his brother or his cousin. Funny thing is that by age 11 or so, the girls in their class will probably be taller than they are.

When it comes to culture—to society--it seems that the whole world revolves around physical appearance. Of course biases about how tall you are or how big your nose is or the size of your feet are artificial and are even different in different cultures.

God doesn't pay attention to those things—I'm absolutely certain that not one of us is physically ugly to God. He created you and me and like the tee shirts said back in the 80's "God don't make no junk!"

God pays attention to our physical stature instead. When God told Samuel to anoint a new king from the line of Jesse, in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16, he was told to pass by every one of the sons who looked the part of king. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> verses say, *"But Yahweh said to Samuel, "Don't look on his face, or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for I don't see as man sees. For man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart."* (WEB) David was the smallest and the youngest, yet he was the chosen one.

One of the ways we can connect to small children is to get on our knees when we talk to them so that we are on their level and don't seem so intimidating because of our size. In this world that seems to always look up to those with size and power, being short can seem like a problem.

In the passage for today, Jesus wasn't put off by the small size of the man he met in Jericho—in fact he introduced himself and then went to eat with him.

We've read the story already. Let me first point out that this is not just a “Sunday School story” or a “Bible story.” It is an account of a real person and when it happened it had all the features and details that real life carries with it. Like I often do, I'll fill in some of those details with my imagination. Let's remember that, though I might be right—I also might be wrong on those details.

Zacchaeus' story is important to us in several ways, but the main way he teaches us is through his path to redemption—his relationship with Jesus. You and I can use this path to develop or renew our relationship to God through Jesus the Christ.

You know, I can be pretty quiet in a crowd. I'm often an observer more than a participant when people get together. I am very interested in people's actions and the reasons for those actions. I wonder what motivates people to do the work they do and have the hobbies they do—what causes them to be in the situations they are in. I wonder if Zacchaeus was always smaller than everyone else. I wonder if he was the last one chosen in a pick-up basketball game or other team sports. I wonder if the bigger boys had chased him or beaten him or taken his lunch money. I wonder if, somewhere along the way, if he decided to get even—even better, to get ahead.

IF that were so, then that would give some insight into his profession—that of tax collector (even chief tax collector). I can imagine him saying or thinking, “I'll make something of myself and you will be sorry!” I don't know what he did before, but when the Romans took over the government, he had a perfect opportunity to get even.

For him, and for others in his line of work, loyalty to their people was trumped by their greed and their pride and their ambition. Seems that he was not only willing to get rich off of his own people, as the chief we could imagine that he was eager and pretty good at it. Small as he was, he had become a big man around Jericho.

There were several ways he could use his position to his advantage. First, the Romans only cared about getting what they required—and gave substantial leeway to those who collected it. Zacchaeus would have skimmed money from what he collected and he would have skimmed from what those who worked for him collected. AND if I were him, I would have used that power to get over on those who mis-treated me. I'd have added an extra 20% or 30% to the school bully's tax bill—just because I could. When they came to me with a sad story, I would have them evicted and take their property for myself or to sell.

I imagine that Zacchaeus had taken the bitterness that came from all the reviling he had stood during his youth and turned it into hateful, grudging respect. If that is the case, then I'm sure he loved the fact that he had power over those who disrespected him.

So, when he heard that Jesus was coming, he wanted to see him—I believe the passage says that he was trying to see who he was, but I'm pretty sure that at this point in Jesus' ministry, Zacchaeus would have known WHO he was, but wanted to see for himself. I like to think of this as God working in Zacchaeus' heart and mind and not just idle curiosity. In my thinking, a haughty and rich tax collector would not have made a spectacle of himself otherwise. He couldn't see, but by climbing a tree in public he was risking the old remarks: “hey shorty” “hey short-stuff” or “look a the little big man...”

When I think of the Middle East, I don't think of there being many trees—at least there don't seem to be these days. If it was that way when this happened, maybe there was only one tree and it seemed to be near the road. He could see them coming but couldn't see Jesus and knew for sure that when the crowd got there he wouldn't be able to see him. The crowd was pressed in too closely and they were blocking his view.

Seems he felt compelled to have a look at this man Jesus and see if he had power and see what he was like.

