

Face to Face with Jesus

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Luke 19:1-10

19 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." 9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." NIV

INTRODUCTION:

We all want to be accepted. **We all want to fit in.**

- No little boy enjoys the feeling of being the last one picked to be on a kickball team.
- A little girl's feelings can be hurt when she is the only one in her class not invited to the birthday party.
- No business woman wants to feel as if her ideas and insights are overlooked because of her gender.
- Many men struggle with a sense of value because their profession is not as prestigious as their neighbor's.
- No single man wants to feel lonely or left-out of the joy of loving relationships.
- No wife wants to feel excluded from the discussion regarding any of the issues of family life.

Certainly, many times we struggle with these issues because of our own failure to trust God in our relationships, for our success, and with our life's meaning. But, make no mistake; very often we "help" one another with these struggles.

The bottom line is that, whether at work or play or with regard to others, we all want to fit in.

When we consider today's Scripture I believe we enter the story of a man who most likely felt left out.

Zacchaeus had the worst job!

As I reflect on Zacchaeus' story I can't help but imagine the loneliness he felt.

Consider what we know about Zach's life. As a Jew he had arguably the worst job he could possibly have. He was a tax collector. On top of that, he worked for the Roman government. I guess you could say he was a tax farmer.

His job is immeasurably worse than any of the jobs encountered by Mike Rowe on The Discovery Channels "Dirty Jobs". Do you know the show I am talking about?

Dirty Jobs with Mike Rowe

- Toilet Recycler
- Sheep castrator
- Maggot Farmer
- Road kill Collector

Zach's job was worse than all of these. He made a living sending his employees around in the name of the Roman government and collecting these taxes from the Jews. And it is clear from the text that he took the liberty to take a little extra if he wanted. He did all of this in the name of Caesar. He made his living by making life difficult for his own people to survive. He was good at what he did. **Verse 2** reveals that he was rich. All of this lets me know that Zach wasn't likely looked upon very favorably by his community. He must have been terribly lonely. It's very likely that he did not fit in.

On top of that, I imagine that Zach could have struggled with self-image problems.

Zacchaeus had a poor self image

Think about what we have known about Zach since we were small children. When you think about Zach, do you remember any outstanding attributes? Does anything regarding his physical stature come to mind? That's right. He was short.

Think back to Bible school, Children's church, or maybe Sunday School as a child. (HB sing) "Zach was a wee, little man and a wee, little man was he..."

Artificial measures of value

Think about what I am saying here. How would you like to be remembered throughout history by your most horrible physical feature? I wouldn't like to think that people would sing songs about me in the future (or now for that matter) like "Herschell was a _____ man..." I can imagine it now. We would each have our own theme song, songs about acne, obesity, big noses, warts, or just plain ugliness.

No doubt Zach was as self-conscious about his attributes as many of us are about ours. So many times we put our confidence in artificial measures in determining our personal value/worth.

Oh, I hear some of you thinking that you never do that. Perhaps you don't arbitrarily measure your worth by your appearance, but how about by any of these (and there are many more things we put our confidence in):

- Looks
- Athletic ability (slam dunk = cheer)
- Intelligence (knowing validates us, makes us feel value)
- Wealth (accumulation of things makes us feel successful)
- Rightness (when being "right" validates you)

I think Zacchaeus wanted to fit in.

Verse 3 says Zach wanted "to see who he (Jesus) was". In other words, Zach wanted to determine what kind of a man that he was. After all, Jesus was what you call rock-star popular. Love Him or hate Him, Jesus was in the headlines.

Let's take a look at what Zach did:

Verse 4 says he ran and climbed a sycamore tree because he was short and couldn't have seen for the crowd. Again, he was face with a physical limitation (inadequacy).

But let's not skip over the significance of that sycamore tree. You might be thinking what could possibly be important about a tree, but bear with me for a moment.

- The sycamore tree is **ASSOCIATED WITH COMMONNESS**. They were plentiful (**1 Kings 10:27**). They likely originated on the continent of Africa (Egypt) and spread through the middle east.
- These trees were used for making coffins (particularly in Egypt).
- They are a type of lesser fig tree, who's **FRUIT IS INFERIOR** to the standard fig tree.

I think that Zach probably saw himself as that sycamore tree...as common, or even inferior.

In many ways, Zach represents you and me oftentimes: people struggling, even hurting because of loneliness and/or feelings of inferiority or commonness. ...worrying if we really fit in anywhere or with anyone.

Let's look at Zach once more and see what happened to him. So, Zach is in the sycamore tree...I can imagine him kind of hiding behind the limbs and branches trying to blend in. Isn't that what we do when we feel insecure or out of place?

He is simply in the tree to observe what is going on, hoping to see the type of person Jesus was.

Jesus, the center of all the commotion, stops right under Zach's tree (**Verse 5**)! This is probably the last thing Zach wanted. I mean, this could potentially draw the gaze and judgment of the crowd on him.

Why did Jesus stop under Zacchaeus' tree?

So, why did Jesus stop there under, of all trees, the one Zach was in?

- **Coincidence?**
- Did he simply need **shade?** (there were many other nearly identical trees he could have gone to)
- Was he somehow drawn to that tree?

I believe it is because **Jesus Christ is drawn to hurting people**—people with needs, burdens—people who think that they are common (nothing special) and don't think they fit in. Jesus is drawn to the very spot where people are most miserable. He knows where they are. He knows where you are and the good news is...you cannot hide! You cannot cover up that misery from Him, because He is drawn to you.

You may wonder what Jesus knows about how you feel rejected, lonely or hurt.

- **Isaiah 53:2-6**

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. NIV

- **Hebrews 4:14-15**

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. NIV

Jesus understands because he has been there Himself! He has compassion (to have feelings of love or suffering with) those in pain...with those that hurt! And Jesus stopped under Zach's tree, and bade him to come down immediately. Notice what he didn't say. He didn't say:

- Get down here Knee-high-miah!
- Come down here you sinner!
- Thief, come here!

Instead, He said, I need (must/ought/should) to stay at your house today. That tells me that Jesus wanted to get into where Zach lived and dwelt. He wanted to get behind the public image. That is where Jesus can really make a difference in our lives. **Verse 6** tells us that Zach made haste to come down and received Jesus! Oh, that we would make haste and receive Jesus, really welcome Him into our lives.

Zacchaeus made haste, came down, and received Jesus.

Zach left that sycamore tree (his commonness and feelings of inferiority) behind and welcomed Jesus into his home. I believe the moment Zach chose to come down from that tree a transformation took place! When he came out of that tree and looked into the eyes of Jesus

Christ—when he stood face to face with Jesus and saw his own reflection in the eyes of the Savior—I believe he saw himself the way God saw him.

When Zach stood face to face with Jesus, he saw himself, for the first time, the way God saw him.

When you stand face to face with the Savior you will see something you've never seen before: the man or woman you were meant to be!

- You will be able to understand for the first time the words of **Psalms 139:13-16**.

13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. NIV

- You'll see how great you and your life can be through Him. For the first time you will be able to understand the words of **Jeremiah 29:11**.

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. NIV

If you are hurting this morning, Jesus is drawn to you.

If you are "up in a tree" or "out on a limb," suffering or in pain, then I want you to know Jesus Christ is stopping under your tree this morning. Come down and get a glimpse of your reflection in His eyes!

You aren't broken beyond repair. You are not isolated beyond love's reach. Certainly, in ourselves we all have our limits and our weaknesses, but we are not insignificant.

Can we glance back at the Zach's **sycamore tree** for a moment?

- You already know that it is **ASSOCIATED WITH COMMONNESS** and that **ITS FRUIT IS INFERIOR**, but you might not know that...
- Although the fruit of the sycamore is inferior and required more work to harvest, because of its abundance and its ability to produce fruit year-round, **THEY WERE A GREAT BLESSING** to the poor who could harvest their fruit for sustenance in every season.
 - The prophet Amos was employed at one time tending the fruit of sycamore-figs (**Amos 7:14**).
 - They were so valuable that David appointed a special overseer to care for their protection (**1 Chronicles 27:28**)
 - The sycamore-fig was known in Egypt as the “Tree of Life”!

God’s design is for you to be a blessing. For you to be a giver of life!