

“THREE SIZES TOO SMALL – ‘TIL JESUS”  
Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10  
November 2 & 3, 2019

“You don’t have to like the law of gravity, but it is in your best interest to respect it. You don’t have to prefer it, but it’s not going to change for you. It is a law of nature. It is a divine law, not a negotiated law.

“You may say, ‘Gravity, you are not going to tell me what to do. It’s my thing and I’m going to do what I want to do. You are not my boss, Gravity! You are not my instructor! I’m my own man and I’m going to do what I want to do! In fact, Gravity, just to let you know how I feel about you, I’m going to rebel. I’m going to get up on the top of this church building and I am going to despise you. I’m going to jump. What do you think about that?’

“The law of gravity won’t stop you. The law of gravity won’t hold you back. You can jump and, for a moment, a short moment, it may appear like you have outwitted and outsmarted gravity. It may appear like you have had the last word, but a few seconds later as we sweep you up off the pavement, it will become abundantly clear that you have adjusted to gravity; gravity did not adjust to you.”<sup>1</sup>

Now when we rebel against God’s laws, we call that sin, and the same consequences take place. God has established His laws for the world, and we can either abide by them or we can rebel against them. If we abide by God’s laws, then we acknowledge that those laws are just and right and are non-negotiable. God’s laws, just like the natural law of gravity, can be argued against and rebelled against, but when we do that, we will ALWAYS suffer the consequences of that disobedience or sin. We may not like God’s laws; we may want to reject God’s laws, but that decision will always bring about results that we will not enjoy.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE ABANDON THE WAYS OF THE LORD? In our Old Testament lesson of Habakkuk 1 and 2, we see where our hearts turn when we rebel against God’s laws

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<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 282, #847)

and go our own way. The Book of Habakkuk was written “near the end of the seventh century B.C, at a time when the Babylonians were in power. Habakkuk was deeply disturbed by the violence of these cruel people, and asked the Lord, ‘So why are You silent while they destroy people who are more righteous than they are?’ (1:13)” (pg. 1016, *Good News Bible*). God lets Habakkuk know what the consequences will be for these people since they have abandoned God’s ways. But this book also gives us a look at what we do when WE abandon the ways of the Lord. And the consequences are the same for us as for them.

First, We focus on gaining material possessions and power. Our whole life becomes surrounded by what we can get for ourselves, and from others if necessary, because life becomes all about what we have. Habakkuk 2:9-11 let us know, however, that by doing so, we bring ruin upon ourselves when life becomes all about wealth and possessions and violence. Even if we try to “*make our homes safe from harm and danger,*” the Lord says, “*You are doomed!*” (2:9). It’s one of the consequences of sin.

But we also Turn to our own devices, our own wisdom when we abandon the ways of the Lord. We use our own limited wisdom and our own knowledge, and we turn to create our own laws that often enslave others into doing what we want done. We ignore the knowledge and wisdom of the Lord and we often turn to crime and murder just to get what we want to satisfy our desire for wealth and power. But we fail to realize that nothing we build on our own will ever last – it all comes to destruction when we don’t have God’s ways in us. Again, when we do this, God tells us, “*You are doomed!*” (2:12).

When we abandon the ways of the Lord, it’s not long before We lose respect and dignity toward others. We begin to look at ourselves as being better than those around us, and in anger, “*we humiliate and disgrace our neighbors...*” (2:15) making them look shameful, rather than treating them with honor. And as we put people down as having less value than we have, we treat them as though they are expendable, disgraceful creatures who deserve to be used and abused. But God tells us that in these actions “*You are doomed?*” (2:15).

And when we abandon the ways of the Lord, we begin to worship other things or people as being

our gods. Within us there is an innate need to worship something, and if it is not going to be the God of the universe, we end up making our own gods. In essence, We turn to idols to guide us throughout our lives. Things of metal, or wood, or stone that we create become our gods and we focus on them to give us meaning and purpose. But we also turn to entertainment, pleasure and convenience to guide our lives; but they are just as empty as any other idol. Movie stars, spouses, lovers, sports teams, political figures, historical icons or buildings, cars, airplanes, boats, trains, and even worship centers can become the idols in our lives as we focus our whole lives on them. And God tells us, “*You are doomed!*” (2:19) because we put our confidence in something that cannot save us.

Do you begin to see the situation? When we abandon the ways of the Lord, our lives are doomed to destruction because we have turned away from the Only One Who Can Give Us LIFE! Our lives become and remain empty, unfulfilled, and destined to destruction because we have rebelled against God’s ways and have told God to adjust to our way. Sorry folks; It just doesn’t work that way. “*The Lord is in His holy Temple...*” (2:20), and He is the One Who calls the shots. It is His laws that are constant and true. It is in following Him and HIM ALONE that brings us life.

So WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE **HOLD FAST TO THE LORD**? Here we get the answers from 2 Thessalonians 1. The Apostle Paul wrote to the people of the church in Thessalonica, “pointing out that before Christ returns, evil and wickedness will reach a climax under the leadership of a mysterious figure called ‘the Wicked One,’ who would be opposed to Christ” (Good News Bible, pg. 279). Yet Paul encourages those who are followers of Jesus to continue to stand firm in their faith and follow the ways of the Lord, holding fast to the One who is in control of all things.

Paul tells us that We receive grace and peace through our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:2). Now let me explain these two terms for you. Grace is “unmerited favor.” That means that we get God’s love given to us even though we are evil and turn away from His ways. No matter what we do, no matter what we say, God will always love us, but that doesn’t mean that He will allow us to be with Him beyond this life. God has given us the freedom of choice as to whether or not we will follow Him and

obey His ways. God does not force us to obey Him, but invites us to do so. Grace is God's love for us, even though we sin against Him and do horrible things against each other. We make the choice of what will happen to us when this life is over. We choose heaven or hell by what we do with Jesus with regard to following Him or not. So abundant grace is given to those who follow God's ways, and God forgives us of our sin as we claim Jesus as our Savior who died for us on the cross and took the penalty for our sin upon Himself. He freely gave His life to pay the penalty of sin so that we could have life in Him.

Peace, then, is the confidence we have in Jesus, that our sins have been atoned for, and that we are able to start over brand new in God's sight. We no longer have to worry about doing enough to earn our way into heaven (that doesn't work anyway). We gain peace knowing that Jesus has already made a way for us to come back into a relationship with God the Father. We can rest our minds, with no guilt plaguing us, that we have a place with Jesus in the Father's house, having been redeemed, restored and forgiven of the sins we commit. Grace and peace are ours when we decide to let Jesus be our Savior and Lord.

When we hold fast to our faith in the Lord, We grow in faith despite the hardships around us (2 Thess. 1:3-4). As we come to know that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6), we grow in our confidence that no matter what we face here on this earth, nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:38-39). When life gets overwhelming, and we are surrounded by trials and troubles, Jesus assures us that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). And He promised to give us the strength and courage to endure all that comes to us and to guide us in the truth. And we are promised that all of our needs will be supplied to us so that we might continue to work for the Lord (Philippians 4:19). As we let God be God for us and follow His ways on a daily basis, we can let go of all the worries and fears that surround us.

When we hold fast to the Lord, we find that God fulfills our desire for goodness and completes our work of faith. As we live in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, "*the name of our Lord Jesus will receive glory from you, and you from Him, by the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Thess.

1:12). If we diligently live for the Lord, He will use all of our work to present His goodness and love to those around us so that they might become attracted to Him by the way that we live.

But a big question that gets asked all the time is, **IS IT TOO LATE FOR ANYONE?** Is there ever a time when we can look at a person and say beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are going to hell? As long as we have life and breath it is never too late. Last minute, death-bed conversions have happened, assuring that person of Salvation in Jesus Christ. We cannot know the time that God will work in the life of a person to bring them around to choose Jesus as their Savior. But if God works with those who follow Him and blesses their lives abundantly while they live for Him, why wait until the last minute to find Life? Why not come to know Him early in your life and seek His ways throughout your life so that you might be blessed?

However, Salvation comes only to those who turn away from the world and follow the Lord. As long as we decide to turn from our own wickedness and choose to follow Jesus, we will be saved. There is no age limit for this, only humility of mind that helps us to see the futility of our own ways and the eternal blessings of the Lord's ways.

You see, **JESUS MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.** And we see that in the Gospel lesson today of Luke 19:1-10. Here we see the dramatic conversion of a man named Zacchaeus. Listen to how it unfolds. (READ Luke 19:1-10).

In the first few verses of Luke 19 we see what kind of life Zacchaeus had before Jesus came to town. In a statement we could say that his heart was 3 sizes too small. Zacchaeus Was focused on himself. He was looking for power and wealth and pretty much looking out only for his own personal interests. As a tax collector, he had the power of the Roman government behind him to make people pay their taxes to the State. Of course, to make a living, he had to add a certain percentage to that tax. His government benefit was pretty small, so he had to exact more money from the folks he was in charge of. His whole life was focused on getting money, and he became rich from the earnings of his fellow Jews. This made Zacchaeus very popular, but not very likeable. Everyone hated him. But he

didn't seem to mind as long as they kept paying his salary through the paying of their taxes.

It seems that Zacchaeus had become so focused on the things of this world that he Had given up on his own faith tradition, rejecting God's way of life for his own way of living. He no longer cared about his own people, but focused on himself. Any self-respecting Jew would never conspire to work for the enemy. He was a traitor to his own people because the lure of riches and possessions was too great, and though Zacchaeus was very rich, he was the loneliest person in Jericho.

Not only did Zacchaeus have a heart that was 3 sizes too small, but his own stature was, too. Being small in stature often drives individuals to do things to be recognized or noticed. Until Jesus came to town he must have felt even smaller, all due to his choices to abandon God's ways.

