

Introduction:

- A. Within a week the whole world could change and the people gathering around Jesus sensed it. It was as if the nation was on adrenaline. Jesus was approaching Jericho, not far from the Jordan River, an ancient and beautiful city, with streets scented by balsams and shaded by sycamores. King Herod's wondrous winter palace was there. From Jericho Jesus and his disciples would make the arduous last leg of their journey to Jerusalem for the Passover, ascending 3300 ft. in about 17 miles.

As they approached Jericho a blind man cried for attention, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" and Jesus stopped and healed him. He followed Jesus, shouting his praises to God. And Luke says, *"When all the people saw it, they also praised God."* *Wait till he gets to Jerusalem!* is what they were all thinking. *Just wait till the Passover next week.* Because then Jesus, the Son of David, might well be shown to be the Messiah himself! And here he was!

- B. Not far away, in the Roman section of the city, Zacchaeus, left his comfortable home and made his way to the main thoroughfare through the middle of Jericho. Turn to **Luke 19:1-4...** Tax collectors everywhere have an image problem but the Jewish tax collectors served Israel's enemy Rome at the expense of their own people, and got rich doing it. Zacchaeus had apparently bought the *chief tax collector's* position which, I assume, meant he got a percentage of all the taxes collected in southern Judea. Zacchaeus was a Jew in name only. He was not only short; he was lower than low. Even the worst of Jews looked down on him. If ever there was a man without a country it was Zacchaeus.
- C. So here is Zacchaeus, probably the wealthiest Jew in the city, despised by his own people, so determined to see Jesus that he shimmies up a sycamore-fig tree. **So why would a man like that want to see Jesus so badly?**

- D. Jumping into the story as we are, you might not realize that this story is a climax of all Luke has told us so far. The next stop is Jerusalem, and the last week of Jesus' life. This story is the climax of Jesus' ministry—the very essence. The story ends in v.10 with the great summary of Jesus' entire ministry: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." That is the summary of Luke 1-18, and the story of Zacchaeus is the last climactic chapter. This story is the very definition of what Jesus came to do.
- E. I've been reading Luke this week as part of our Community Bible Experience and I've noticed that tax collectors just keep popping up. We first see them in **Luke 3** when John was baptizing people in the Jordan River, only five or six miles from Jericho. *"Even tax collectors came to be baptized,"* Luke wrote. I wonder if Zacchaeus had been there. He most certainly knew about it. Later in **Lk 7:29** tells us something interesting: ***"All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John."*** So their hearts were ready. They were sensitized to their sin and looking for the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Luke tells us in **ch.5** that Jesus chose a tax collector, Levi or Matthew, to be one of his disciples. People noticed that! Especially other tax collectors!

In **Lk 15** Jesus told the stories of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son surrounded by *"tax collectors and sinners."*

And in the chapter just before this, **Lk 18**, Jesus told a story of a tax collector and a Pharisee who both went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee bragged to God of his goodness. *"The tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.'" And Jesus said, "I tell you... this is the man who went home justified before God."*

And now, Zacchaeus. Don't you get the feeling that his interest in Jesus was no coincidence? It never is.

I. THE LORD PREPARES PEOPLE WHOM WE'D NEVER EXPECT TO LOOK FOR JESUS

- A. Every salvation story is wonderfully unique, but God prepares each person just as he did Zacchaeus. One way or another, he sensitizes a person to their sin and their distance from God. They have a growing awareness of Jesus, maybe from a friend's testimony, or from reading the Bible, or memories of childhood. Not one of us here came to Jesus out of the blue. And not one of us made the first move. **God always seeks us out first.** The Lord *searches* for lost people.
- B. And ever since Jesus returned to the Father, God almost always uses Christians in various places along the line to draw lost people to himself. Sometimes we are aware of it. Sometimes we aren't. **We are all God's search party.**

Vv.5-6... This was a stunning turn of events. For one thing, I doubt Zacchaeus had ever, in all his life, entertained anyone remotely holy at his table; certainly *never* a rabbi! And now Jesus chose *him*—picked out of the tree like ripe fruit! Of all the people in Jericho, *no one* would have been less likely to host Jesus. And Jesus chose him.

We've gotten used to the harrumphing of the Pharisees when Jesus paid attention to tax collectors and sinners. But in this case, "All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.'" Not one person in that whole crowd liked this part of the story. **For people expecting the Messiah, this was a debacle!** Why? Because it looked like Zacchaeus's horrible reputation didn't matter to Jesus. Bad people shouldn't be given an iota of respectability. It seemed the rabbi Jesus was ignoring just what kind of lowlife Zacchaeus was.

Talk about deflating the moment! Suddenly no one was praising God any more. No one in that whole crowd was smiling. This was no way for the Messiah to act. This was a deal breaker. But that's what Jesus does, still to this day.

II. JESUS BEFRIENDS THE VERY PEOPLE WE'D EXPECT HIM TO REJECT

- A. Notice two surprises: First, Jesus spotted him up there in the tree, the way you spot a familiar face in a crowd. Jesus didn't choose Zacchaeus at random. And second, Jesus called him by name. And no one was ever more stunned to hear his name called than Zacchaeus was that day!

