

Who is this Man? At The intersection of Our Short and His Tree We Are Set Free October 23, 2016 Bill Limmer

If you have ever been to the LA, you probably know what is at the intersection oh Hollywood and Vine. Anybody, “The Walk of Fame.” If you have ever been to Green Bay, you likely know what is at the corner of Oneida and Lombardi, Lambeau Field. If you are a Cubs fan, you know what is at the corner of West Addison and North Clark St – Wrigley Field. Today we are going to go back to an ancient intersection, the intersection of Short and Tree, and I am willing to bet we are going to see that even though this intersection is in antiquity it still applies to you and me.

So lets dive into God’s Word. Luke 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 because he was short he could not see over the crowd.** ⁴ **So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.** And with these words we are introduced to a man named Zacchaeus. Those of us who are vertically challenged can relate to Zacchaeus, right. I mean the parade goes by, we are moving one way then another to try to see. We go to the game and we hope we are not stuck sitting behind someone with a hat. That was Zacchaeus height. But while he may have been small in stature, he was not small in sin. He was a big sinner. He was a prolific sinner. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, but not just any tax collector, the chief tax collector, the boss. And as boss, he was not a servant leader. He was all about the bottom line. His website would have been showmethemoney.com. At this time in history, the title tax collector and thief were pretty much synonymous. His status in the eyes of the average person was just under animal poo. To make matters worse, check out what his name means: the name Zacchaeus means “pure.” The people must have hated him because of the things he did and because of his name because he was certainly not clean. This short guy, was big on the accounts of money and sin. People would look at Zacchaeus and think, how could he? What road in life did he take that he could do what he is doing and think it was ok? He is despicable. This small man in size and in character wanted to see Jesus and likely only because he had heard Jesus could do things that no one else could. He wanted his autograph. But the crowd was not going to let this man of despised reputation cut to the front of them to get to the road to see Jesus. They weren’t going to lose their spot so Mr. Not Clean. So Zacchaeus, the entrepreneur, found a way: he booked it up ahead and climbed a tree so he could see.

Verse 1 **Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.** . . ⁵ **When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”** ⁷ **All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”** Jesus, not just any prophet, not just any teacher, but the Messiah. Some people hated Jesus because of the things he did, like acknowledge and forgive sinners. Some people thought he was crazy because he taught things like love your enemies. And some people hated Jesus because of his name, which means: He Saves. Jesus spots Zacchaeus, camouflaged by the leaves and fruit of the fig tree. It is at this intersection of Short and Tree that Jesus calls to the wee little man to come down because he wants to set him free. Jesus wants to have a meet and greet and eat with Zacchaeus. And so the holy and pure and really clean, Jesus, goes to Zacchaeus’ house because there needed to be some cleaning done on and in Zacchaeus’ heart. ⁶ **So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.** Zacchaeus is like “booyah. Take that tall people. Eat my leaves.” As he strutted to his big house, with his big bank account, with big this figure in tow but also big sin that he was about to know, know all about. Meanwhile, the people are like it figures. Zacchaeus gets all the breaks and I told you could not trust this Jesus. If Jesus was such a righteous guy certainly he wouldn’t be caught dead in Zacchaeus’ house.

Once inside the house, we don’t know how long it took or what exactly was said but before Jesus left Zacchaeus’ house that night, Zacchaeus, the man who went out on a limb with all of his sin, was now in the house and set free through the promise of the tree. We see this little man’s big response to his personal forgiveness in these words. ⁸ **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.”** Zacchaeus went from big on greed to big on generosity. Zacchaeus went from big on injustice to big on justice. Further confirming that Zacchaeus became a member of God’s family 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 the lost.”** Jesus took Zacchaeus, who was anything but clean and made him clean through forgiveness. This forgiveness is something that Zacchaeus didn’t earn or deserve but the

forgiveness was complete and free. Even though he came up short on righteousness, Jesus made up for it on the tree of the cross. Through this forgiveness Jesus changed his status, his outlook, his life, his eternity. Zacchaeus is free.

