

Meeting Jesus

Luke 19:1-10

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

This past week, for Spring Break, our family had the opportunity to go on a Disney Cruise. We loved it. The chance to get away, the food, the entertainment – it's a lot of fun. One of my favorite parts of the trip – this was especially true for my girls when they were younger – NOT so much anymore, but I love watching all the kids meet their favorite Disney characters.

I mean just think about HOW big of a deal this is. It's excitement overload for these kids. This princess or this character that they have only seen on TV is now there for them to meet, talk to, and take a picture with...there are some long lines with parents waiting semi-patiently for their children to meet the person of their dreams!

There's an app you download for the trip and it tells you all the different times and places you can go on the ship to meet your favorite characters and as you can imagine all the little princesses on the ship get dressed up to meet their favorite princess – it's awesome.

I actually got to meet a pretty cool character this week and got my picture with him – this is “Hook Hand” from Tangled (**SHOW IMAGE**). I was so proud of this moment we had together! We had a nice conversation right there at dinner one evening – it was great.

Seeing the long lines and meeting these famous characters sets up perfect the passage we're looking at today. When I was thinking about what to preach this weekend, I knew we were preaching a Palm Sunday message next week and then of course Easter the following week.

So, I thought let's look at what Jesus was doing two weeks prior to Easter...a week prior to Palm Sunday and let's preach that – and THAT is when Jesus is in Jericho. And it was here in Jericho that a man who wanted to see Jesus so bad, got the opportunity of a lifetime...NOT just to see him, but to meet him and better than that, got to have him over to his house to have dinner with him as well.

I'm calling the message today: **Meeting Jesus**

Luke 19:1-10 – “He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” ⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have

defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.”¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Now, I’ve been preaching for 25+ years and I was looking back through my files this week and realized that I have NEVER – that I’m aware of preached a message on this passage...can’t believe it!

This is one of the most well-known passages in all of the Bible. It’s the story of a man named Zacchaeus getting to meet Jesus. It’s a powerful story of how one meeting with Jesus can change a person’s life forever.

Luke 19:1 – “He entered Jericho and was passing through.”

Now, Jericho is the last major city you get to before you arrive in Jerusalem. It’s about 18 miles Northeast of Jerusalem. It was a large resort city at the time of Jesus, with a population of around 100,000 people.

Herod had built a theatre there and had made this city sort of his winter home. It was actually known as “The City of Roses” because of the many rose gardens and palm trees that filled the city. The word “Jericho” actually means “fragrance”. It was known for the pleasing aroma that filled its air!

You know the city of Jericho because it’s the first city Israel came to when they entered the Promised Land. “Joshua fought the battle around Jericho...and the walls came tumbling down.”

This is a significant city in the Bible and as it relates to the story we are looking at today, the Bible tells us that Jesus was just “passing through” Jericho on his way to Jerusalem.

Now keep in mind, this was the climax of Jesus’s ministry. He was at “rock star” status at this point. He’s been teaching for three years...healing people of their diseases...challenging the authority of the religious leaders.

Most recently he has raised Lazarus from the dead and you better believe that kind of news traveled fast! People knew who Jesus was...at a minimum they had at least heard his name or rumors about him.

The belief that he was Israel’s Messiah is gaining some ground and people want to catch a glimpse of this man they have heard so much about!

This is why it makes perfect sense that a man like Zacchaeus who is short in the first place is having a hard time seeing Jesus. The crowds are big and he is small.

Luke 19:2-3 – “And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.”³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.

In two verses here, we are given four important details about this man, Zacchaeus.

First, is that he was a “chief tax collector”. This means he was a hated man. Tax collectors as you are probably aware in the times of the Bible were considered the worst of the worst. They were sell-outs...they were cheats!

They worked for the Roman government, collecting taxes from their own people (the Jewish people), but what they would do is add to the tax rate so they could skim off top and get theirs – and everyone knew what they were doing!

They were hated...and what we see here is that Zacchaeus was a “chief tax collector” so he was essentially over all of the tax collectors in Jericho which was one of the top three cities for collecting taxes because of its size and because of its location being on a major trade route.

So, you can see why “rich” is a way to describe him. He is skimming of the top of those who are skimming of the top and as a result he ain’t hurting when it comes to resources and wealth. He’s got the goods!

