

I'm Going to your House Today

The Testimony of Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

I love Mother's Day. It is an opportunity to honor our mothers, and to value women in general, for the great contribution and legacy they have given each of us. We men of Central Bible Church want to honor mothers and value women all the time, and throughout the year. But particularly on Mother's Day we want to express it publicly. Would all you women please stand so we men can honor you with our applause?

Jesus certainly honored his mother, valued women in general. Have you ever noticed how many of his miracles recounted in the Gospels affected women and their homes? My sermon today draws attention to the impact Jesus had on the lives of three women and their households. But the ministry of Jesus does not stop at the end of the Gospels. Jesus still changes us when we are willing to hear him say, as he said to Zacchaeus, "I'm Going to your House Today."

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' "

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

--Luke 19:1-10

One of the benefits we experience growing up in a local church is the various assortment of songs and rhymes which indelibly stamp the names of certain biblical characters upon the soft metal of our memories. You remember, don't you, this one:

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
And a wee little man was he.
He climbed up a sycamore tree,
For the Lord he wanted to see.*

*But as the Savior passed that way,
He looked up in the tree,
And he said,
“Zacchaeus, you come down,
For I’m going to your house today.*

I wonder, what drove Zacchaeus to climb that tree? What was his motivation? What compelled him? It is exceedingly unusual and totally uncanny to see a well-dressed, well-educated, well-established, well-heeled man at midday, publicly but shamelessly clamoring up a tree, crawling out onto its branches, and hanging onto its limbs. What led him to ignore embarrassment, disregard shame, reject ridicule and do something as uncharacteristic as climbing a tree for all to see?

A sermon I heard once by a Pastor Bailey explored that question. And, with your permission, I’d like to borrow from Pastor Bailey’s imagination, to investigate what might have been the events in Zacchaeus’ life that made him so curious and motivated. I think it is okay for us to use our imagination when we preach or teach from the events described in the Bible—as long as we make it plain we are speculating, and as long as the color of our imagination stays within the dark lines of what we know happened from the Bible. So with that caveat, I invite you to take a journey back to the world of Zacchaeus. And as we walk alongside Zacchaeus, I hope we will see how Jesus valued women enough to transform their lives and reconstruct their homes. **May we love Jesus more as we see what a difference Jesus makes.**

House #1 (The Woman with the Hemorrhage, Matthew 9:20-22)

If we are to travel with the tax collector Zacchaeus we will have to get up early. In his attempt to catch people still at home, he was up and out early. He pulled out his Day-Timer to check the names and addresses of the homes he planned to see that day. On this particular day, he had three collections to make.

As he came to his first address, he noticed it was an unkempt, dilapidated shanty, desperately in need of some paint and repairs. There was no sympathy coming from Zacchaeus. To him the only thing that mattered was the word **overdue** stamped by the person’s name. He knocked on the door.

As the woman opened the door, Zacchaeus grimaced as he recognized there was going to be a problem. The woman’s complexion was completely pale. It was as if all the blood had been drained from her face. Her lips were cracked; her cheekbones repulsively protruded from her gaunt face; and what hair she had left, was matted. Her face was wet with tears.

“I know who you are and why you’ve come. But Mr. Zacchaeus, I don’t have any way of paying my taxes. You see, for twelve years I’ve had a blood hemorrhage. In that time my

insurance was canceled, my husband divorced me, and my savings account is empty. I have pawned my jewelry and sold my furniture, and everything in my checking account is spent. But give me thirty days, just thirty days. All I need will happen within thirty days.”

Zacchaeus was caught between *greed and grace*. He said, “For some reason, I feel benevolent today. You have thirty days. But when I return, I want the taxes.” And as he walked away, he thought to himself, “Maybe I’ll have better luck at the next house.”

House #2 (The Woman Married to the Demoniac, Mark 5:1-20)

As Zacchaeus walked around the bend in the dirt road, there stood the second house. A woman stood in front of the house, staring into space. When he tried to speak to her, there was no response. Suddenly a blood-curdling scream shouted out from the distance. Zacchaeus whirled to see who had screamed. On the adjoining field, running nude between the headstones of the graveyard, screaming and cutting himself, was the silhouette of a man acting like a wild animal.

The woman broke her silence. “That used to be my husband. He was a good man. I’m still praying that someday he will be restored and return to his family. Some have suggested I should move on with my life, but I still love him. He’s the father of my children. I’m not sure if it will ever happen, because no man can tame him and no man can bind him. He calls himself Legion because he’s possessed by many demons.”

Now Zacchaeus was caught between *dollars and demons*. Not anxious to dialogue about demons, Zacchaeus put himself in reverse. Before the woman said anything about the past-due taxes, Zacchaeus said, “I’ll be back in your area in thirty days. Be prepared to pay upon my return.”

