

### Physically Small, Spiritually Great, Jesus #80

I saw this guy who intimidated me just looking at him. He was muscular, he was big, he had long hair, he had more tattoos that you would think could normally fit in the area that was tattooed, he had chains, he had a black motor cycle jacket with all these insignias and sayings sewn and painted on it and I looked at him and I tried to think of what is the next category beyond a hell's angel. I couldn't come up with exactly what that was but at least I knew he was no friend of God and he was certainly not a Christian and I decided to get a little bit closer, little bit closer so I could read what it said on his jacket and there it said, "Satan is wimp, Jesus saves" so I had found a biker for Jesus and when I talked to him I discovered that he had a gentle spirit. He was a committed Christian. He loved people. He was a man with spiritual zeal and I learned more one time that first impressions and external appearances can often be deceiving but unfortunately often we make all kinds of judgments about other people based upon their physical appearance, upon their health or lack of it, upon their gender or their age or the care they drive or the place where they live or the position or title that they have, whether they are rich or poor, but it's not the way it is supposed to be. At least not according to a very famous story that is in the biography of Jesus. I read it to you from Luke chapter 19, it's page 1726 in the blue pew Bible. It tells how Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the named of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man, he could not because of the crowd and so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. So he came down at once and he welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, He's gone to be the guest of a sinner. But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, look Lord, here and now I give half my possessions to the poor and if I have cheated anybody out of anything I will pay back four times the amount. Jesus said to him, today, salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham for the son of man came to seek and to save what was lost. Zacchaeus was a very famous man around that city of Jericho. He was known for three things. He was short. He was rich and he was a tax collector. But of the three he was most infamous for being a tax collector because pretty much everybody hated tax collectors. Now admittedly we have those who have a dislike in our culture and time for paying taxes but it really Faith Matters™ - A Ministry of Wooddale Church

is a stretch to find any kind of a parallel. In those days tax collectors got their contracts by bidding with the Roman government to see how much they could collect and pay to the Roman coffers. They also were authorized to collect as much as they could and to keep the difference between their contracted amounts and the monies that were received and they had the full authority of the Roman government and the Roman army to collect whatever taxes they imposed. The result was that tax collectors, as a general class, became ugly in the way they treated people. They would take money from the poorest of the poor, the little that had for food. They would take away their homes. They would put them in debtor's prison. They would beat them. Sometimes they'd take their children and have them sold into slavery. They were, again, the worst of the worst and often became quite wealthy. They accumulated enough money in an otherwise very poor time and place to have their own homes, to have fine clothes and servants and plenty of food and good food at that. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. That meant that he not only profited from what he collected but also from others and he was at the apex of a pyramid tax-collecting system that was very lucrative. He was wealthy and then, like now, pretty much everyone welcomes wealth. It isn't just the money. It's the security. It's what the money can do and buy. It's the self confidence, the respect, the comfort that comes from having lots of money and society has always been and is now just fascinated with celebrity and with wealth. We have special TV programs about the rich and the famous. We buy tickets to see mansions in order to be able to tour through them and pretty much everybody wants to be a millionaire, if not a billionaire. Now, all that being the case, we still say that we know that money doesn't buy happiness and we admit that some of the richest people we know of are the most messed up people that we know of. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and was wealthy but was not content. So the power, the position and the money had not done for him all that he had hoped for because contentment is different. It is a peace that is on the inside. It is a satisfaction that somehow aligned what we have and what we want so that there is a convergence of the two. Those who are not content would see just about anything to get contentment and those who are truly content would not give it up at any price. My guess is that if you are content and I ask you, whether you answer me honestly or not, the truth is you know, we all know, whether we're content and if we're not content, we know that as well. We all want to be satisfied. We want this peace, this joy, this happiness, that settles inside of us and then helps us to understand and Faith Matters™ - A Ministry of Wooddale Church

