

BLAST VIDEO #5: "JUST A LITTLE GUY"

(Luke 19:1-10)

7.8.20

Did you ever do that thing where you're maybe playing with a bunch of your friends, and you decide to choose up teams? I remember when we did that when I was a kid. I was always lucky; I was always one of the first ones picked for a team because I was the fastest kid in the neighborhood (in fact, I was the fastest kid in our whole school). But I remember how it would always come down to the same last two or three kids to get picked. They were maybe not very good at sports, or they weren't very fast, or they were really small but wanted to play with us. The one who had to pick the last kid always felt like he was already losing because he had to pick "him."

That ever happen to you? Well then, maybe you know what it was like growing up for the guy who our story today is about. Now while I am always looking for Bible stories specifically about kids, this is a good story for all of us to hear because I suspect that, even when this guy became a grown-up, he still thought of himself as a little kid. His name was Zacchaeus, and he lived in a town in ancient Israel called Jericho. Now I'm pretty sure he was a little guy growing up because he remained very short even after he was grown up. If people stood in front of him, he couldn't see over them. If an animal was too big, he might get run over without anybody even knowing he was there. Kind of a lousy way to live.

So I got a feeling that, because nobody likes always being the little guy, he tried to make up for it by becoming a big guy - not physically (he couldn't do much about that) but in other ways. He would become a big guy by becoming somebody that maybe people were afraid of. He would become a big guy by having more money than anybody else around. He would become so big that he'd make everybody wish that they had treated him better. But how to do that? Well, there was a way - but it might mean losing all his friends. He could work for the Romans, the empire that now had their soldiers in Israel and treated it like it was theirs. So how could he work for them? By becoming a tax collector. Now a tax collector was somebody who collected money from the people to help Rome pay for all their expenses of governing Israel. And the neat thing was, as long as the Romans got the money they were expecting, Zacchaeus could keep all the rest of the money he could try to collect. People had to pay their taxes, so Zacchaeus could charge them as much as he wanted.

Well, it worked out just like he hoped: Zacchaeus became somebody to be feared. If you didn't pay your taxes, he might send the Romans after you. And he became so good at his job that he was made a chief tax collector, meaning that he had other tax collectors working under him. Now he got money from them as well. Pretty soon he was the guy with more money than anybody else around. Now, just like he thought, he had no friends, but what did he care about anybody he had cheated to get all this money? He was rich; that's all that mattered. Except that all that money didn't seem to make him as happy as he thought it would. He couldn't figure it out: Why if he had made all his plans come true, wasn't he enjoying his life more? Why did he seem to have nothing even while most people thought he had everything a man could ever want?

Well, one day, Zacchaeus heard that an incredibly famous guy, Jesus of Nazareth, was going to be passing through town on His way to Jerusalem. Now this was a big deal! The stories about this guy were incredible - healing people who were blind, deaf, lame, sick, even dead (at least according to some people). And He was absolutely excellent at tweaking the noses of all those pompous, religious windbags at the temple, making them look like complete imbeciles.

But there was a problem: This guy attracted crowds like a beach attracts waves. If there were too many people, he'd never get a chance to see Him. And he knew that he had no friends to help him out. So, what to do? Then it hit him. If Jesus was coming down the main road, there were plenty of sycamore trees alongside. I bet that, with everybody watching for Him, nobody's even gonna notice if their rich, finely dressed tax collector is climbing up a tree like a little street kid. Besides, it'll give me a chance to see Him. For some reason that he wasn't quite sure he understood, Zacchaeus felt like seeing Jesus this day was really, really important. So, climb up the tree he did. And like he had hoped, nobody had noticed. And soon he heard the sound of a crowd buzzing with excitement. It could only mean one thing: Jesus of Nazareth was coming through. And then, there He was, with all the people looking at Him and calling out His name. This is great, Zacchaeus thought; I got the best view of anybody and no one even knows I'm here. This is perfect!

Except all of a sudden, it got really quiet. The crowd that had been making all the noise while surrounding Jesus, suddenly stopped - because Jesus had stopped. And all of a sudden, Jesus was walking toward the tree, his tree, in which he was so quietly perched. And then He stopped - and looked up, right into Zacchaeus' eyes. Zacchaeus' heart went right up into his throat. Did Jesus know about his tax collecting business? Did He know that he often took, OK, almost always took, more than he should? Was He going to embarrass him, or turn him over to the crowd to do whatever they wanted? He held his breath, waiting.

But as Jesus looked up at him, Zacchaeus noticed Him starting to smile - a really big, friendly smile. And then He said to him: "Hey, Zacchaeus! Any chance you could climb back down here? I was thinking it might be nice to head on over to your house for some lunch. What do you say?" Are you kidding? The great Jesus of Nazareth wants to have lunch - with me? He wasn't going to wait for Jesus to change His mind. As quickly as he could, Zacchaeus came down out of the tree and began walking Jesus over to his house.

Now many in the crowd weren't too happy with Jesus' choice of dinner companion. "How can this Guy call Himself great if He can't even pick a better lunch buddy than this slimeball?" But Jesus just ignored their comments. There was something more important that needed to happen. And as they ate lunch and talked, that "more important" thing happened. Zacchaeus all of a sudden found himself realizing that living his life the way he had, cheating people out of their money, hadn't accomplished anything except make everybody miserable - including him. But all of a sudden, he found himself realizing that if he welcomed this Jesus into his life just like he welcomed Him into his home, his life could become different. Jesus seemed to provide a different kind of happiness - a happiness that could last. And Zacchaeus admitted, to Jesus and himself, that Jesus could give him a better happiness than anything Zacchaeus could ever find on his own.

So, as a way of thanking Jesus for being such a friend to him, Zacchaeus promised Him that, for all the ways he had wronged people, he was going to make it right: Apologizing to them, and giving them four times more money back than he had ever taken in the first place. And he was going to give half of everything he had to the poor and needy. He felt changed, and he realized that his change needed to look like something.

Jesus saw the new Zacchaeus and smiled. "This is why I came," he told the people around Him, "to seek and to save anybody and everybody who has lost their way." And as He left Jericho, He knew at least one little guy who had found the biggest, best life of all!