

November 2, 2025

Luke 19:1-10:

Wee Little Men Are We

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Wee Little Men Are We

Luke 19:1-10

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

The old familiar childhood song goes,

“Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see. And as the Savior passed that way, He looked up in the tree. And He said, “Zacchaeus, you come down from there. For I’m going to your house today. For I’m going to your house today.”

We laugh at this very catchy children’s song, but the title for today’s message fits us well. A wee little man was he in stature, but when it comes to our rebelliousness in the eyes of God, **Wee Little Men Are We**. When it comes to righteousness before God, we are not big in His eyes. We’re small, not because of our height, but because of our sin. We are small in patience, mercy, faith, and love. In fact, without Christ, those qualities in relation to our love with God are non-existent.

Yet here’s the beauty of Zacchaeus’s story: Jesus saw him. Not the crowd, the reputation, or the corruption. Jesus saw him. A small man, physically and spiritually, with a great need for the forgiveness of sins that only Jesus could give. Therefore, when He said, “I’m coming to your house today.” That was not just a basic invitation to open the conversation; that was the Gospel of forgiveness at work. The Lord who fills heaven and earth stoops low to seek and to save those lowly in spiritual stature. He stoops to love, to seek, and save people like Zacchaeus and ultimately, people like us.

I. “Not the Righteous, But Sinners”

Tax collectors in the New Testament era were often socially and morally grouped together with prostitutes and other notorious sinners. This comparison wasn’t based on casual criticism or rumor; it reflected the deep disgust and moral outrage Jewish society felt toward both groups. This was for good reason because they were, as we learned this last Wednesday, notorious for their greed and other abuses against the people of this day. Therefore, Zacchaeus was not just a tax man; he was the boss of a corrupt system. To be a “chief” tax collector meant he was not just corrupt, but one of the system’s top beneficiaries. He would have had authority to set rates, collect through agents, and enforce payment, often using Roman soldiers or hired muscle to ensure compliance.

Luke says he “was seeking to see who Jesus was.” Zacchaeus was seeking the truth and was being stirred by the Spirit. Something within him, long deadened by greed and guilt, was beginning to move again. The great irony is that his physical smallness mirrors his social

smallness; he is both literally and figuratively “looked down upon.” Yet even from the ground, he cannot see Christ over the crowd, just as sin always blocks the view of the Savior. So, he runs ahead and climbs a sycamore-fig tree, which would be an undignified act for a man of his status. But desperation will do what dignity will not. Pride must yield to curiosity when it comes to knowing Jesus. Sometimes, the movement toward grace is simply the willingness to look foolish in order to see Him.

II. The Grace of God is Never Earned

And if anyone doubted His purpose, Jesus Himself said it plainly in Matthew 9,

“And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

When examining the Gospel of Luke, we find that Jesus' mercy is demonstrated across the board to those who, in the eyes of the rest of the world, did not deserve it. The Lord of heaven sought out the detestable, the sinful, and the unclean. He touched lepers, spoke to prostitutes, ate with tax collectors, and welcomed the outcasts whom polite society avoided. This was not random kindness, but it was a deliberate confrontation with human pride. Jesus was showing the religious leaders, the people of His day, and each one of us that the grace of God is never earned, never merited, and never deserved. He did not come for the respectable but for the ruined. He did not come for those who could clean themselves up, but for those dead in their trespasses and sins.

And here is where the mirror of God's Law is, once again, turned toward us. If we are honest, we must be daily reminded and brought by the work of the Holy Spirit to admit that we belong to that same company of the despised. Every heart here is stained with the same corruption that infected the tax collector's greed, the prostitute's shame, and the Pharisee's pride. Each of us, in one way or another, has sold ourselves to sin and has thrown away the image of God for comfort, convenience, or control. We have despised His Word when it confronted our desires, and we have loved ourselves much more than we have loved our neighbor. The truth is that all of us, apart from Christ, are equally condemned. We are not the exception to God's judgment. Rather, we are the reason for it.

That is why the Son of God had to come. It was not enough for God to send another prophet, another teacher, or another moral example. Humanity's disease was too deep. It demanded a perfect sacrifice. It demanded one who could fulfill the Law of God in every thought, word, and deed. It demanded one who would bear in His own body the curse that the Law pronounces on sinners. Only the Incarnate Son of God could stand in that place. Had He

faltered even once, salvation would be lost forever. And if he had been only a man, His righteousness would have remained His alone, and His holiness would have remained too pure for us to endure. But in His mercy, He traded places with us. He was innocent, while we were guilty. He was pure, where we were polluted. And He was exalted where we were condemned.

Therefore, this account, and the Gospel of Luke, from beginning to end, drives home this humbling truth: there is not one person among us who is perfectly righteous or holy in the sight of God. There is not a single soul on earth who has done what is necessary to earn eternal life. Before God's throne, all our boasting falls silent. We are the "wee little men," without Christ, and yet seen, sought, and saved by the One who is mighty to forgive.

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 1,

"This is a trustworthy saying, deserving full acceptance: that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display His perfect patience as an example to those who would believe in Him for eternal life."

That is precisely the kind of mercy and grace that occurred in Jericho. Our gracious and loving God, who fills heaven and earth, walks toward the tree Zacchaeus is in and looks up to see a sinner of sinners. He does not find a man worthy of His company, but a man whom the Spirit leads to see and know well his own guilt. Brothers and Sisters, that is exactly where grace always finds us. It does not find us at our best moments of secular goodness, but in the deep, longing need for freedom from our own messes. Those messes that seem impossible for us to deal with on our own are the same pull of necessity that sent Christ from heaven to earth and that compelled Him to step under the tree of a sinner's shame. The Savior who will soon look down from the cross looks up at this man and calls him by name.

III. Let Crowds Grumble

The crowd grumbled at the mercy of Jesus. In the same way, let the crowds of our day continue to grumble! Christ has come to be the guest of sinners and praise Him for His mercy! If Jesus had not dwelt with sinners, then He would dwell with no one at all. Christ enters the house of the unholy because that is His mission: to seek and to save the lost, to enter homes defiled by sin and leave them filled with salvation. Where the world saw a person too far gone, Christ saw a repentant sinner in need of the grace and mercy that only the cross could remedy.

All glory, praise, and honor be to God, that the same power of the Word of God that calls to sinners such as Zacchaeus, still calls to us to this very day. He calls to the "wee little men" and women who have suffered the pangs of sin and have been brought by the Spirit to seek a hope that is beyond all human understanding. He calls to the sinner hiding behind good appearances and to the broken soul hiding behind guilt. To us, He says, "Come down," from your pride and sin. And for our benefit, He proclaims in Word and Sacrament, "I must stay at your house today." Jesus Christ insists on entering our dwelling to redeem us and to cleanse us of all our sin.

Zacchaeus did not earn the right to host the Lord; the Lord made His home in Zacchaeus. And the same is true for you. The Lord of heaven has entered the darkness of your heart, not because you were ready, but because you were lost. He has claimed you in Baptism, fed you at His table, and spoken to you in His Word the same life-giving declaration He spoke that day in Jericho: "Today salvation has come to this house."

We can confess without a shadow of a doubt, **Wee Little Men Are We**. We are small, nothing without Christ in faith. But here is the difference: we have a great Savior who looks upon our smallness and does not despise it but comes to remedy it. The cross of Christ is the tree to which every Zacchaeus must come. And this we do, not by our own doing, and not climbing up and seeing, but to look to it and to live. For on that tree the Son of Man bore our sin, our shame, and our weakness, so that by the forgiveness of sins that was won in His death and resurrection, He might lift us to be brought into His Kingdom forever.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott