

THIS WEEKEND,,, I'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT HOW MUCH GOD LOVES US AND HOW,,, EVEN THOUGH WE ARE CRIPPLED BY SIN,,, WE ARE VALUABLE TO GOD!

ONE SUMMER EVENING,,, A FARMER WAS SITTING ON HIS PORCH,,, WHEN A NEWSPAPER BOY,,, NOTICED A SIGN ON THE PORCH THAT READ;

“PUPPIES FOR SALE”

HE ASKED THE FARMER;

HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT FOR THE PUPPY'S,,, SIR? THE FARMER SAID; \$25 SON! THE BOYS FACE FELL,,, AS HE SAID: SIR,,, I DON'T HAVE \$25,,, BUT,,, COULD I AT LEAST LOOK AT THEM,,, ANYWAY?

THE FARMER WHISTLED,,, AND THE MOTHER DOG CAME RUNNING AROUND THE HOUSE,,, FOLLOWED BY HER 4 CUTE PUPPY'S,,, WAGGING THEIR TAILS.

FINALLY,,, ALONG CAME A 5TH PUPPY,,, DRAGING ONE LEG BEHIND HIM,,, STRUGGLING JUST TO KEEP UP.

THE BOY ASKED:

SIR,,, WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THAT PUPPY?

WELL SON,,, THAT PUPPY'S CRIPPLED. WE TOOK HIM TO THE VET,,, AND WERE TOLD,,, THAT THE PUPPY DOESN'T HAVE A HIP JOINT. HIS LEG WON'T EVER BE RIGHT!

THE FARMER WAS AMAZED WHEN THE BOY WENT IN HIS POCKET,,, TOOK OUT .50 CENTS,,, SAYING; *PLEASE SIR,,, I WANT TO BUY THAT PUPPY AND I'LL PAY YOU .50 CENTS EVERY WEEK,,, UNTIL THAT \$25.00 IS FULLY PAID. HONEST I WILL!*

THE FARMER SAID; “YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND SON,,, THAT PUPPY WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO RUN OR JUMP. HE'LL BE A CRIPPLE FOREVER,,, SO,,, WHY IN THE WORLD WOULD YOU WANT SUCH A USELESS PUPPY?

THE BOY REACHED DOWN AND PULLED UP HIS PANT LEG,,, REVEALING A BRACE ,, HOLDING A POOR,,, TWISTED LEG.

SIR,,, THE BOY SAID,,, “*THAT PUP IS GONNA NEED SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTANDS HIM,,, TO HELP HIM IN LIFE!*”

IN OUR LIVES BROTHERS AND SISTERS,,, THERE’S NO GREATER EXAMPLE OF AN UNDERDOG,,, THAN A SINNER WHO HAS BEEN CRIPPLED IN HIS SOUL.

***WE* ARE CRIPPLED BY SIN,,, AND *WE* NEED **SOMEONE** WHO UNDERSTANDS HOW VALUABLE *WE* ARE,,, THAT *WE* MATTER AND THAT *WE* ARE WORTHWHILE,,, JUST LIKE *ZACCHAEUS* THE MAIN CHARACTER IN TODAY’S SCRIPTURE DID!**

THAT SOMEONE,,, IS JESUS CHRIST!

ONE OF THE GREATEST NEEDS,,, IN OUR LIFE,,, IS TO FEEL VALUABLE,,, TO KNOW THAT OUR LIFE MATTERS,,, AND THAT WE ARE WORTHWHILE!

BECAUSE OF THIS,,, WE OFTEN FIND OURSELVES TRYING TO COMPARE **OURSELVES TO OTHERS; BY OTHER PEOPLE’S STANDARDS;**

(*) WE TEND TO JUDGE OUR WORTH,,, BY OUR APPEARANCE ASKING; *HOW DO I LOOK?* AND; *THE BETTER I LOOK,,, THE MORE I MUST BE WORTH,,, IN OTHER PEOPLES EYES!*

(*) WE JUDGE OUR WORTH BY OUR ACHIEVEMENTS SAYING; *IF I’M SUCCESSFUL,,, EVERYBODY WILL ACCEPT ME!*

(*) WE JUDGE OUR WORTH ON APPROVAL! *HOW WELL AM I LIKED? IF PEOPLE LIKE ME,,, I MUST BE OK!*

(*) WE JUDGE OUR WORTH ON WHAT WE HAVE. *DO WE HAVE ENOUGH TOYS? IF SO,,, PEOPLE WILL ACCEPT ME,,, AS THEIR EQUAL!*

THIS IS KNOWN AS: **KEEPING UP WITH THE JONES’! AND THE PROBLEM WITH THESE STANDARDS,,, IS THAT NONE OF THEM,,, ARE STABLE!**

THE TROUBLE WITH LETTING STANDARDS LIKE THESE DICTATE YOUR SELF-WORTH,,, IS THAT; IF YOU LIVE BY THESE STANDARDS,,,

YOUR SELF-WORTH WILL ALWAYS BE CHANGING AND YOU'LL NEVER KNOW,, FROM MOMENT TO MOMENT,, WHERE YOU REALLY STAND!

WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND,, THAT ***GOD ACCEPTS US,, AS WE ARE,,*** IT CHANGES THE WAY WE SEE OURSELVES AND THAT TRANSFORMS OUR HEARTS AND ALLOWS US TO BECOME MORE CHRIST LIKE! IN TODAY'S GOSPEL,, WE HEAR ABOUT ***ZACCHAEUS*** WHO WAS A VERY INFLUENTIAL JEW AND A CHIEF TAX COLLECTOR,, FOR THE ROMAN'S.

ZACCHAEUS LIVED IN JERICHO AND HIS NAME IN THE GREEK MEANS "***PURE OR INNOCENT***",,, AND BECAUSE OF HIS PROFESSION,, ***ZACCHAEUS*** WAS VERY RICH! HERE WAS A PHYSICALLY "***LITTLE MAN***",,, WHO WAS JUST ABOUT TO MEET A "***BIG GOD***"!

ZACCHAEUS,,, HAD ***VERY FEW*** ACHIEVEMENTS,, UNLESS YOU COUNTED HIS; ***OVER TAXING OF THE PEOPLE***,,, AND; ***HIS CHEATING THEM OUT OF THEIR FINANCIAL GAINS.***

ZACCHAEUS WAS HOPING,, TO GET A LOOK AT JESUS; THIS MAN THAT EVERYONE WAS TALKING ABOUT! ALTHOUGH HE DIDN'T KNOW IT YET,, HE NEEDED JESUS,, IN THE WORST OF WAYS. IF THERE WAS EVER A MAN,, WHO NEEDED A STRONGER SENSE OF SELF-WORTH,, IT WAS ***ZACCHAEUS***. ACCORDING TO THE FIRST THREE STANDARDS MENTIONED,, ***ZACCHAEUS*** STRUCK OUT.

FIRST; HE WAS SMALL,,
SECOND; HE HAD NO ACHIEVEMENTS,, AND
THIRD; HE WAS A ROMAN "***TAX COLLECTOR!***"

FOR A JEWISH MAN TO BECOME A TAX COLLECTOR,, WAS UNTHINKABLE!

IF YOU BECAME A ***TAX COLLECTOR***,,, EVEN YOUR OWN FAMILY WOULD DISOWN YOU,, YOU WOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO WORSHIP IN THE SYNAGOGUE,, AND,, YOU WERE LOOKED AT,, THE SAME AS A MURDERER.

AS A RESULT,, ALTHOUGH **ZACCHAEUS** WAS RICH,, HE WAS ALSO MISERABLE! WE KNOW THIS,, BECAUSE; **YOU CAN'T HAVE A GUILTY CONSCIENCE,, AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF,, AT THE SAME TIME!**

ZACCHAEUS KNEW,, HE WAS CHEATING PEOPLE. HE LOST HIS SELF-RESPECT AND HIS MONEY DIDN'T MEAN MUCH,, ANY MORE.

BUT SOON,, A BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS,, WOULD CHANGE HIS LIFE. **ZACCHAEUS** WOULD LEARN,, ***HOW MUCH WE MATTER TO GOD!***

TODAY'S PARABLE,, TELLS US,, THAT **ZACCHAEUS** JUST WANTED TO GET A GLIMPSE OF JESUS,, BUT HE WAS TOO SHORT,, TO SEE JESUS OVER THE CROWD.

