

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

And so we pray that the ministry and preaching of your Word might be your Word for the sake and glory of your Son Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen. Please, this is one of my favorite

passages because of the little children's song that goes with it. Does anybody know the song? Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in, oh you know the hand motions too, he climbed up in the sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see. And as the Lord he passed that way, he looked up in the tree, and what do you say? Zacchaeus, you come down from there because I'm going to your house today. There you go. That's a great, oh thank you. Yes, appreciate that. I'm making a run for Billy's position up here. Can you tell? I'm going to go for the band next and get the air guitar and everything going. It's going to be great. But this is really a passage about who's looking for who. It's funny, my daughter has this big giant great Pyrenees that she walks around the neighborhood and the dog is so big that people always come up to her and ask who's walking who. And we have a little joke about that, but in this passage it's who's looking for who. And the very first thing that you see is that Zacchaeus is described as short in stature, but he is seeking the Lord. Behold there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and rich. He was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on the count of the crowd he could not because he was small in stature. Zacchaeus was a wee little man. He was short and he was also insignificant for another reason and that's what it said about his profession. He was a tax collector. These were the people who were the most despised of the people of Israel because they literally were acting as traitors on behalf of the Romans, collaborators. They would go to their fellow Jewish family members and cousins and friends and extort the Roman tax out of people really who didn't have a lot of money to give. And one of the things that the Romans would say to these tax collectors is, "You need to get us our money, but whatever you can get on the top of that, well that's yours to keep." And so it became such that tax collectors would steal and cheat and they became very rich. And this is what he's described as. He's described as a tax collector who had become very rich off of taking money from other people. And yet there was something in Zacchaeus' life or heart that he wanted to see Jesus. And I think when we get right down to it, it probably was the fact that he had

been a crook, that he had been an extortionist and a collaborator and a betrayer of his own family. And that guilt and shame was inside of him and eating him up. And he knew, he knew in his deep down heart of hearts that Jesus was the one that could help him with all of that. Brene Brown, who writes a lot about the subject of shame, describes guilt and shame in two different ways. She says, "Guilt is when you've actually done something wrong. It's very specific. You know exactly what you're guilty for. I stole money. I broke the law. I am guilty of stealing." And Zacchaeus knows very specific people in his mind that he was guilty of extorting money from. In fact, later on when he gets to a place of repentance, he actually wants to make restitution for the wrongs that he had done and pay people back four times for the things that he was literally guilty of doing. But one of the things that guilt does is it leads to shame. And the shame is the feelings of, "I'm unworthy. I'm unholy. I'm small. I'm nothing. I'm a failure. I'm a loser." Any of those kind of "I am" statements where you take the behavior and the action and you allow it to, in a sense, make you an unclean person, a person who is defiled in the core of your being. And this was fundamentally Zacchaeus' problem, is that not only was he guilty in violating God's laws and breaking God's commandments and sinning against God and against others, but that guilt had been internalized in the form of shame. And if anybody would have wanted to hide from God, and that's what shame makes us do. It makes us want to hide. Remember Adam and Eve in the garden when they realized they were guilty, they felt ashamed because God saw them. And He's trying to, you know, run away from the Lord hiding behind bushes and things like that. Well, that's what shame does. It makes us want to self-hide. But Zacchaeus, I think you get to the end of your rope in many ways. You get to a place of desperation where you know that only Jesus is your hope. And He literally climbs up into a tree so that He can somehow see Jesus. Now, what's interesting is that the crowd that is this group of people, we don't have them described in any other way as the crowd or they, and they're in the way of this small man finding salvation. And I sometimes think that that is the case with Christian people, actually,

that we are our own worst enemies when it comes to evangelism, that here Jesus is seeking out, trying to find the lost, and there's all these, quote, righteous people that are in the way of Him and the sinner. I remember when I was first coming into the life of the church when I was in Gainesville, that

blessed city with that wonderful institution. Go Gators, sorry we lost. But we played well. That was really great. But I remember being wrapped up in the fraternity life and feeling ashamed of myself that I wanted to find salvation. I really wanted to find Jesus. I was a lot like Zacchaeus. I felt my need. I was being called, and I don't mean called to the ministry, I was being called to the Lord for salvation. And I remember going to a church for the first time and looking around at all of the Christian people in the church,

and I felt even more defiled and more guilty and more ashamed, because they all had their act together. They knew the Bible. They knew God. They knew so much about the faith, and I didn't know anything about the Bible. I didn't know anything about God. I just knew I needed Him. And I remember that feeling very distinctly. And were those people in the way of me getting to Jesus, or were they there to help me find Jesus? And that's a good question for us as church people to ask.

