Zaccheaus was a wee little man who was about to have an immensely large experience with the Great Physician, our Lord Jesus Christ. This sermon concludes our series on “Dear and Glorious Physician Stories” from the perspective of the Gospel writer, Luke, who was himself a physician. And it doesn’t take much diagnostic skill to figure out what is wrong with the patient who has come to be healed by Jesus that day. Zaccheaus was a chief tax collector and rich as the story unfolds. And he was “small of stature”. (Luke 19: 3) Since the average height of people of that time was at most 5 foot 6 inches that means that to be described as being short back then meant you were probably under 5 foot 2 inches or even smaller. Zaccheaus undoubtedly had endured short jokes his entire life. Was made fun of on whatever the playground of school in that age would have been in growing up. Probably was bullied and pushed around. Maybe there was a time in his life when he was religious and had prayed to God to have him grow more and be like the rest of the kids. But his entreaties went unanswered. God didn’t hear nor answer the little boy’s prayers. “Hey, Zaccheaus, stand up, they taunted. Oh, you are standing up, too bad.” Kids can be so cruel. And what was sown into his heart was hurt and pain and bitterness. So when he grew up he could have developed a Napoleon Complex, an oversized ego seeking to dominate others. But he got his revenge on life another way. He became a tax gatherer, indeed a CHIEF tax collector. So his job was to shake down the locals, all the kids who had made fun of him, for taxes for the hated Romans. He received a percentage of the taxes he took by hook or crook. The more he gouged people, the richer he became. He was in charge of multiple tax collectors. So the more rapacious he became the richer he became and the richer he became the more hated he became. Ah, vengeance is mine, sayeth Zaccheaus!

What is more he would have been excluded from the Temple, most likely. His shortness would have been seen as an aberration. In that era one was blamed for a physical defect or an infirmity. Who sinned, Zaccheaus, you or your parents, to have been born so short and deformed? And then on top of that he would have been seen as a sinner; his profession as a tax gatherer would have also excluded him from participation in the Temple and entering into the presence of God. So he was cursed by his fellow citizens and he thought cursed by God. The bitterness and hurt in the heart of Zaccheaus grew and grew until it choked his love and any space for God in his life. Hurt people, as the saying goes, hurt people. The hurt in Zaccheaus’ heart was why he was a tax gatherer, who he was made him so hurtful and zealous in his task, why he delighted in hurting all the people who had hurt him so much in his life. He might have thought that success and riches and people hating and fearing him was the best revenge. But he was unhappy and disconnected from people and from the Lord. And somewhere deep in his heart he knew he was sick. And he needed help. He needed the Great Physician. Is there hurt and bitterness in your heart, O Christian, that only Jesus can heal??????

So Zaccheaus climbs up a Sycamore tree to see Jesus. He is in his fine robes but he scampers up the tree anyway. He is excited to see this Messiah who seeks out and sits and sups with sinners. It has been said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are
sick.” (Luke 5: 31) Perhaps this man will be different. Perhaps this time God will hear my prayer. Perhaps this time God will heal the ache and the pain in my heart. Anyone could have seen Zaccheaus and known that something was up; God was at work. I remember a particular church service many years ago and I couldn’t see what was happening so first I stood up to get a better view. And then everyone else stood up so I couldn’t see. So I stood up in the pew just so I could see what was going on over the crowd. And I remember thinking, “I don’t do this kind of thing. I don’t stand up in pews.” But I do to see what JESUS is doing. Are you excited by what Jesus is doing today? Probably not. That’s your problem; that’s your hard heart. That’s because you really don’t think you need a physician. Jesus sees this little man scrambling up a sycamore and of course knows that something is about to happen in this little man’s life. And the Spirit whispers in Jesus’ ear –this is the very reason why you are walking along this road today. And Jesus calls forth this man. He calls him by name. Jesus always calls us by name, for He knows us, He knows us better than we know ourselves. He cries out: “Zaccheaus, make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” (Luke 19: 5) Nobody had ever said that to Zaccheaus. Nobody had ever invited themselves over to his house. Why would you ever want to associate with such a man—a dwarf, a Cretan, a tax gatherer, a thief and a sinner. Sitting and supping with someone in their home was a sign of your friendship and your acceptance of that person. No one, trust me, had ever identified and associated with this little man ever before…let alone the Son of man, the Messiah, Jesus the very Son of the Lord God Almighty. And the Pharisees murmured against Jesus. There are always Pharisees and they are always murmuring. “He (Jesus) has gone to be a guest of a man who is a sinner.” (v. 7)

And salvation came to that home that day; quite literally, Jesus, whose name means salvation, came to Zaccheaus’ home that day. As Jesus said, “Today, salvation has come to this house.” (v. 9) And Jesus sat and supped with the little man. And the scales fell from his little heart. And all the bitterness and all the hurt and all the pain was healed by the Great Physician. The little man’s prayers were answered, not as he had asked, but as the doctor ordered. The Great Physician knows what disease we need cured of better than do we; He knows it is always heart surgery done by His Almighty Hand that cures the sin-sick soul. So Jesus in this sacrament is saying to you—I want to come home with you today. I want Salvation to visit your heart today. I want to enter into your life and into your heart and into your soul and I want to heal you deeply, deep and deeper within. I don’t care who you are. I don’t care what you’ve done. I don’t care how wounded you may be. I don’t care the heaviness you have carried in your soul your whole life. I am the Great Physician and I have come to your house to heal you today. He wants to take away all the hurt and bitterness in your heart today.

But He can’t enter in. He can’t heal you if you don’t think you’re sick. The sick know they need the Great Physician. Do you????? It is why doctor Luke tells us this little story about a little man who was about to have the biggest experience of his life. And a little man can have a HUGE heart when Jesus comes and calls his name… Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!