relate to everything that happens on the outside. Zacchaeus wanted that. He wanted more and when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming to his town of Jericho he hoped that this marvelous rabbi, this famous miracle worker would somehow do for him what allegedly he had done for others and that was fill in this missing peace in his soul and in his life. Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was but being a short man he could not because of the crowd. Now I know on first reading what that says is that because he was short in stature if he got compressed into a crowd he wouldn't be able to see beyond the shoulders and heads of all those who were around him and he would miss visual contact with Jesus and I am sure that was the case. But I suspect there was something more. Zacchaeus was known to probably everyone in Jericho because tax collectors, by the nature of their employment, have to have direct contact with the people from whom they collect the taxes. It was a dangerous thing for him to go into a crowd because there were a lot of people who wanted to shove him and push him, kick him in the shins or knife him in the back. It would be a dangerous risk that he would be pushed down and then trampled and no one would be held responsible. My guess is that he often avoided crowds for these very reasons. But he wanted to see Jesus. So he decided that he would do whatever he had to do in order to see Jesus of Nazareth and so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way. What he did was assess the situation, calculate the route that Jesus would take, estimate the amount of time, go far ahead so he wouldn't have to deal with the crowd, found a large tree with big branches that extended out, climbed up the tree and positioned himself so that he wouldn't have to have the risk, he wouldn't have to have impaired sight line, he'd be able to see Jesus. Now, if you can picture him there, picture a man who was despised for his occupation, who was mocked because of his short stature and who was envied because of his wealth and inside of him was a heart for God. Isn't that surprising? Isn't that kind of amazing? Here was someone who was willing to do anything to connect with Jesus. I know people like that. Not terribly long ago we had an interesting thing that happened right here in this building, out in the hallway. On a Sunday morning a man who to the best of my understanding had never been to a Christian church or church building before in his life, from another major world religion background. I don't know that he had a car. I don't even know how he got here. He came in. Never came to a service, just stood out in the hallway and a few Wooddalers stopped and asked if they could help him and he had seen the cross on the top of the building

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and he said, I'm looking for God. Here's a guy who was willing to cross religious and cultural and geographical and physical barriers to get God. I heard a report this past week from Senegal where just recently in this majority Muslim country, forty former Muslims were publicly baptized as Christians. Or another report also this past week in one of the most fanatical Muslim centers of Indonesia, which is the highest population Muslim country in the world, were baptized young adults in a pool in the middle of the town and I think to myself, do they know what they're doing? Don't they realize they could lose their job, they could alienate their families, they might be beaten, they might even be killed for that type of a religious conversation and to do it so publicly and what I am getting is that they are saying, so what? If you get God what difference does it make? Not that these things are unimportant but He is most important. Like Zacchaeus willing to do whatever he needed to do to connect to God and that's the way I want to be. And that's the way I want to be. As the deal, the quest, for my heart and for yours. That more important than money or position or power or what anybody else thinks is knowing the true satisfaction and real contentment in life that comes from Jesus Christ and nothing else. So there he was in the tree. And I can kind of picture him and I can almost hear his heart pounding as on the distant horizon he see what appear to be a crowd of tiny little people coming his way and the crowd and the people grow larger in his sight until he starts to hear the sound. It's the mixture of one man talking and then some laughter and then some applause and then some murmuring and whispers and question and the dialogue is taking place and they come closer and closer and closer in a quest that if finally coming true for, for Zacchaeus. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and he said to him, Zacchaeus come down immediately. I must stay at your home today and so he came down at once and he welcomed him gladly. Doesn't that sound to you as if Jesus expected him to be there? And why else would he have looked up in the tree. Now this past week, based on this story, I did an admittedly unscientific study. I watched people walking past trees and probably it was a skewed sample and I know it was large enough and it wasn't all these things but at least none of the people that I saw looked up for anybody in a tree so that is at least an indication to me that this is a somewhat unusual thing to do and trying to balance it and make it more scientific I walked by twelve trees and looked up myself and found no one, no one in any of the trees so I conclude that for Jesus to look up in the tree he expected that he was going to be there. And I will also explain to you that part of my expectation is the fact that he knew his Faith Matters™ - A Ministry of Wooddale Church