It wouldn't have been pleasant up there—hot and dirty and then there were the flies and gnats. If it was mid-day then the heat would have been increasing but still he waited for the crowd—fisting sweat and dirt out of his eyes.

As Jesus got closer he could see him. I imagine that there was just something about Jesus—it seems that many were attracted to his appearance—not just the outside but what was inside and the grace and peace he exuded. It seems that Zacchaeus experienced that. Jesus would have probably been smiling and he clearly loved those who were all around him. I wonder if Zacchaeus had anyone who really loved him. In those times, his parents were probably already dead. If he had brothers and sisters, they would have treated him as an outcast just as the rest of his people did—because of his work and because he collaborated with the Romans. Maybe even his wife only loved him because he was rich.

Just as the crowd was passing near the tree, was there a warm feeling overtaking him? I imagine he was smiling or as close to it as he could when Jesus stopped, turned and looked straight at him—right into his eyes and even his soul and asked if he could come to his house for a meal.

“What?” “Was he talking to me?” “Did he call my name?” “What does he want?”

My imagination says that he couldn't answer at first because he was so taken aback. Maybe Jesus had to say it more than once before it registered.

“Zacchaeus, HURRY UP AND GET DOWN HERE!”

Maybe he was speechless at first, but once he hit the ground he recovered quickly—sending a servant running home to arrange for a feast for an honored guest.

As they walked together, I bet Zacchaeus could hardly contain himself. He probably could barely pull off that aloofness that he had perfected so well.

You know as we read about Jesus' ministry, we often see the Scribes and the Pharisees mumbling and grumbling about Jesus and what he did and said. This time, I'm guessing that the common people were doing there share—that they were upset. They had seen Zacchaeus in action. They had been victims of his greed. They hated him—probably in a general AND a personal sense (for what he did for a living and for who he was). He wasn't just a sinner, as common people were sinners, he was a REAL sinner. A thief, and more importantly, a traitor. He was a cheat. He used his power to make up for any sense of inadequacy he may have had. He may have used his power to hurt those he hated. He was a coward who hid behind the power of Rome.

Maybe it was just Jesus' presence. Maybe it was the grace that oozed from him. Maybe it was his kindness or his smile—his love. Jesus' power words and his power cut to Zacchaeus' heart and soul and changed him. Being in the presence of Jesus and feeling his love changed him forever. So, as they dined and talked and visited—Zacchaeus stood and made an announcement. “I'm going to right my wrongs!”

The way I see it, this restitution he was willing to make WAS NOT what caused his redemption. His willingness to make things right was an external manifestation of what was going on within—what being with Jesus did to him on the inside. His heart had changed and he was acting on that change.

What did Jesus say? He said that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house—he declared him changed/redeemed/saved/justified and I'm certain he knew what he was talking about. He was always a son of Abraham because of his lineage. He was now a son of Abraham because he had seen the Father in the Son. The Pharisees standing around couldn't make that claim.

In the last verses, we see Jesus explain why he ate and drank with sinners. “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*” (WEB)

I've talked a lot about Zacchaeus' story today—but let me finish by pointing out three very specific actions he took that you and I can use to seek our own redemption or seek a renewal of our relationship to God through Christ.

First of all—he was looking for Jesus. For what ever reason, he felt compelled to have a look at Jesus and see what the fuss was. Was he motivated by curiosity or by the hand of God? I suppose it was a bit of each—but ultimately that doesn't matter to me. What matters is that he took the initiative and that he made the effort and he put himself in the best possible place to see Jesus. He may have been given the desire by God, but he acted on it and climbed that tree.

Second, he responded to Jesus' commands. He did as he was told. He heard and he climbed down and he took Jesus home and he listened to him. In that presence—that listening and being with Jesus he changed on the inside.

Third, he confessed his sin, he vowed to change and to make the wrongs right again. In fact, he vowed to make it MORE than right. Not just to the letter of the law, but surpassing that.

Zacchaeus knew he was lacking something besides stature. He knew he needed what Jesus had to offer. He established a relationship with Jesus. You and I can follow Zacchaeus' lead and establish a relationship to God through Jesus—or we can use the same pattern to re-establish and re-new the relationship we already have.

One: Recognize our need. Two: Respond to the voice of Jesus. Three: Repent—confess our own sins and turn away from them in the power Jesus.