What he doesn’t have...at least I don’t think he has, is true friends – he’s got people to hang out with...people to give him company every now and then - other tax collectors mainly, but other than that no one is going to give him the time of day AND I don’t think he has a real sense of purpose either.

I say this because the scripture gives us a third description of Zacchaeus in (v. 3a) – that he was “seeking to see who Jesus was”.

It causes me to ask this question, “Why would Zacchaeus care about seeing Jesus?”

Maybe he just wanted to see who this miracle-working rabbi was...check out what he was all about like he was some circus sideshow, but I’ve got to think it was more than that. I think...and this is just my interpretation and reading in between the lines. I think Zacchaeus was lonely and empty on the inside and deep down he thought Jesus was different.

- Perhaps he had heard that one of Jesus’s disciples (Matthew) was a former tax collector and that piqued his curiosity...
- Perhaps he had heard that Jesus took a special interest in “tax collectors and sinners” and often would hang out with them and have dinner with them (Mark 2, Luke 15) – who knows? Maybe he would have dinner with me (wishful thinking!)?
- Perhaps he had just discovered like so many have that after having it all, that wasn’t giving him the peace of mind and heart that he thought it would. All his wealth and resources wasn’t easing a guilty conscience...

I think Zacchaeus was on a search for something MORE even if he didn't know what it was. This is the only reason I can come up with as to why he worked so hard to see Jesus!

And he had to work to see him because of the crowd gathered that day and the fourth description we are given – he was (v. 3b) – “small in stature”. He was short!

And so, look at what he does...again, there is something deeper going on here in Zacchaeus's life. He runs ahead.

NOTE: wealthy people in the days of the Bible didn't run anywhere. Like today, wealthy people played it cool! They don't run to you, you run to them!

Zacchaeus...why's he running to see anyone?! But he didn't just run...he climbs a tree in order to get a glimpse of Jesus.

Luke 19:4 – “So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.”

Now, when we go on our trips to Israel, depending on which way the wind is blowing when we are there...Jericho is in Palestinian controlled land, you can go by there and see the ruins of the oldest city in the world – Jericho.

When you are there, you also drive by the city square, and this tree is fenced off...it's known as “Zacchaeus Sycamore Tree” (**SHOW IMAGE**). The tree is over 2,000 years old, and it is the traditional site of where this scene in Luke 19 takes place.

Now, I LOVE this. If you grew up in church, this story and song probably like me, captured you as a child. Here is this wee-little man climbing up a tree to see Jesus! And what did Jesus say when he saw him?

“Zacchaeus, you come down! For I'm going to your house today!”

Luke 19:5 – “And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”

That word, “must” that Jesus uses right here - it means “constrained...obligated”. It's the same word used in John 3:3 when Jesus says in order to enter the Kingdom, you “must” be born again...there's a sense of urgency here!

Jesus sees Zacchaeus...and don't miss this – calls him by name! And says, “hurry and come down, I MUST stay at your house today. What?!”

(v. 1) tells us that Jesus was just passing through Jericho. I don't know about you, but when I'm passing through somewhere this means I'm not staying for long. I don't know if his plans

originally called for him to stay in the city, but upon seeing Zacchaeus, he made the decision to prolong his stay at least for a little bit so he could go to his house.

Now, just a couple of insights here before moving on. First of all, let's notice:

1. Jesus sees Zacchaeus

Pastor Philip Ryken notes this in his commentary on this passage and I think it's worth mentioning here, Zacchaeus didn't stop for Jesus. Jesus stopped for Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus worked his way up a tree, but Jesus didn't have to stop and address him. But he did! In the midst of a huge crowd of people, Jesus saw Zacchaeus and stopped to talk to him.

2. Jesus knows Zacchaeus

Notice, Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name! I wonder when the last time Zacchaeus had heard his name when there wasn't an expletive attached to it?

Think about the power of hearing your name called. We love the sound of our own name. **Dale Carnegie** in his book, *How To Win Friends and Influence People* wrote: **"Remember that a person's name is to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language"**.

We love hearing the sound of our name...someone calls on us. Remember when you were in school and the teacher was taking roll? You were just waiting for your name to be called out!

