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Coming Up Short

Text: Luke 19:1-10

In a seminary class on preaching, each student was to preach a spontaneous sermon on an assigned passage. The professor wanted to challenge the students to be fast on their feet. One young man was assigned this passage in Luke 19. He was very uncomfortable with this assignment. He got up and said, “I have a three-point outline on this passage. Zacchaeus was short... and so am I. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus... and so do I. Zacchaeus was up a tree...and so am I”.

1. Zacchaeus was, according to the text, a chief tax collector and was wealthy. Tax collectors, in Jesus’ time, were often despised. They worked for the Roman government and didn’t earn a salary. They were given an amount they needed to give Rome. Then they’d go out and get as much out of a citizen as they could, and they’d keep the difference.
2. Zacchaeus was physically short- vertically challenged.

I heard a story of two very short men, both of whom wanted to kiss a tall woman. One of them kissed her and the other put him up to it.

3. Zacchaeus had a curiosity about Jesus. It might even be termed spiritual hunger.

The text says that Zacchaeus wanted to *see who Jesus was.* It is the beginning of every believer’s journey. We were curious about the Savior. Who is Jesus? Does He live up to the testimonies of His followers? Does Jesus really turn lives around? Does a person in Jesus Christ really become a new creation? Perhaps Zacchaeus has these questions. He wants to see Jesus...for himself. Maybe Zacchaeus had heard that Jesus is a friend of tax collectors (Luke 7:34).

Given the crowd and Zacchaeus’ short stature, he may or may not get a glimpse of Jesus. This text starts off describing a short man’s desire to see Jesus. Verse 5 changes the narrative. Zacchaeus is *trying* to see Jesus.

Verse 5 says Jesus looked up and saw Zacchaeus. Some of you in this worship space are trying to get close to God, trying to see God. You have varying levels of success. God is, however, seeing *you*! There are passages in Luke 13:12 and in Matthew 9:36 which remind us that Jesus sees us. We are trying to see *Him* and He is also seeing *us*. Perhaps it is Luke’s physician’s eye (Colossians 4:14) and medical sensitivities that give Luke this perspective. Luke *sees* that Jesus *sees*. When Jesus sees us, He calls to us, inviting us into something greater than what we had in mind. Zacchaeus wanted merely to *see* Jesus. He wasn’t trying to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment. He wasn’t trying to be healed of some dreaded malady. He was just trying to get a glimpse of Jesus. However, Jesus invites Zacchaeus into a fellowship experience. Jesus invites Himself to Zacchaeus’ house and suggests they hang out together. Zacchaeus has been marked by curiosity and Jesus is marked by compulsion. Luke doesn’t note Jesus using the language of compulsion a great deal, but when it is used it is always notable.

* 2:49- Did you not know that I **must** be about My Father’s business?
* 13:33- I **must** journeytoday, tomorrow, and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.
* 22:37- For I say to you that this which is written **must** still be accomplished in Me: And He was numbered with the transgressors.
* 24:7- The Son of Man **must** be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

Now listen to Jesus, in verse 5 of our text:

“Hey, Zach. Get down here. I **must** go to your house”.

In the previous chapter, Jesus commented on wealthy people and the difficulty those people have, trying to become kingdom people (18:24-27). Yet, here in this text, Jesus goes to a wealthy tax collector’s house. It’s an indication that Jesus doesn’t give up on people as we do. Jesus clearly thinks Zacchaeus is worth spending time *on*... and spending time *with*.

This was a life-changing day for Zacchaeus. He becomes charitable and repentant. Jesus then declares that salvation(deliverance) has come to Zacchaeus’ house.

Zacchaeus was coming up short when it came to matters of ethics, integrity, spiritual vitality, and social acceptability. Jesus meets those who come up short. Jesus visits the homes of the socially shunned and the overlooked and the ignored. Jesus goes to the houses of and enters the circumstances of, the ones who have been written off. Luke 15 contains three parables which Jesus told in direct response to the Pharisees’ and scribes’ complaint that Jesus “receives sinners and eats with them” (15:2). Tax collectors are not the kinds of people with whom a respectable rabbi consorts. Jesus breaks expected protocol.

Jesus is still doing what he did in Zacchaeus’ day. He is still seeing the ones coming up short. Jesus is still saving people from their sin and from themselves. Jesus’ purpose for coming to earth might be summed up by verse 10 of our text:

...the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

That’s Zacchaeus...and me...and you.

Amen