SO,, **ZACCHAEUS** DID TWO THINGS THAT WEALTHY EASTERN MEN,, WOULD NEVER DO;

FIRST; HE RAN THROUGH THE CROWD AND **SECOND**; CLIMBED UP A TREE.

NOW,, THESE WERE THINGS THAT CHILDREN MIGHT DO,, BUT NOT FULL GROWN JEWISH MEN!

ALTHOUGH THIS WAS SHOCKING,, FOR IT'S DAY,, WHAT JESUS DID NEXT,, WAS EVEN MORE SHOCKING!

JESUS WALKED STRAIGHT THROUGH THE CITY PAST THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE,, AND RIGHT UP TO THE TREE,, WHERE **ZACCHAEUS** WAS!

JESUS STOPPED,, LOOKED UP AT **ZACCHAEUS** AND CALLING HIM BY NAME,, SAID:

"ZACCHAEUS,, COME DOWN QUICKLY,, FOR TODAY,, I MUST STAY AT YOUR HOUSE!"

WHY WOULD JESUS DO THIS? ESPECIALLY FOR **ZACCHAEUS**? MAYBE,, IT WAS BECAUSE JESUS KNEW **ZACCHAEUS'S** HEART,, JUST LIKE HE KNOWS OURS!

NOW,, YOU MIGHT BE "**UP A TREE**" TODAY? OR,, "**OUT ON A LIMB**" AND,, YOU MIGHT EVEN THINK,, **THAT GOD HAS FORGOTTEN YOU**,, BUT,, IN REALITY,,

BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

**THERE'S NEVER,, EVER,, BEEN A TIME,,
WHEN GOD HAS TAKEN HIS EYES OFF YOU!
HE HAS SEEN EVERY BREATH YOU'VE EVER TAKEN!
HE KNOWS EVERY THOUGHT THAT YOU'VE EVER
HAD AND HE'S SEEN EVERYTHING,, THAT YOU'VE
DONE!**

**NO,, GOD HASN'T EVER FORGOTTEN YOU,, HE'S
ALWAYS HAD HIS LOVING EYES UPON YOUR LIFE,,
*BECAUSE,, OUR GOD,, REALLY CARES ABOUT YOU!***

**SOMETIMES,, WE MIGHT FEEL,, *THAT OTHER PEOPLE
THINK THAT WE'RE WORTHLESS*,,, BUT,, THOSE
PEOPLE AND THEIR OPINIONS,, DON'T MATTER.**

**THE SIMPLE FACT IS,, *WE MATTER SO MUCH TO GOD,,
THAT HE SENT HIS ONLY SON TO DIE FOR US!***

**THESE “OTHER PEOPLE” WERE THE SAME TYPE OF
PEOPLE,, THAT MADE *ZACCHAEUS*,,, FEEL THEIR
HATRED,, BECAUSE HE WAS A CHEAT,, AND TO
THEM,, THAT MADE HIM WORTHLESS!**

**IT WAS FOR “THEM” THAT JESUS INVITED HIMSELF
INTO *ZACCHAEUS'S* HOME FOR DINNER,, BECAUSE
*JESUS DIDN'T CARE,, WHAT THOSE PEOPLE SAID.***

**THE CROWDS WEREN'T HAPPY! THEY SAID;
“HE HAS GONE TO STAY AT THE HOUSE OF A SINNER”
ZACCHAEUS,,, QUICKLY CLIMBED DOWN AND TOOK
JESUS TO HIS HOUSE,, WITH GREAT EXCITEMENT
AND JOY.**

***ZACHAEUS* TOOK JESUS UP,, ON HIS OFFER,, FOR A
RELATIONSHIP,, AND AS A RESULT,,
ZACCHAEUS WAS CHANGED INSTANTLY!**

BROTHERS AND SISTERS;

***GOD HAS A PLAN AND A PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE.*
SINCE JESUS OFFERS SO MUCH LOVE AND ETERNAL
HAPPINESS,, PERHAPS WE SHOULD RESPOND,, IN A
SIMILAR WAY AS *ZACCHAEUS*,,, WITH GREAT
EXCITEMENT AND JOY,, TO WHAT HE HAS TO OFFER?**