Pretty cool, right? Neat story, but it doesn't apply to me, or does it? Spoiler alert, it does. We are like Zacchaeus, short of righteousness. Our sins make us small. We are small when a friend does something good and gets noticed for it and we want glory in this scenario somehow, someday. We are small when we wonder why people don't do more, or carry their share of the load as if we are working independent of grace. We are sometimes so small we give people labels. We hold on to bitterness and resentment. Truth is: we are prolific in sin. Our sin towers over us, in us and through us. Who of us has not asked: How could I have done such a thing? How could I have thought such evil? How could I have wanted to do such a thing? How could I have even thought that was going to be ok? Here is the deal: when we correctly understand the teaching of original sin, that we are by nature sinful and unclean, then we will have gone a long way towards understanding how evil could lie so close to the heart of even the best of Christians. Original sin is not an act of a deed performed but a deep-seated, thorough-going tendency to do evil. **We are sinners not because we sin but we sin because we are sinners.** Because of original sin we are born spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God, with no ability to change our status before God; The lost image can only be restored by God himself.

Our need of grace and mercy is constant, total and absolute. And get this, the grace of God and his mercy in Christ Jesus is even greater than our original sin, actual sin, our guilt, or our need, our shame. As St. Paul joyfully confesses: Romans 5:20b-21: **where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.** God is just. And since we cannot save ourselves then God or even assist in our salvation God does not expect us to contribute in anyway to our salvation, then our salvation is secure, it rests entirely in the hands of the crucified Christ. Isaiah 1:18 **"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.**

Our "sin is too much for us to live with and too much for Jesus to live with too – so he was placed on and died on a tree for you and me. It is at this intersection of Short and Tree that you and I have been Set Free. Galatians 3:13 **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.** It is at the intersection of Our Short and Jesus Tree that we are Set Free! Now this is cool, because this is what it means: In the forgiveness of sins, the holiness and righteousness that Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden are restored. Our status has changed. We are no longer children of wrath and heirs of damnation. We are dear children of God and joint heirs with Christ. The image of God is imputed to us, that is the righteousness and holiness are credited to our account on account of the grace of God and the work of Christ for our redemption. This changes everything. 2 Corinthians 5:21 **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** Our status has changed; God, who reconciled the whole world to himself by charging all of the sins of the world to Christ's account. 1 Corinthians 6:11 **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

While the most important damage of original sin is entirely undone by this imputed restoration of holiness and righteousness through the forgiveness of sins, we still live in our sinful flesh. With St. Paul and all the saints on earth we daily stand in need of forgiveness. For our renewed nature struggles vs our old nature daily. The struggle is real. It is hard. And sometimes the red marker crosses over the line because we have sinned. To be honest, sometimes we just flat out fall on our faces in the battle. But guess what? Jesus always pulls from side of gory to his side of glory! As we strive to become in life what we already are in faith (holy and righteous) we trust in God's grace and the merits of Christ for our forgiveness and salvation. We are free from the burden of expectation, obligation to hold on to a label or façade and free to live with

Jesus love and forgiveness made a powerful change in Zacchaeus' life. Zacchaeus becomes a real son of Abraham not just through genealogy but in his heart. He is not connected only by culture to Christ, he is connected by the tree to Christ. The one who was lost is found. The one who was dead is alive. The one who once was rich in greed now has become rich in generosity. Jesus looks eye to eye at us on our limb of sin and invites us to see him on the tree of his

cross. Jesus love and forgiveness makes a powerful change in our life too. We have power to forgive because we have been forgiven. We don't have to worry about waiting for someone to deserve forgiveness because that will never happen. God forgives us all and we don't deserve any. God does not hold our past against us. He runs to meet us where we are at and welcome us home. We were lost but now are found. We were dead but now alive. And as we see him on the cross we realize the verdict is already in you are able to let go of the brokenness that is within (Matt Mahr).

Who is this man? He is the one who sets you free at the intersection of Short and Tree.