

YOUR STATUS IS TALLER THAN YOUR STATURE!

Today's Text: Lk 19: 1 -10

Extracts:

Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. 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." So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully [Lk 19: 2-6].

Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of France, is 5 feet 5 inches (165 cm) tall.¹ He is reportedly so conscious of his small stature that he wears high-heel shoes and speaks to audiences standing on hidden platforms to look more imposing. On Thursday, 3 September 2009, he visited the Faurecia factory in Normandy (Northern France) to promote his economic policies. He addressed 20 selected workers (out of a workforce of 1,400) who stood on a stage around him and the picture of the event showed the President towering over all of them. A worker later revealed to the media that all the 20 workers had been carefully chosen on account of their small stature, such that none of them should be taller than Sarkozy! The French Presidency denied the report but the trade union backed up its member.

Sarkozy has done what most of us do every day- measuring our status (how others see us) by our stature (how we see ourselves). We tend to believe that the more imposing we look, the more we can influence others or make them respect us. Is that true? Are taller people more respected than shorter people?

Two thousand years ago, a man called Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but he could not on account of the crowd because he was of small stature. Yet, Jesus stayed at his house that day! What did he do? Why did Jesus rank him higher than his physical and other limitations? Let us find out from this week's study.

¹ Story based on the following sources: Peter Allen, "Sarkozy shortlist: 5 ft 5in French President packs stage with tiny staff to make himself look taller," *Mail Online*, 9th September 2009; www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1211630/Sarkozy-height-foley-Ordering-20-short-people-stand-make-look-statuesque.html and "Sarkozy height row grips France," *BBC News*, 2009/09/08; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/8243486.stm>

1. Background: A rich man climbed up a tree!

Try to put yourself in the place of Zacchaeus. We are not told how old he was but he was certainly not a young man. He was a tax collector by profession, suggesting above average level of education. He had also become rich [Lk 19: 2]. As a rich tax collector, he would certainly have problems with the religious and political leaders of his time, the scribes and the Pharisees, who looked down on him and his kind as sinners. They would assume without any proof that he had corruptly enriched himself by stealing from the state as well as from tax payers. What else was he required to do to be respected? Could his small stature be part of his problems? So, when he was told that Jesus had just entered and was passing through Jericho, he desired to see Him. Why? Let us follow the story from there:

a) *The odds were against Zacchaeus*

Zacchaeus “sought to see who Jesus was, but he could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature” [Lk 19: 3]. ***He was height-challenged.*** That suggests that he could not stay at the back of the crowd because taller people would block his view, and he could not break through to the front because there were taller and stronger people who would not give him a chance. His wealth availed nothing because money could not buy him height. Yet, he very badly wanted to see who Jesus was.

What are the odds lined up against you right now that are eating you up? You may be blind, deaf or crippled. You may consider yourself not tall or beautiful enough. Perhaps, you may have preferred to be born of a different colour of skin or gender. In spite of such odds, you may have worked hard to earn society’s respect through education or business. Now, you are comfortable with material blessings. Yet, society does not seem to respect you (in your view) on account of your natural features. Now, you can empathize with Zacchaeus!

b) *Zacchaeus did something about his situation*

Since the crowd and his small stature would not let him come close to Jesus, Zacchaeus “ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way” [v. 4]. Imagine a middle-aged rich man climbing up a tree! When I was a child in rural Nigeria, we the young ones would climb up trees during the new yam festival to see the *Oba* (king) do his annual dance. The rich and famous elders had no problem getting close to him. Can you imagine how we the children could have felt to see one of such elders (of small stature) climbing up with us? We would certainly have had some fun with him! You can be sure that Zacchaeus was not the only person that climbed up into a tree that day to see Jesus but he could certainly have been the only man among the young children!

What does that tell us about Zacchaeus? When you are already on the floor, can you fall below that? He had to see Jesus and small stature was not going to stop him. The crowd was not going to stop him. All he wanted was “to see who Jesus was.” So, what has stopped you from climbing up into the tree of hope and support to see who Jesus is? Why are you not climbing up the platform of Scriptures to read about and see who Jesus really is? Zacchaeus was not looking for Jesus to miraculously make him taller. He was not going to allow his physical limitations to prevent him from seeing who Jesus was. Why should you?

c) *Zacchaeus got the surprise of his life!*

As Zacchaeus sat precariously on a branch of the sycamore tree, Jesus came to the place, looked up and saw him, and said to him, “**Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down, for today I must stay at your house**” [v. 5]. It was good that Jesus called his name; otherwise, everybody up on that tree that day would have thought that Jesus was calling him! But Zacchaeus was pleasantly surprised because he might have said within himself, “So He even knows my name! Why me, Mr. Shorty, and not the powerful people of Jericho?”

How did Jesus know his name? God created all things through Jesus, the Word of God [Jn 1: 1-3; Eph. 3: 9]. When Philip told Nathanael that he had found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph, written about by Moses and the prophets, he replied, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” As soon as he brought him to Jesus, without Nathanael opening his mouth, Jesus said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit.” When Nathanael asked how He knew him, Jesus replied him, “*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you*” [Jn 1: 45-48]. Therefore, before Zacchaeus climbed up the sycamore tree, Jesus had seen him. He *saw something about him* long before they met! So, why do you assume that Jesus does not know about your case?