House #3 (The Widow Bereaved in Nain, Luke 7:11-15)

As he turned away, he looked in his Day-Timer to see there was one last house to visit. When he arrived at the address, there was a funeral spray hanging on the door—someone had died. But not even a family tragedy would stop hard-hearted Zacchaeus, so he knocked anyway. A woman veiled and dressed in black, answered the door.

“I know who you are and why you’ve come. Zacchaeus, my son died yesterday, and I’m on my way to the funeral. I had to use the tax money to bury my only son.” Zacchaeus said, “I’ve already given some of your neighbors thirty days. So I’ll be back in thirty days. Again Zacchaeus was trapped between *money and mercy*.

Revisiting the Homes

Thirty days passed quickly. As Zacchaeus left home at the crack of dawn, as he did every day, he opened his Day-Timer and noticed this was the day he was to return to those three

homes—those houses that represented the most unproductive day in his tax-collecting career. He squared his shoulders, and as he walked you could hear him say, “No sob story will dissuade me today. They will either pay up, surrender their property, or be thrown in prison. I refuse to be trapped between greed and grace, between dollars and demons, or between money and mercy.

#1 Testimony (The Woman with the Hemorrhage)

Upon arriving at the first house, Zacchaeus knocked on the door, and this beautiful woman, radiant with joy, answered. She had color in her cheeks, a glimmer in her eyes. She had a new hairdo. Her nails had been manicured. Yes, she was stylin’.

[Eleanor Yost stands and with a wireless mic interrupts the sermon]

Eleanor: “Mr. Zacchaeus, it’s good to see you.”

Preacher: “I’m looking for the woman of the house.”

Eleanor: “I am the woman of the house. Zacchaeus, when I told you to come back in thirty days, that was nothing but a ploy. As I told you, ‘All I need will happen within thirty days’ because I figured in thirty days I would be dead. In fact, I had been praying to die. I thought only death could deliver me from the unbearable existence. But a friend told me Jesus was coming to town.

I elbowed my way through the crowd. When I got close enough, I stretched out my arm through the people and was just able to touch the hem of his garment. And the moment I touched him, the blood that had been hemorrhaging for twelve years immediately stopped! But not only was my body healed, when I touched Jesus, Jesus also touched my soul. Even though my faith was weak, he made it strong; even though my faith was inadequate, he made it sufficient. Zacchaeus, I know it’s hard to believe, but I need to tell you what happened, **what a difference Jesus makes...**

[Song #1: He Touched Me, sung acappella by Eleanor Yost]

*Shackled By a Heavy burden,
'Neath a load of guilt and shame,
Then the hand of Jesus touched me,
And now I am no longer the same.*

*He touched me, O he touched me,
And O the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened, and now I know,
He touched me and made me whole.*

“Zacchaeus, no more doctor bills and no more prescriptions to fill. I’ve been able to save a little money. Here’s the money for the taxes.”

#2 Testimony (The Woman Married to the Demoniac)

Zacchaeus turned sharply and headed toward the second house. He thought, “This is a weird and wacky day. I wonder if I will ever meet Jesus. Like that woman, I’ve had a long-standing, ever-present problem. Maybe if I met Jesus, he would do something about my issue.”

Soon he was in front of the second house. He looked for the woman to be standing at the front of the house gazing toward the graveyard. But she was not there. When he knocked on the door, the same woman opened it. But before they could start talking, this handsome, young man walked out from behind her. Zacchaeus’ first thought was, ‘I’m glad this woman got a new man. She should have divorced her husband and kicked that old grave dweller to the curb long ago.’

The woman spoke up, “Mr. Zacchaeus, I want you to meet my husband. You haven’t met this man because when you were here thirty days ago, his home was in the graveyard. But look at him now. Doesn’t he look good? He’s clothed and in his right mind. Mr. Zacchaeus, I owe you an apology. Thirty days ago I told you that no man could tame him and that no man could bind him, but that was before Jesus stepped off that boat. When Jesus walked in, the demons walked out. Look at him. He’s a new man.

“Mr. Zacchaeus, if you want to be a new man, you must meet Jesus. He’ll give you a relationship with God, with yourself, and with your family. When Jesus goes home with you, things change at home. Old things will pass away, and behold, all things will become new. My husband met Jesus, and his life has been changed forever.