ZACCHAEUS STOOD THERE AND SAID;
*BEHOLD,,, HALF MY POSSESSIONS,,, LORD,,, I SHALL
GIVE TO THE POOR,,, AND IF I HAVE EXTORTED
ANYTHING FROM ANYONE,,, I SHALL REPAY IT,,, FOUR
TIMES OVER.*

JESUS RESPONDED: *TODAY,,, SALVATION HAS COME TO
THIS HOUSE,,, FOR THIS MAN TOO,,, IS A DESCENDENT
OF ABRAHAM.*

SOMETHING,,, HAPPENED IN **ZACCHAEUS'** HEART,,,
BECAUSE,,, THAT DAY,,, THE MOST SELFISH MAN,,, IN
THE CITY,,, ALL OF THE SUDDEN,,, BECAME THE MOST
GENEROUS MAN IN THE CITY.

WHAT HAPPENED,,, WAS **THAT JESUS,,, AND THE LOVE
OF GOD,,, TOUCHED ZACCHAEUS'S HEART AND
CHANGED HIM!**

THAT DAY,,, **ZACCHAEUS** MET JESUS IN A SPECIAL
WAY! SO,,, HOW DO YOU KNOW,,, IF YOU HAVE MET
JESUS? WELL,,, THAT'S REALLY EASY TO KNOW,,,
BECAUSE;

- (*) YOUR ATTITUDES WILL HAVE CHANGED!**
- (*) ALL OF THE SUDDEN,,, YOU START THINKING
ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE RATHER THAN YOURSELF.**
- (*) YOU REALIZE,,, HOW MUCH YOU HAVE BEEN
GIVEN,,, AND,,,**
- (*) YOU WANT TO GIVE BACK!**

IT'S EASY TO FORGET,,, THAT EVERYTHING WE HAVE
IS FROM GOD AND WE SEEM TO WANT TO HOLD
ONTO EVERYTHING THAT WE DO HAVE,,, DON'T WE?
BUT,,, WHEN JESUS TOUCHES YOUR HEART,,, YOU
WILL HAVE A

CHANGE OF HEART.

ZACCHAEUS PUBLICLY DEMONSTRATED HIS
CONVERSION OF HEART

AND WHEN YOU RECEIVE CHRIST,,, HE WANTS YOU
TO PUBLICLY DEMONSTRATE WHAT'S HAPPENING,,,
ON THE INSIDE,,, OF YOUR HEART.

**JESUS KNOWS OUR PAST,, HE KNOWS OUR HURTS,,
AND HE WANTS YOU TO KNOW,, THAT HE LOVES YOU
ENOUGH,, TO HEAL YOUR HURTS AND TO SET YOU
FREE OF THEM.**

**SO,, DO YOU LOVE JESUS ENOUGH,, TO ALLOW HIM
TO TAKE AWAY YOUR HURT AND TO HEAL YOUR
BROKENNESS?**

**IT DOESN'T MATTER,, WHETHER YOU HAVE EVER
RESPONDED TO JUSUS' INVITATION OF SALVATION
BEFORE.**

**JESUS WANTS YOU,, TO RESPOND TO HIS INVITATION
TODAY AND HE IS TELLING US;**

***IT IS NEVER TOO LATE! I AM MERCIFUL!
I DESIRE TO FORGIVE EVERYONE,, WHO COMES TO ME
WITH SINCERE CONTRITION.***

***I DO NOT CONDEMN,,
I SIMPLY FORGIVE AND RESTORE THE SOUL!***

**MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS,, IT'S NEVER TOO LATE
FOR THOSE,, WHO HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED THE
LORD INTO THEIR LIVES.**

**LET'S PRAY FOR THEM AND ASK THE LORD,, TO
REACH OUT TO THEM,, SO THAT THEY TOO,, MAY
RESPOND TO HIS INVITATION,, LIKE **ZACCHAEUS** DID
AND THEY TOO,, CAN RECEIVE THE LORD JESUS
INTO THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH AND ACCEPT HIS GIFT
OF SALVATION,, THIS VERY DAY!**

+++AMEN+++

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