Sometimes I think about the doors in the church here, and a lot of times the people that are standing in the narthex are aimed in this direction with their backs to the doors. But here are all these people that are coming to church. You know, they're coming to worship, and they're coming to find Jesus. And all the people that are gathered in the narthex are all talking to themselves, and they're interested in each other, and they're happy to see one another, or they're eager to get in here and to sit down and be quiet and worship. But who's facing out? Who's the one that is looking for the Zacchaeus that's going to show up here and come through those doors and meet Jesus? It's something we all need to be mindful of, that we can be in the role of the crowd, blocking a true seeker from finding the Lord. But one of the wonderful things about Jesus is that He knows people that are looking for Him. And so He looks up in that tree, and He sees Zacchaeus. Let me read the text to you. He looks, "Came to the place," and He looks up, and He says to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

And it says, "So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully." Isn't that wonderful?

That these two people, Jesus and Zacchaeus, were looking for each other, and in the midst of a giant crowd, they found each other, and Jesus said, "I

want to go to your house." Out of all the people in Jericho that day that He could have wanted to go and visit, He's like, "I'm coming here to visit you, Zacchaeus. You're the guy. I want to see your house." And it overjoyed Jesus, but it didn't overjoy the crowd. When they saw it, they all grumbled. He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner, and there's that shame voice again. He's not just someone who stole,

but He is a sinner. He has been defiled. He's been tainted. He's been a shame. He's a shame.

And Zacchaeus has a very humble reaction to that kind of language. He says, it says, "He stood and said to the Lord, "Behold," here's sight language again, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." Earlier in the gospel, there's a story of Jesus coming across a rich young ruler who asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus says, "What does the law say?" And He quotes the back half of the Ten Commandments, all the, "Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie, cheat," and so on, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," all the ones that are the horizontal relationship ones. And the Lord says, "There's one thing that you lack. You need to go and sell all of your possessions and give your money away to the poor." And it says that the man went away disheartened because he had many possessions. And it's a real contrast to Zacchaeus here, who also is rich, but a person who in his humility knows that what he needs more than anything is to let go of that which is an idol in his life, his money. The rich young ruler, he wasn't prepared to give the idol up, and Jesus put his finger right on the issue in his life. And the disciples were standing around at that point with the rich young ruler, and they said, "Wow, that didn't go so well." And Jesus says, "It's really hard for rich people to get into heaven. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." And the disciples were like, "Well, that sounds impossible,"

which is what Jesus' point was. In and of myself, if I'm trying to earn my salvation or buy my way into salvation or to attain it in any kind of stretch of me doing it, it's never going to work. It's not until we get up to a place of hopeless dependence on God, where we say like the psalmist, "There's no help in me. I need you, Lord, to solve this problem and to rescue me." And then everything unlocks when it comes to the relationship with the Lord.

Zacchaeus is the one who found that. Even though he was a sinner, Jesus says to him, "Today's salvation has come to this house, since he also is the son of Abraham, for the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." It's an interesting play on words here in this story. Jesus' name means Yahweh saves. It's the Hebrew name Yahshua, which Yahweh saves.

Zacchaeus' name is also interesting in this text. His name means pure and innocent.

Isn't that interesting? Here's a man that from all appearances was a short little sinful failure.

"And yet the Lord saw him and saved him and gave him a restoration that his name would be innocent and pure." What a beautiful picture of the Lord's salvation that he wants to do with each and every one of us. My wife will sometimes say that we often judge our insides by other people's outsides, that when we look at the crowd and we see a bunch of people, maybe even in church, that seem to have all their act together and things are going well in their life. But I know inside that I don't feel that way. I feel like I'm small, I'm finite, I'm a sinner, I'm ashamed, whatever it is, I'm broken, I'm grieving, I'm hurt. We look at people's outsides and we misjudge them. The reality is, every one of you, sorry to blanket generalize you, but every single one of you has stuff. Every single one of you has challenges, problems, difficulties, things that you're ashamed of, places where you feel like Zacchaeus, very small. And yet the Lord sees you. He sees your heart. He sees not only what you've done, but what you can become. And he wants to go to your house today. He wants to be in your life today and dwell in your heart. And I'm going to metaphorize the house. It's talking about the house of your heart. The Lord wants to come into your life and fill you with his joy and his salvation and his life. And that's the pathway to abundance and joy. And Zacchaeus got to experience that.