name. He called him by name. Now obviously they hadn't met or Zacchaeus wouldn't be up in the tree trying to see him if they had met before and he knew exactly what to say, come down, I want to come to your house today and I would also guess that he anticipated what would be the answer so what's going on here. Zacchaeus thought that he was seeking Jesus but the truth is that Jesus was seeking Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but it sure sounds as if Jesus wanted to see him. Zacchaeus wanted to meet Jesus. Jesus wanted to go to his house. Zacchaeus wanted a change in his life. Jesus wanted to change him. So whose first here? Where is the initiative? Who chose whom. There has been a debate among Christians for generations about how a person becomes a Christian and there are those who open their Bibles and read the words believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and they say, the way it works is that God presents his gospel through Jesus Christ and you come to him and admit that you are a sinner, accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and when you have made that decision, when you have taken that initiative toward God, then you become a Christian but you flip the pages of the Bible and there you read that God chose us before the foundation of the earth, that God knew us by name, that he was the pursuer, the hound of heaven, the one who desired for us to become Christians before we ever heard the name of Jesus Christ. So which is it? Suppose there's a large room and a party is going on and there are about a hundred people that are there and this woman is in conversation with some of her friends and she looks across the room and she sees this guy who just grabs her attention and it's almost as if everyone else in the room is out of focus and she can see him across the crowd and she's enamored by him. She stares, she watches his every gesture and movement. She tries to read his lips to understand what he's talking about. She tries to see his left hand to see if he has a wedding ring that he's wearing there. And then she turns to her friend and she says, see that guy over there in the yellow shirt, I'm going to marry him. And a few minutes later, maybe fifteen minutes later, this guy makes his way through the crowd, walks over, introduces himself to her and asks her out on a date. That's the first of several dates and on the third date he says to her, I know we haven't known each other very long, but I just need to tell you. I love you and I want to marry you. I'm going to marry you. And she says, I know, I know. And he says, what do you mean I know and she says I decided that a long time ago. A long time ago? Yep, before we even met. Before we even met I decided I was going to marry you. So which is it? Did she decide to marry him or did he decide

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to marry her. Did she choose him or was it the other way around and the answer is yes. The answer is yes and so it is that God chooses us, that we choose Jesus Christ. The words of Ephesians 1, vs. 4 and 5, God chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ and in accordance with the pleasure of his will. God chose us. We chose God. Jesus chose Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus chose Jesus Christ. When Jesus looked up and when their eyes made contact Jesus didn't see a short guy. He looked up to see this man, this man whom he did not see as a greedy thief. He saw him as a man of compassion and generosity. He didn't see someone who took advantage of other people. He saw someone who was concerned about their poverty and their need and would take action to remedy their problems. Jesus looked up and he didn't see a man to hate. He saw a man whom he loved. He didn't see a man to avoid. He saw a man to whose home he wanted to go. Because that's the way Jesus is. He sees all the promise and all the potential. He has a dream of what a person can be when transformed by the supernatural power of God and it's the same way with us. Hey, we all know how the system works. We see ourselves largely through the eyes of other people. That's why we wear makeup, that's why we're concerned about our hair and our clothes and our weight and the titles that we have. That's why we position ourselves continually so that we can impress other people and get their favor and make them look good. We are constantly at that and it is a frustrating position to be in to have to live life always constantly trying to measure up to the expectations of other people, fearing that people see the worst, that they hold against us mistakes and things that we did years and years ago and that they will never forgive and see us in another way and then Jesus sees us not that way but the way we can be and the way we should be. All the promise and all the potential. Now what I'd like to say to you is, see yourself in the mirror of the eyes of Jesus Christ. But I'm not sure that can be done. I'm not sure in our wildest imagination we can see ourselves in the spectacular and hopeful and promising way that Jesus sees us. I don't think we're that smart. I don't think we're that creative. I don't think our imagination can go that far and so instead what we need to do is what Zacchaeus did and that is when Jesus calls us by name, when he invites himself into our lives and into our homes, to simply say yes and then begin to experience the breathtaking transformation to the fulfillment of the dreams of God and all Jesus envisions for us to be. When Jesus asked to come to Zacchaeus' home and into his life, this chief Faith Matters™ - A Ministry of Wooddale Church

