

## “Zacchaeus”:

...an all-consuming zeal.

Luke 19:1-10

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**Luke 19:1-10** Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. 2 Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. 3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but

could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." 6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. 7 But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." 8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold. 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."



**Luke 24:32** “*And they said one to another, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”*”

If we were to attempt to succinctly encompass the living of the Christian disciple, one might find it greatly difficult to package up all the subtle aspects and the living manifests of such an individual to “put it in a neat little box.” And while it would be foolish to attempt to objectively oversimplify the faithful walk in Christ, the one singular focus to “love the Lord your God” is in fact the heart and goal of every disciple’s mission, ministry, and purpose. “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*” (Luke 10:27)

From that love will naturally flow all the desire, the anointing, and the ability to be His disciple: essentially, *everything else* that goes along with a sanctified and holy life! That love enables and impassions the disciple’s obedience, and the disciple’s joy. Without it, the “domino effect” begins: that desperate struggle to dig out and which ultimately sweeps us away as we become just another spiritual casualty. Another memory of one who once was “into the Jesus thing...”

Many today, *at least internally*, are crying out that they once had experienced God’s presence and passion, but things have now grown quiet and tedious. Their hearts have grown cold and thus their lives have followed in kind. They survived the seed of God’s Word from falling “DOA” on the side of the paths of our lives. They went on to survive the ‘rocky soil’ as the seed indeed found root and grew. ***But it was the next one that got us:*** the thorns began to crowd out the Word...the natural and mandatory growth and the continued maturity. The cares, riches, pleasures, and even *distractions* of this life began to strangle out the things of God and we stalled. And ultimately our pride made sure we did not repent and turn back.

Like the disciples traveling the Emmaus Road, our inability to perceive the presence of Jesus often stems from our distractions, our emotions, and our preconceptions as to how God will operate and what that will mean to us. We are depressed and even distraught, that life is difficult. Life is not progressing at the speed and direction that we planned. We lack the control over its seemingly meandering path. We, in our desperate efforts to gain some hand, just become even more entangled as we turn to the “answers” that the world offers up as the path of relief and the road to reward.

The answers that the world gives are the same old empty promises that have been made for years and years. “You just need a girlfriend of a boyfriend.” You just need to get married. You need another job. A different church. More money. A new location. A new spouse. Away from your parents. To finish school. To have a kid. Etc...Etc...Etc...I will discipline my diet and go to the gym and exercise, so that I can hang onto the physical life that I’m not really living out anyway. I will declare that everyone around me is wrong about me and I alone see that I am indeed a great and dynamic friend, Christian, and individual. I will hang onto the sad story that is my life because at least it is familiar and safe, and I wouldn’t want to gamble away such a droning existence for something that might be better...even if God promised me such! We cling to self, safety and familiarity at the expense of dynamic relationships with God as well as the people in our lives. One of the easiest things to spot, is another believer that is not really in love...not passionately invested!

**Matthew 5:6** "Blessed are those who *hunger and thirst* for righteousness, for they will be filled."

It’s been said that Satan’s greatest ploy in America is its prosperity. Most of us have never experienced any real physical hunger or real physical thirst. We have more than enough material things and because of such we become complacent. There is no “want” in our affluent lives. Our days are filled with so many good things, albeit *worldly things*, that we are blinded to the simplicity of realizing there is only one BEST thing...to love, serve, worship, praise, and be thankful to God. But such zeal is overwhelmingly intangible: unmeasurable, and “*un-quantifiable*.” It is not something I can hold in my hand, put in my pocket, or store in a bank. It can only be spent and experienced.

Again, Jesus said that loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength is the first and greatest commandment (Mark 12:28-29). This commandment, combined with the command to love our neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), encompasses all of the other Old Testament laws. **LOVE**. All the Law and the Prophets...*as well as the joy and success of the Christian life*, hang on the issue of love. **Matthew 22:37-40**

The story in our text tells of a “little man” named Zacchaeus. That’s us. We may not be short in stature, but we are all “little men.” Not a famous, rich, or powerful one amongst us! Even if we were in those latter camps, at some point, *perhaps even not until death*, we will discover that we are still very small on the grand scheme of things.

The old story of Zacchaeus today tends to get lost in the child’s Sunday school account:

*“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 when the Savior passed that way, He looked up in the tree  
And said, 'Zacchaeus, you come down! For I'm going to your house today!  
For I'm going to your house today!'*

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man, But a happy man was he*

*For he had seen the Lord that day, And a happy man was he;  
And a very happy man was he...*

Because of the familiarity of the story, we tend to miss everything about the man except that he was short and he climbed up a tree. The impact for us is that he did indeed climb up a tree but he did so because “he sought to see who Jesus was.” He apparently wasn’t going to let anything on the earthly realm stop him from seeing who Jesus was. He was already a rich and no doubt influential man, yet the search for meaning and purpose was as illusive in his day as it is today. As a man in his position, he probably had all the world had to offer, and yet something was still missing.

For a lot folks, Jesus will never be anything more than a curiosity or perhaps a perceived hedge against judgement and hell. Following them are the vast number of those who are, *for the most part*, obedient believers. But they are obedient solely under their **own power**, which is why I said *for the most part*. Because self-discipline will always and forever be only marginally successful. I meet scores of believers that approach their lives of faith with an attitude of “*just tell me what I am supposed to do and I will do it.*” Thus their Christianity, and furthermore their church participation, is boiled down to a set of rules...a credo in which they attempt to adhere. They are always so surprised when they are correctively approached concerning their faith, because in their minds they are doing everything they are supposed to be doing, and if there is anything in which they are not, just give the directive and they will acquiesce! But what is lacking in these folks is *passion*. There is no zeal for Christ, kingdom and His church! And again, believe me, *it shows!*

You see, many of us will indeed come ‘round to “see Jesus.” To “catch a glimpse” of the Savior. Like a music concert or a sporting event, we engage for the event and disconnect on the way back to the car after. But Zacchaeus wasn’t there to just “*see* Jesus.” He was there to “*see who Jesus was.*” He wanted to know all of it and all of Him. Not just the public and famous persona, but the reality of who and what He was and is!

Author and blogger Tim Challies...coauthoring a work with Dr. Joel Beeke, called ***A Puritan Theology***, says this about Christian zeal: “*Zeal will readily set us a-work to do all we do willingly, freely, and cheerfully. By zeal they (scriptural authors) meant the fruit of the Spirit, especially love, exercised to a high level in the soul and activity of life. Thomas Manton said that godly zeal is “a higher degree of love,” indeed the burning of divine love. Manton wrote, “Zeal will readily set us a-work to do all we do willingly, freely, and cheerfully” (2 Cor. 9:2). It is distinguished from “carnal zeal” by its lack of hatred and bitter envy (James 3:14), its direction by a true knowledge of God’s Word (Rom. 10:2), and its keeping its focus on piety of the heart instead of superstitious externals (Matt. 23:23; Rom. 14:17). Yet zealous love does include a holy “indignation” because when we love something strongly then we hate all that is against it. The strength of zealous love moves Christians to deny themselves and press on despite resistance. It fills them with “holy grief and anger” whenever God’s truth, God’s worship, or God’s servants are violated.” For example, David wrote, “My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words. Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it. I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts” (Ps. 119:139–141).”*

How can we increase the zeal in our lives and in our churches? Well, **firstly**, as in all aspects of Christian growth, we must look to Christ to increase our faith, love and passion for all things Christian. The presence, the possession, and thus the control of the Holy Spirit alone can give us life, and cause us to grow.

**Second**, use the gift of grace with real honesty. Accepting the truth about ourselves and our condition go a long way in changing a cold heart toward God, the Christian life, and our brothers and sisters we call our church family. If we cannot face the reality of the facts, we are confused and paralyzed.

**Thirdly**, in the vein of that honest evaluation, examine yourself to see if your heart is divided. Divided by *anything*. For we are called boldly to “have *no* other god’s before Him!” No matter what form they might appear, or importance to the secular and worldly life which we live on this planet. No woman will grow in her love for her husband if her heart clings to another man. We must sincerely labor to be divorced from all other loves . . . weaned from all earthly things, to which our hearts are too much wedded.

**Fourth**, exercise whatever zeal you have by obeying God’s Word with all boldness. We must not let the grace God has given us illicit a false security based on a previous spiritual experience sometime in the past, or the reciting of some “sinner’s prayer.” We must draw out of our depths a very purposeful action, then make such a practice, and burn the village of worldly distraction and burn the bridge back to it at the same time.

**Fifth**, we must hear the voices of the faithful around us who attempt to intervene on our behalf. Voices that we will heed when it is easy to do so and pleasing to our flesh, we must hear also when they are confrontational and challenge our comfort.

If our hearts have grown lukewarm, how do again find that initial burning passion for God? We must remember that the complete obligation and direction for the disciple of Jesus is summed up in one word...LOVE. We love because God FIRST loved us, and gave His only begotten son as a ransom for our lives (1 John 4:19). The pathway to restoring our passion for God is to love one another as Christ loved us by laying down our lives for Him and others. Nothing is more cathartic in curing depression than getting our eyes on others!

Jesus Christ gave up the normal comforts and joys of this life. He suffered beatings, insults, hatred, rough Roman nails in His hands, the spear in His side, the sharp burning spikes of twisted thorns in his scalp; all of which, bear witness to the pattern and example for loving each other. No one will ever find real Christianity without sacrifice. No one will ever experience real love with sacrifice.

Zacchaeus wanted to “see who Jesus was.” Do you? Are you truly hungry to know this God-man? For He alone possesses the answers you seek today. Our text says that “*Jesus looked up and ‘saw him.’*” Maybe that seems like a small thing, but Jesus “sees” a man much differently than we do. He sees more than just our physical outward actions, even if they are religious in nature. He sees motivation, attitude, thoughts, and heart! He sees our zeal, as well as the lack of it. He sees if we are distracted by other loves. He sees if we indeed “have a form of godliness but deny its power.” (2 Tim 3:5).

He knew, out of all those that were there that day looking for Him that Zacchaeus stood out as a man *truly seeking the Messiah, the Son of God, and all that that meant*. Zacchaeus was willing to *act* in his faith. He put some movement behind his passion. And in doing so, he found the blessing of Christ. And ultimately, he found *life*. Zacchaeus “*received Jesus joyfully*.” Here was his answer. Not in his money or worldly security. His zeal had “eaten him up.” (Ps 69:9) His zeal had “consumed him.” (Ps 119:139) And a consuming zeal is what Jesus wants us to have. May *you* be so consumed!

“...you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13