Yet, in the later verses, we see a different Zacchaeus after Jesus visited his home. He must have heard about Jesus from the people of Jericho, enough to get his interest up in seeing who He was. So Zacchaeus makes a decision that forever changed his life – he ran on ahead of the procession and climbed a tree so that he could see over the crowd and get a look at Jesus. That inner desire for something greater drove him to seek Jesus, and his life was transformed.

He Welcomed Jesus into his home, especially since Jesus invited Himself to join him there. And as he entertained Jesus, he was able to see something that he had never considered before. If Jesus was truly the Messiah, the Son of God, and He thought enough to come to HIS home, maybe He was someone to listen to. Zacchaeus experienced the great love of God for the first time in his life.

So changed by the great show of the love of Jesus, Zacchaeus Repented of his wrongdoings and promised to make amends to everyone he had ever cheated, up to four times the amount. Suddenly the riches he had weren't so important any more. Suddenly his heritage became more important than his position, and we see that his heart grew 3 sizes that day. He Received Salvation as he claimed Jesus into his life.

But The town's people couldn't believe their eyes. Why would Jesus decide to go to the house of a sinner? They thought Zacchaeus was way beyond hope. They had given up on him and thought

that it was too late for him to change his life. In their eyes Zacchaeus was the lowest of the low and deserved every bit of their scorn and disgrace. They were so judgmental that it never entered their minds that they, too, were sinners in need of God's grace and peace.

We're not told in the Scriptures what Zacchaeus did after that day with Jesus. Did he quit his tax collector job? Did he follow Jesus? Did he become an evangelist much like the woman at the well at Sychar, or the demon possessed man at Gerasa? Did the people finally receive him as one of their own, a Jew seeking the Savior? Nothing more is heard about Zacchaeus outside of the words we see in Luke 19:9, "*Jesus said to him, 'Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham.'*" All we know is that when Jesus came into his life, Zacchaeus received Him, welcomed Him in, believed in Him, and trusted Him. And Jesus made all the difference to him.

His life that was once broken by abandoning God's way was now restored and renewed because he changed his heart. He allowed Jesus to come into his home and His presence made all the difference. I often wonder what Mrs. Zacchaeus thought about what he was doing and what he offered. But that's a different story. The greatest verse in this whole passage opens up the love of God to all people, "*The Son of Man came to see and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10)

That's wonderful news for us because when we take a step back from the account in Luke 19, we can begin to see ourselves in the picture. Each of us has turned to our own ways, and abandoned God's ways. We have all had a time in our life when we rebelled against the laws of God. We have all had the time when we told God we want things OUR way, not His way. We are all faced with the lure of riches and possessions, power and position, ease and security. Our world is very sneaky to try to incorporate us into its ways that leads us away from God's ways, but much like the law of gravity being constant and true, our decisions to walk away from the Lord bring huge consequences to us. And the hope is that soon we will be able to see the error of our ways and begin to seek Jesus.

But none of us is not without hope, as we see in the case of Zacchaeus. When everyone around might look at us and think there is no way that God could ever forgive the sins we have committed,

Jesus demonstrates the complete opposite and reaches out to us with hope and life and grace and peace. And we can easily look at others and judge them, too, as being worst sinners than we are and refuse to give them hope. But we are the ones that need to make the choice in our own hearts as to whether we will follow Jesus or follow our own way. Jesus can transform our own lives so that our hearts that are 3 sizes too small, might become resized, too.

Jesus comes to each one of us, seeking to make a difference in our life. He doesn't push His way in. He doesn't force us to believe in Him. He doesn't prevent us from walking away from Him, if that is our choice. No Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, the ones who have abandoned God's ways, who have decided to live life on their own terms, and stand before God adamant that His ways are all wrong.

And if by chance we decide to follow Jesus, will we grow our faith enough to live in the midst of this world as living witnesses to an alternative that brings life? Will we reach out to those who society deems so lost that there is no hope for them? Will we keep our faith so protected in the midst of our family or within the safety of the walls of our own homes that no one ever sees the difference that Jesus makes in those who seek Him and follow Him?

There is a world of Zacchaeus' out there who need to know who Jesus is. There are so many who have blatantly abandoned God's ways. If Jesus came to see and to save the lost, as His followers, aren't we also to go and do likewise?

*“Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God – what is good and is pleasing to Him and is perfect”* (Romans 12:2). Let Jesus make a difference in you so that others might see that difference and ask you how they can have what you have – the Son of God as Savior in their hearts.

Let's pray. Father, as we come now before Your Communion Table, help us to humble ourselves under Your mighty hand, that we might let Jesus make a huge difference in us. He came to

seek and to save the lost, and that includes us as well as those around us. Give us the courage to live for You every day of our life so that You may complete our work of faith by following all Your ways. Guide us to open our hearts to let Jesus come in and renew and restore and redeem us from all our sin so, that we might be with You when this life is finished. Let our hearts grow 3 sizes today so that we might live for You. This we pray in Jesus precious and holy Name. Amen.