Jesus looks for someone personally. He's looking for a particular person. And when we serve him, he invests that privilege in us. There are particular people in our lives for whom Jesus is searching. It may be someone whose heart is so grimy and germy you don't want to touch them, but Jesus is looking for them. It may be someone who is lonely and outcast. Someone too small to be easily seen. So when we **see** someone—when they stand out to us for some reason, when we keep thinking about them, or keep running into them, that may well be the Spirit of God identifying an unlikely candidate for grace.

- B. What Jesus did here is interesting. He *imposed* himself upon Zacchaeus. *"Come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."* Jesus invited himself into Zacchaeus's life. Look more closely and you may see in this story the shepherd looking for the lost sheep, the woman scrounging in the dark corners for her precious coin, this the Father seeing his son a long way off and running to meet him. *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* **Before Jesus invites us into his life he invites himself into ours.** And when your heart is ready, no guest could ever be more welcome than Jesus.
- C. Right there and then, Zacchaeus became a disciple of Jesus. What did Jesus say to him? We're not told. Apparently, Jesus' words here weren't the point. **But**

Jesus' coming was a gospel sermon to Zacchaeus, "I am your friend. You matter to me. I want to be with you. In my book, you don't have to be an outcast. I know your name. I plan to be your guest." Zacchaeus did not so much turn from his sin as he turned to Jesus. **When Jesus became his guest, Zacchaeus became Jesus' follower.**

- D. Jesus still does that through us. When we step into the life of someone whom Jesus has been preparing, we can bring the very friendship of God to them. We take our cues from Jesus and then we invite ourselves in to their lives. "You know, I'd like to get to know you better. Could we have lunch?" "I'd love to taste some of your Indian food." "Could I come to one of your games?" "Do you have room in your book club?" Our faith tells us that God is up to more than we can see.

V.8... What do you think Zacchaeus looked like when he said this? Was this a man defeated, handing over his loot to the victor? Or was this a man who just figured out grace? A man who grinned like a man just set free?

III. JESUS UTTERLY CHANGES SINNERS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

- A. This man parted so happily with his money because meeting Jesus changed him. To this day, when someone welcomes Jesus they give up their long-nurtured anger, or their high pride, or their way of measuring success; their wealth and status. Some leave their jobs and others embrace the work they've always despised. In short, **they reorient to God**, and whatever that requires, they embrace.
- B. When Jesus graces someone's life wrongs are righted and righteousness is embraced. Giving half of his wealth to the poor was an act of extraordinary righteousness. Repaying those he'd cheated was a necessary act of repentance. He wasn't trying to *prove* anything to Jesus. He couldn't help himself.

- C. Vv.9-10.... I doubt we can imagine how wonderful it was for Zacchaeus to hear Jesus say, *“this man, too, is a son of Abraham.”* Jesus brought that outcast back into the great family of God. He was restored. The prodigal given a welcome-home feat. God sought out Zacchaeus with salvation because God sent Jesus out to invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” to his feast, and Zacchaeus was more than happy to come. This man, disowned by his people, the Jews, and for good reason, had been found. He had been as good as dead, and now he was alive again.
- D. Jesus did not come to upgrade our morals or to improve our spirituality or to give us a new philosophy of life. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost. And Zacchaeus is the poster child.

I know you’re about ready for the benediction, and so were the people in Jericho that day, but there’s a conclusion to this story.

V.11... So people thought that within a week or so Jesus the Messiah would usher in the new kingdom of God. *Not so fast,* Jesus says. *Let me tell you a story you’re going to need to remember.* **Vv.12-27...** Jesus just does not seem to want to win friends and influence people!

There’s more here than we have time to sort through, but why would Jesus tell this story from Zacchaeus’s porch? Why would he say, *“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost,”* then immediately tell a story about a king who has gone away and left his servants to invest his wealth?

I’ll tell you this: this parable is *not* about money. It is *not* about our talents or doing our best for Jesus. **The treasure our King has entrusted to us is his grace—seeking and saving the lost.** He gave you some of that treasure and he gave me some. He has dispersed grace to us in order for us to invest it in people like Zacchaeus. What Zacchaeus did with his money is what we are to do with Jesus’ grace.

IV. YOU AND I DARE NOT HIDE AWAY THE SAVING GRACE OF JESUS

- A. On the one hand, if we hide away the grace Jesus has shown us and never invest his saving grace in other lives, we belie our profession of faith. Had Zacchaeus continued to hoard his wealth no one—certainly not Jesus—would have considered him a follower of Jesus. Jesus' visit to his life would have been in vain.
- B. On the other hand, when we invest Christ's grace in the lives he puts in our path, that salvation gift not only enriches his kingdom, but enriches our lives as well. No one who invests God's grace in people's lives ever comes out the poorer for it. We always get more than we bargained for; if not here, then certainly in heaven.

CONCLUSION

We come to Village Church to be nourished on God's grace, to explore its diamond-faceted dimensions. We are the heirs of Zacchaeus, the investment of those whom Jesus sought and saved. We gather here so that we might embody God's grace together. To live out this good news in sickness, trouble and sorrow.

We go out from here looking to befriend lost people in Jesus' name, people who don't have a prayer without him. We bring Jesus to them. And whenever we can we invite them home. Here, to our home, our family, and our Father.