

A man went for a physical checkup and the nurse asked him how much he weighed.

- He held his stomach in and replied, “160 lbs.”
- She got him on the scales, weighed him and said: “No, your weight is 174.”
- Then the nurse asked him, “How tall are you?”
- Standing very straight, he answered, “5 feet, 10 inches.”
- The nurse measured him and said, “No, your height is 5 feet, seven inches.”
- Then the nurse asked him what his normal blood pressure was.
- After looking at her for a moment he said: “Normal? How can you expect my blood pressure to be normal? I came in here a tall, slender man, and you have already made me short and fat!”

When we think of Zacchaeus, we might think of a delightful little man who climbed up a tree to see Jesus.

- But if you get the impression that Zacchaeus was a sweet little man with one basic problem of being vertically challenged, it’s the farthest thing from the truth.
- The Bible says he was a tax-collector—not only a tax collector, but a *rich* tax collector.
- The Roman government of Jesus’ day had usurped authority over the Jews and forced them to pay exorbitant taxes to Rome.
- The Romans hired Jews to collect taxes from their own people—they weren’t paid a regular salary, so the tax collector would add a surcharge over and above the Roman tax.
- These tax-collecting Jews were collaborating with the enemy and cheating their own Jewish neighbors—Zacchaeus would have been perceived as a Traitor and a thief as well.
- In the Bible, when tax collectors are mentioned, they’re mentioned together with sinners and prostitutes—they were of the same class.
- It’s as if there were sinners...and then there was a special class of *big* sinners called “tax collectors.” And, to top it off, Zacchaeus was the *chief* tax collector—the Big Kahnuna. He was in a class all by himself.
- In short, (no pun intended), in short, Zacchaeus was a creep.

I would imagine that Zacchaeus took a certain consolation in his job as chief tax collector. His job made him a very big man. Sure, people hated him, but they also feared him—he was a man of power and influence, and he was rich.

- Zacchaeus had everything a person could possibly want: power, riches, control of his life, and control of others.

But he also must have been a very lonely man—he was the man that people loved to hate.

- He needed something—probably acceptance; possibly fulfillment in life—something to fill the emptiness of his heart.
- He was rich, he could buy almost anything he wanted, but his money couldn’t satisfy the longing of his heart.
- Christiana Onassis said: “Happiness is not based on money, and the greatest proof of that is my family.” A few days after saying that, she committed suicide.

Perhaps this explains why Zacchaeus has such a great desire to see Jesus. Having heard so much about Jesus, he wanted to see him personally.

- He heard the rumors: Jesus doesn’t care who you are, or what you look like, or what you have done.
- Jesus even eats with tax collectors. One of his own disciples, Matthew is a tax collector.
- And Zacchaeus was so passionate about getting a glimpse of this Jesus that he was willing to climb up a tree—Middle Eastern adult, chief tax-collector, wealthy, wearing nice clothes. And acting like a child

- Children know what it's like to try to watch a parade—they can't see—the adults are too tall—they get in the way.
- Then, Dad hoists you up on his shoulders and you get a bird's eye view. Or maybe some kind soul lets you sit in front.
- But, I doubt that anyone would have let Zacchaeus in front of them. Neither is anyone going to allow this sinner on their shoulders. So, he climbs a tree—silly as it seems, he doesn't care what other people think.
- And that change of perspective changed his life forever.

Jesus won over Zacchaeus by building a bridge to his lonely heart.

- Jesus won over Zacchaeus by inviting himself to stay at Zacchaeus' house—by inviting himself into Zacchaeus' life.
- “Zacchaeus,” Jesus says, “come down quickly, for today I *must stay* at your house.”
- Not just to visit, but to stay—to live with you and abide with you.
- Jesus came to Jericho looking for Zacchaeus. He knew where he lived. He knew the turmoil in his heart. He walked right up to the tree that held Zacchaeus and he called him by name.

Zacchaeus was a small man, but he teaches us some big lessons.

- For one thing the Zacchaeus story tells us not to dwell on past mistakes—on the sins of our past.
- The Zacchaeus story tells us that Jesus is the one who does the inviting—that it is Jesus who invites himself into the home of our hearts.
- The good news is that Jesus doesn't wait for our invitation—he'll simply invite himself if he has too.
- The bad news is that we won't have time to clean up the mess when our divine guest arrives unexpectedly.
- When Jesus invited himself to stay at Zacchaeus' house, Zacchaeus had no warning—no time to go home and clean the place up. He didn't even have the opportunity to hide the things he didn't want his guest to see.
- And so it is with us. When Christ invites himself into our homes, our hearts, there isn't time to tidy the place up or hide things from our guest.
- That requires some courage, for Christ will see us as we truly are. He'll see the darkness and the fear; the anger and the bitterness; the insecurity and the resentment.
- And that's OK. It does require courage to meet Christ and allow him to see us as we truly are. But our confidence comes not from whom we are, but from who Christ is.

Another thing the Zacchaeus story tells us is that there are a lot of lonely, bitter people in this world that are hurting inside.

- Like Zacchaeus and his tax-collector cronies, they are often those who behave in ways that aren't particularly endearing.
- They are hard people to get along with. They have built walls around themselves.
- So, what about that so-and-so that rubs you the wrong way, or that group of people that leaves you cold?
- If you look around, you'll find the strangest and most unlikely people up in that proverbial tree as we stand in the crowd dumbfounded by their childishness, their arrogance, or their lack of care about what others think about them?
- Will we accept them? Will we seek to build bridges to them? Are we willing to be Christ for them?

The Zacchaeus story tells us that God will cast down the mighty from their thrones and lift up the lowly—but *not* so that they can swap places, but so that they can meet each other, be reconciled, build bridges rather than build walls, and so build God's kingdom together.

- Like Jesus, we need to look at those who seem furthest from God's love (even if it is our own very self) and know that they are better people than that.
- Knowing that deep inside of them, God's spirit rests, waiting to break forth.