Well, here Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name and this represented the fact that Jesus knew him. He knew Zacchaeus better than Zacchaeus knew himself!

- Jesus knew Zacchaeus's life...
- Jesus knew all that Zacchaeus was doing and involved in...
- Jesus knew about his shortcomings and failures...

And yet that didn't stop Jesus from being interested in Zacchaeus and wanting to spend time with him!

3. Jesus accepts Zacchaeus

Jesus tells Zacchaeus, "I've got to stay at your house today." We notice what Jesus said, but also notice what he didn't say!

- He didn't immediately call him out for being a cheat...
- He didn't start in on a lecture about him taking advantage of people...
- He didn't go right in on him telling him everything he was doing was wrong...

Instead, he called him by name and said, "Let's hang out! I want to spend some time with you, Zacchaeus."

I want to pause here in the message and just make a point of application that can't wait to the end. You do know that whoever you are right now, what was true for Zacchaeus is true for you.

You can just switch your name out for Zacchaeus in your notes!

Meaning...Jesus sees you! He sees what you're walking through and while you are sitting in a large crowd just like this today, I promise you based on the testimony of scripture, he sees you.

But he doesn't JUST see you. He knows you. He knows what's going on in your world! He knows what's got you down...he knows what you're thinking. Like Zacchaeus, he knows you better than you know yourself and if you will listen with ears of faith today, you'll hear him calling your name!

Tommy Walker wrote a song in the early 2000's we used to sing called, *He Knows My Name*. The lyrics:

**I have a Maker
He formed my heart
Before even time began
My life was in His hands**

**He knows my name
He knows my every thought
He sees each tear that falls
And hears me when I call**

Jesus sees you. Jesus knows you. And I'm here to tell you today, Jesus is interested in you. He wants to spend time with you. He wants to change your life, just like he did Zacchaeus...and he wants to do it TODAY - "I must stay out your house today!"

And hear this...don't let this just slip by: If you are here today or watching online and outside a relationship with Jesus...if you are looking at your life right now and have:

- more baggage...
- more junk in your life...
- carrying with you more shame...
- feeling more hopeless than anyone in the room...

I'm here to tell you if Jesus was physically present today and could spend time with anyone, he'd stop, call you by name and want to spend his time with you!

You say, "No way"...and I'm telling you this is the point of the gospel...it's the point of this story being in the Bible! Jesus, the son of God is interested in you. He loves you – it's what we call "Amazing Grace".

The question is, “Will you open up your home...i.e. your heart to Jesus?”

Zacchaeus, didn’t hesitate. When Jesus called his name, he (v. 6) “hurried, came down and received him (Jesus) joyfully.” And guess what? The people in the crowd...they despised both of them for it.

Luke 19:6-7 – “So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”

The audacity of Jesus to spend time with sinners! You realize the only people who tend to get upset about a church or a person reaching someone who is far away from God are people who either don’t think they need Jesus OR forgot they were once far away from Jesus?

Champion Forest, we can’t ever get this way! We’ve got to ALWAYS remember WHY Jesus came...he came to save the lost!

Luke 19:10 – “For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.”

This was the mission of God, and we now share in this mission. The moment we begin to think that once were saved, the mission of Jesus is complete and now it’s just about a being on a personal journey of spiritual growth with him, we’ve missed it!

The moment we begin to think that the church is a museum for the saved instead of a hospital for the sinner is the moment we begin to shrivel and die.

Reaching the lost...spending time with those who are far away so that we can introduce them to Jesus is the VERY reason we are here! If it wasn’t, Jesus would have just taken us to be with him when we trusted in him – he didn’t though!

He left us here to be his ambassadors...to be his missionaries...to be his emissaries that share in this calling of reaching the lost!

I’m so proud of so many of our people who went on mission this past week for their Spring Break!

- We had a group of students that went on mission to Galveston, New York and to England sharing the gospel...
- We had a group go to Durango, Mexico on mission and saw nearly 150 people trust in Christ...
- I got word this week that through a ministry we support called For All Mankind Movement or (FAMM), in one province in Nepal that CF is directly giving to, we have witnessed 1,756 Adults publicly baptized (104 in just January of this year!) AND 220 Churches planted (11 in January of 2024!)