[Daniel Plesha stands and with a mic interrupts the sermon]

“Wait a minute. She can tell you some parts of the story, but it my testimony. She didn’t experience it like I experienced it, living like a wild man in the tombs. Jesus confronted me and put me in his Recovery Program. Sit down, and let me tell you, **what a difference Jesus makes...**

[Song #2, Daniel Plesha sings, “Healing Grace” from Saddleback Alive]

*Oh Lord Holy Lord, Who took my despair
And put joy in its place, Oh Lord most Holy Lord
Thank you for Your healing Grace*

*Your Grace is changing my life
In so many ways
When I thought my life was over
You were waiting there for me
Now I can see that there are good things*

*Only suffering can bring
(To Chorus)*

*Your Grace is changing my life
In so many ways
I'm looking forward to the future
The work I have to do, Knowing I'm forgiven
And acceptable to You
Thank You for Your healing Grace
(To Chorus)*

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As Zacchaeus left, he thought to himself, a dying helpless woman who's now healed and full of life, and a demon-possessed man who has been delivered. Now I wonder if someday, I will ever meet Jesus. I've got some demons hounding my heels. Maybe if I meet Jesus, he'll come to my house and change me too.

Testimony #3 (The Widow Bereaved in Nain)

At the third house, Zacchaeus thought rather sarcastically, "I wonder what surprise they will have for me here." When he knocked on the door, a teenager with a big grin opened the door.

"I'm sorry. I'm at the wrong house. There is no child living in the house I'm looking for. Thirty days ago the woman of the house was on her way to bury her only son." The young man said, "Are you Mr. Zacchaeus? My mother has been expecting you. She said you'd be back in thirty days. And Mom had said you're never late collecting the taxes." Zacchaeus was startled. He gazed at the teen, and then he challenged, "Wait a minute. This could never be the house where that widow's son had died."

The young man replied, "Mr. Zacchaeus, I'm him. I died. My mama's worst fear was that the disease that took my dad would someday take me. And thirty days ago my mama's worst fear came true. I got real sick. And my mom stayed by my bedside all day and all night. But God chose not to heal me, and I died. My mother had saved the money to pay you taxes, but she had to use that money on my funeral. As the undertaker led the procession out of Nain, Jesus was leading another procession going in. And the procession of death collided with the procession of deity. Jesus laid his hand on me and suddenly something began to stir in my lifeless body. I came back to life, Mr. Zac! When I sat up in the casket, it scared the undertaker so bad he pushed me on out of the casket, took his casket back, and gave my mother her money back. Mr. Zac, here's the money for your taxes."

By the time the teen finished talking, his mother stood up.

[Epie Casey stands and with a wireless mic interrupts the sermon]

“Let me tell you like only a mother can tell you. Let me tell you, **what a difference Jesus makes...**”

[**Song #3: Epie Casey, “There is None Like You”**]

*There is none like You,
No one else can touch my heart like you do.
I could search for all eternity long and find,
there is none like you.*

*Your mercy flows like a river wide
and healing comes from Your hands;
Suffering children are safe in Your arms,
there is none like You.*

Can Jesus make a difference for Zacchaeus?

As Zacchaeus left, he thought, a dying woman who's full of life, a demon-possessed man whose been delivered, and a dead youth that's been resurrected. Zacchaeus closed his Day-Timer, deep in thought. He passed a friend who greeted him, “Hey Zac, have you heard?” He answered, “I've heard all I can handle for one day.” “Well, I just wondered if you'd heard that Jesus is coming into town. He's headed down Main Street right now. You'd better hurry if you want to see him. He'll be gone for good real soon.”

And as Zacchaeus feet pitter-pattered along the dusty road, he pondered about all his life experiences. “I wonder if this is my chance to meet Jesus. All my life I've been a successful failure. I've been a paradox of prosperity and poverty. I'm rich in the things of this world, but poor in the things of God. I've got guilt that's been draining my vigor for longer than 12 years; I've got rage of bitterness inside me like a mad man; and I've got a dead spirit in my heart. I'm beginning to see it is not the shortness of my stature, but the shortness of my relationship with God that has caused my heart to be cold, callous, and compassionless. **If I meet Jesus, Jesus will make a difference in me.**

So Zacchaeus ran toward Main Street. When he got there, he couldn't see over the street-clogging, parade-viewing crowd. Finally he ran ahead where the crowd was thinner. As he ran, that's when he saw that sycamore tree. Remember, I wondered what led him to climb that tree? It became clear the reason he climbed it was not just the shortness of his stature, but it the searching of his soul. Zacchaeus climbed that tree because he had seen what Jesus had done in the lives of other people, and he was utterly aware of the urgent changes needed in his own life.

Zacchaeus boosted himself into the lowest branch and swung up into the tree. And as the Savior passed that way, he looked up in the tree, and he said, “Zacchaeus, you come down, for I’m going to your house today.”

Isn’t it good to know Jesus knows your name—he doesn’t need anyone to tell him the name of Zacchaeus—or yours. And Jesus knows what tree you are up and what limb you’re out on. And Jesus invites you to come down from the tree where you are—to shimmy down the tree of pride, the tree of bitterness, and the tree of guilt. And he offers, if you’ll hear it: “I’m going to **your** house today.” **What a difference Jesus makes. May we love Jesus more as we see what a difference Jesus makes.**