tax collector of Jericho said yes immediately said yes. Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed Jesus gladly. Now all this is going on but you know the rest of the crowd, that's not what they saw. All the people saw this and began to mutter, he's gone to be the guest of a sinner. They could not imagine Zacchaeus to be anything other than what they had always concluded him to be but a total transformation whether they could see it or not was taking place in Zacchaeus life. Zacchaeus stood up and said, 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. Let me just say that if he had been convicted in a court of law, under the laws of the land at that time, he would not have had to pay back anything near what he chose to pay back. He became astonishingly generous and Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. I'll tell you what I find absolutely intriguing and that is that Zacchaeus was changed in the area of his life that would appear to be least likely to change and that was money. You see if we got a little piece of our lives that are kind of out of whack and we read a book or take a seminar and change then we feel really great because we're able to fix some piece of our lives and people say, aren't you disciplined, wow I'm impressed but when you have an area of your life that is totally out of line from what it's supposed to be, it's, you're a greedy rather than a generous person, that you are perverse sexually, that you are abusive in relationships, that you are profane in speech, that you, whatever it may, when the least likely area of life is radically transformed, that's no book, that's no seminar, that's not some measure of self discipline, that is the powerful transformation that comes from God. That's what happened in the life of this man. Money was the last place you would expect him to change. For us today it could be any area. If it's money, I will tell you very candidly, that some people they live for themselves. They are not generous, they don't care about anybody else and when the transformation takes place you can do a self test and that is just read the log of your checkbook and see how Jesus Christ changes the priorities. Zacchaeus became a generous man. He became content. He became a Christian. He was changed by Jesus from the inside out. Now what I would like to do is explain to you exactly the mechanics of how that transformation takes place but I can't. It's a mystery. I can observe it. I can document it but I can't explain it. We're talking here something spiritual, something amazing, something supernatural, a totally different God-given perspective on life. I had an Faith Matters™ - A Ministry of Wooddale Church

experience this past week, a double encounter with blindness in less than an hour. I was in a restaurant and they had the Today show on television and Katie Curic and Matt Lowry were interviewing a man who was fiftyish, who had been blind most, if not all, of his life and had suddenly gotten his eye sight. And they also interviewed an ophthalmologist and medical school professor, all these people who had no explanation. They couldn't explain how this man who had been blind was able to see and apparently they had talked to him off camera before the interview and discovered his Christian faith and so it was the interviewers who brought this into the discussion. And they were the ones who said that he would not count this to be a miracle although he would credit God for the change that had taken place in his life. In the course of conversation he said something that just caught my attention. He said, you know I'm not going to take this for granted and I'm grateful. However, I realize that my sight can go and disappear as quickly as it came and that's okay, that's okay, that he would trust God to make that decision for him. About forty-five minutes later I walked into an office building. I was going by the receptionist's desk and I said, hi, how's it going? And she said, I'm going blind and I can't say well I'm having a hard day too and sort of. Obviously this required a longer conversation. So I walked over to the counter in front of her and I said, you know, you want to talk about it and she said, just rapidly I'm losing my eye sight. She said, I'm not going to be able to drive, I'm going to lose my job, I don't know what I am going to do. She said, I've been to several doctors. I have an appointment with a specialist this afternoon but every indication is that there is nothing they can do. I'm going to go blind. And as she talked on it was later in that conversation that she said, you know, I'm fine with this. I've just have totally trusted God with this and I'm just grateful for all the years of my life that I've had the sight that I've had. Now here in an hour I heard the story of someone who was blind, able to see and someone able to see who was going blind and the common denominator was that they had a contentment from Jesus Christ in these astonishing opposite circumstances. I don't think there is a human explanation for that. That is spectacular. That is supernatural. That's what happened with Zacchaeus. Jesus changed him, gave him a contentment that no money or position or power could ever possibly give him and Jesus concludes this story with a self explanation, saying, the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. The word that Jesus uses here for lost mean that something has been put in the wrong place. You know how at home you have a place for your keys. Always the same place

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and if your keys aren't there they are lost and what you do is you look for them and you get them in the place where they are supposed to be. Jesus said that the reason he came was because Zacchaeus was in the wrong place. He was going the wrong direction. His life wasn't what God intended it to be. He was lost and Jesus came to get him to where he was supposed to be, be in the right direction. To transform his life and the least likely thing in it to change. And that's what Jesus does for us. When we're on the wrong track, when we're in the wrong place, when we've got the wrong relationships, and we're lost. He comes and he transforms us in relationship to God but in relationship to other things in life as well so listen to what he says when he calls your name, come on down, come to him. When he invited himself into your home and into your life say yes. Don't hold tight to money or job or the opinions of other people but totally trust Jesus. Trust him whatever the circumstances of life may be. Trust him to make the dreams of God come true for you too. Our God, we do trust you. We trust you as the amazing Lord who knows far better than we all the things about where we are and where we should be. Thank you for the dreams that you have, the hopes, the promise, the potential and may the dreams of Jesus Christ come true in each of our lives we pray in His name. Amen

Transcribed by Claire Wrigley