Zacchaeus “made haste and came down, and received [Jesus] joyfully.” He got the privilege to host Him in his own house. Jesus saw Zacchaeus as also the son of Abraham and a person deserving of salvation [Lk 19: 9-10] like the rest of us. In deed, Zacchaeus came to see who Jesus was- the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners. ***Jesus saw his faith, not his small stature. Faith in Jesus gave Zacchaeus status that made him taller than his stature.***

2. So why is your stature a problem?

You may be thinking in your heart right now, “That’s easier said than done! I know the problem that I have.” But God knows you more than you know yourself. If you think stature is your problem, examine the following realities:

a) *Height is comparative!*

You do not know your height until you measure yourself against others. That is vividly brought out in Jonathan Swift’s classic children’s adventure story, *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726).² When Gulliver travelled to Lilliput, the Lilliputians saw him as a giant because he towered over the small people there. In another travel, he went to Brobdingnag where Gulliver was treated as a circus wonder at local fairs. He was toyish compared to the giants of that land! Therefore, what matters is not so much your stature but what you can do with it because you can be a small sage or a big buffoon!

Consider the story of the twelve spies that Moses sent to spy out the Promised Land [Num. 13: 1-33]. Ten of them returned with a report that they saw giants, the Anakim, and “we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight” [v. 33]. Caleb and Joshua, on the other hand, gave a hopeful report, urging that they should go up at once to possess the land [v. 30]. None of the ten spies reached the Promise Land but Joshua and Caleb did. Forty-five years later, when the children of Israel had arrived and begun to conquer and take possession of the Promised Land, the portion that fell to Caleb was Hebron (formerly called Kirjath Arba), occupied by the Anakim [Josh. 14: 6-15]. We are told, “Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak from there” [Josh. 15: 14]. He was able to do that because he believed that the Lord would be with him and strengthen him to drive the Anakim out [Josh. 14: 12]. *So, Caleb’s faith gave him victory and higher status over giants.*

b) *Tall people have also failed!*

The tall people that short people may envy also have their own worry! If they are girls, they worry if they can ever find boys as tall or taller to marry. Tall people find it hard to get their sizes in clothes and shoes. When they travel, they are squeezed into seats meant for shorter people. Some of them may wish that they were shorter!

When the children of Israel asked for a king, God told the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul, the son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin as king [1 Sam. 9: 17]. On the day that he was introduced to the people, Samuel could not find him because he had gone to hide among the equipment! Through God’s guidance, they found him and “when he stood among the people, he was *taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward*” [1 Sam. 10:

² “Gulliver’s Travels Summary & Study Guide,” <http://www.enotes.com/gullivers-travels-jonathan-swift>

21-23]. But some rebels among the people said, “How can this man save us?” They despised him and brought him no presents [v. 27]. That suggests that his stature could not buy him respect. But when the Spirit of God came upon Saul and he led Israel into battle, “the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent” [1 Sam. 11: 6-7]. The people turned to Samuel and said, “Who is he who said, ‘Shall Saul reign over us?’ Bring the men, that we may put them to death” [v. 12]. So, Saul became respected, not because of his height but because of the Spirit of God upon him. However, in the end, what made God withdraw His Spirit from Saul and dethrone him was his disobedience, that is, his refusal to carry out the word of God [1 Sam. 13: 13-14]. *His status became shorter than his stature.*

c) *Small people have defeated giants!*

God has a way of compensating people with something that they lack elsewhere. For example, people of small stature may be dynamic leaders. Saul of Tarsus had a Roman name “Paulos” (Paul) which means little. A Bishop in the province of Asia during the Second Century described Paul as “a man small in stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.”³ In spite of such physical features, Paul’s writings terrified his readers who said, “His letters are weighty and powerful, but *his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible*” [2 Cor. 10: 9-10]. Paul’s words corroborate the Bishop’s. Therefore, small people can also do great exploits.

We know so well the story of David and the giant Goliath. As a teenager, David was still growing up. Goliath, on the other hand, was a giant over nine feet (2.74 metres) tall. For forty days, the Philistine giant challenged Israel to find him an opponent to fight with. Nobody accepted because everybody was afraid of him. But David, who was not even yet qualified to enter military service, accepted the challenge, armed with only a sling and some smooth stones. He told the heavily armed giant, “I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” Moving forward by faith, the small man struck the giant on his forehead with a stone in his sling! As the giant lay dead, David used his opponent’s huge sword to cut off his head [1 Sam. 17: 1- 51]. David’s status (with God) made him taller than his youthful stature!

From the forgoing, we can conclude that *your stature has got nothing to do with your status, especially with God. The Lord does not see the inadequacies of your physical features because your faith in Him through Christ Jesus has made you whole* [Lk 18: 42]. Therefore, instead of looking at your small stature, look at your God on high. By Him, you can leap over a wall [Ps. 18:29], and mount up

³ “Apostle Paul,” <http://www.abu.nb.ca/ecm/topics/people15.htm>

with wings like an eagle [Is. 40:31]. Your eyes may not see far on account of the crowds but you can see the kingdom of God because you have been born again of water and of the Holy Spirit [Jn 3:3]. The world may laugh at you and make you look forsaken and abandoned up in the tree of expectation, but the Lord will pick you up and take care of you [Ps. 27:10]. *Therefore, your status is measured by faith, not by your stature. In fact, your status is much taller than your stature.*

3. Conclusion: Only faith can make you taller!

God does not look at man as we do “for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” [1 Sam. 16: 7]. Jesus looked up the sycamore tree and saw a man of tall faith, not of small stature. That was why He said to Zacchaeus, “Make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house” [Lk 19: 5]. When people complained that Jesus had gone to be a guest with a man who was a sinner, Jesus responded, “Today salvation has come to this house” [vv. 7-9].

Right now, you may be hanging by a hair’s thread to the sycamore tree of true seeking and repentance. You have cried to Jesus and you want to see who He really is. He has come and He has seen your faith in Him. He is saying to you with love, “make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” Today, salvation has finally come to your house. Congratulations!

Only faith in Jesus can make you taller!