God will bless our church with his presence if we will commit to keeping the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is prayer – seeking after God with all our heart and continuing to have heart for the lost.

Illus. Card in my journal – “Christ’s name and the lost written on my heart”

If we ever put seeing those who are far away from Jesus on the back-burner as a church, it’ll be the first step to us becoming a mausoleum – we exist for those not yet reached for Jesus!

I can take you to dead churches all over North America and all over Europe that were once thriving churches, but are no more because the gospel stopped being proclaimed and the lost stopped being a priority.

That can’t be us, Champion Forest...it’s why when Easter comes, this is a chance for us to highlight reaching the lost.

Illus. Easter promo – It’s why we put yard signs up...it’s why we pass out door hangers...it’s why we hand out cards in our work places and give them to people when we go out to eat. We want to get the word out because we really believe this message has the power to change lives!

We really believe that Jesus sees people...that Jesus knows people...that Jesus accepts people AS they are, but check this: he doesn’t leave people where they are! His grace has a way of changing people forever!

This is how it went with Zacchaeus. One meeting with Jesus changed him forever!

Luke 19:8-10 – “And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Zacchaeus’s actions here is what we call repentance. See, in (v. 6) Zacchaeus received Jesus into his home. In (v. 8) he receives Jesus into his heart.

How do we know this? The same way we know anyone has asked Jesus into their heart - repentance.

Repentance is a change of mind, emotion and will...it’s a change of heart, attitude and behavior. It’s this idea of going one way, but u-turning and going in the opposite direction.

And this is exactly what Zacchaeus does. He was going in a direction that cheated people...stole from people...took advantage of people. But after meeting Jesus and experiencing his love and grace, he u-turns and instead of taking...look at what he does!

Half his goods, he gives to the poor. The law only required Zacchaeus to pay back 20% to those he defrauded. What does he do?

He restores it four-fold – that's 300% interest...and in the language of the Bible – “I restore it” – means it's resolved...the decision he needs to make has already been made (present tense) and the act is as good as done.

Jesus hears this, and says, “Today, salvation has come to his house...” Repentance is the proof of salvation!

You can tell me all day long you know Jesus, but the proof is found in a life of repentance...a life that has been changed!

In saving Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus became a true child of Abraham (v. 9). It wasn't about race or ethnic status (being a Jew), but instead being a son of Abraham was to be born again by faith...that's what makes one a true child of Abraham.

The scripture says, Abraham believed (Gen. 15:6) and it was credited to him righteousness”. When we believe, we become true children of Abraham.

There are so many elements to this story that I love...it's like peeling back an onion once you begin studying it...there is so much here!

First, you have this setting in Jericho. We know Jericho because Joshua (Old Testament), whose name means “God saves” marched around the city and physical walls came down.

Here, you have Jesus (New Testament) – his name comes from the word “Joshua” meaning also “God saves”. When he comes in the city, physical walls didn't fall, but spiritual walls did!

You need some spiritual walls to fall in your life today:

- You need a relationship mended...
- You need an addiction broken...
- You need your sin covered...

Spend some time with Jesus, and just watch what happens!

Just look at the parallel that Luke gives us here. In (v. 5) we read, “...I must stay at your house today.” And in (v. 9) – in ONE meeting with Jesus, we are told “Today salvation has come to this house.”

You let Jesus come into your heart and life, and you will NOT be the same! Jesus changes lives...it's what he does!

My buddy, JD Lowrie preached this passage and he had some awesome insight. He said, Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus and just a couple of weeks later, Jesus would climb a different tree to save Zacchaeus.

Salvation – this is what it's all about. He came to seek and save the lost.

If you are here today and don't know Jesus in a personal way, you are lost...may not feel like it, but it's a spiritual reality. The word lost is also translated in the scripture as the word "perishing".

It's used in **John 3:16** – **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish** (won't be lost...ravaged...destroyed) **but have eternal life."**

Jesus sees you...he knows you...he's interested in you...and he came to seek and save you.

All you have to do, is be like Zacchaeus...

Illus. "If I could be like Mike" commercials

- 1. Get to Jesus**
- 2. Get to Repenting**

Well, be like Zacchaeus today. Welcome Jesus into your heart...all it takes is one meeting, and I promise you, he can change you forever.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.