

“ZACCHAEUS: DESPERATE FOR GOD”

Rev. Becky Stephens

Text: Luke 19:1-10 NLT

God’s Word: Revelation 3:14-22 NLT

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19 Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. ² There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. ³ He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” ⁶ Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. ⁷ But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. ⁸ Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” ⁹ Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”

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*Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he.  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.  
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.”*

How many of us remember singing that song as children? It’s a cute song and a good way to remember a Bible story, but there are a number of details about Zacchaeus that this song does not include.

For one thing, Zacchaeus was a chief among tax collectors, and I’m sure his parents never would have dreamed that he would turn out the way he did. You know why? Because his name means “Pure” or “Righteous.” He was given that name as a baby. His mother and father looked down upon him and thought he was the most precious little fellow in the world...so they named him “Pure.” They knew and believed that God had great plans for his life so they named him “Righteous.”

And I would imagine that Zacchaeus’ parents probably did the best they could to help him to live into his name. They probably took him to the Temple. They probably taught him about God and maybe the Scriptures. They probably loved him so very much. And through there showing an unconditional love for him...I would imagine that Zacchaeus was given just a little glimpse of the kind of love that God has for all people—including himself.

But as Zacchaeus began to grow up he probably found that he was not growing as fast nor as tall as his peers. The word that is used for “short” in this passage literally means “an adult who has not grown out of a child’s body.” So Zacchaeus was probably quite troubled...perhaps even tormented by this. He probably had what many people refer to as “a Napoleon Complex.” He felt insecure about his size, and therefore felt that he had

to prove just how big, and tough and unafraid he was by other means. He was probably made fun of at school, and perhaps he ended up getting into a lot of fights because of that. Or maybe he just got beat up...and led a very lonely, isolated and ostracized existence.

He probably never had many friends...not that he could have had friends...but his lack of self-esteem probably caused him to push potential friends away. He had been hurt one too many times. So he built walls of protection up between himself and others. And people stayed away. The walls worked. But behind those walls was a desperately lonely and self-hating man who wanted nothing more than to be loved, accepted and understood.

How many of us can relate to Zacchaeus' predicament? When we see some of the youngsters who wear all-black...the goth-kids...walking around with all kinds of piercings in all kinds of places...when we see these often sad looking and sometimes intimidating looking kids...let's remember that behind all that black there is most likely a person who wants desperately to be loved, to be understood, but has been hurt way too many times.

So one night when the Roman occupation came to Zacchaeus with an offer...an offer to be somebody...a job offer as a tax man, Zacchaeus faced a tough, but inevitable decision—whether or not to sell-out to Rome. As a tax collector he would have to pay Rome a certain amount for his territory...and then, of course, he would get rich by charging people for more taxes than they really owed.

This would mean that Zacchaeus would collect taxes from a widow who wouldn't have enough to pay...and therefore put her out of her house...yes, he would have to rob, cheat and steal from many persons. He would also have to give up his religion. He would no longer have access to the Temple...and he would be hated...truly hated...not just shunned or misunderstood...but...but he would be rich. So, Zacchaeus chose to be rich.

But he would have something, wouldn't he? He would hold power...power that he never had before...power over other people's lives. But this power, this money didn't make Zacchaeus feel any better about life than he had before. He was still miserable. He still knew that he was lacking that love that his parents first introduced him to as a young child. He knew he was not living the life he had been created to live. He knew that he was not being the person that he really was and was capable of being. And so he was desperate. Desperate for God.

So here we have Zacchaeus...he is rich, but lonely and hated...he is wealthy, but spiritually impoverished...and he knows it. Remember the first thing Jesus said during the Sermon on the Mount? *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

J.B. Phillips, a man who translated the New Testament into Modern English, puts it this way: "Happy are those who understand their spiritual poverty. They have already entered the Kingdom of Reality."

So Zacchaeus, the tax collector understands that his life is not complete... something is missing...something VERY BIG and VERY IMPORTANT IS MISSING!

Do any of us feel as if something VERY BIG AND VERY IMPORTANT IS MISSING in our lives this morning? If so, you may be like Zacchaeus...a person in need of God.

No doubt Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus, and he had probably heard what people were saying everywhere about Jesus: *"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* And after Jesus eats with these sinners...something about them changes. They become like new people. It's as if they have been born all over again.

So when Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, he wanted to see Jesus...and he wanted to see Jesus so desperately that he *“ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him...”*

I've been told that a sycamore tree has a slick bark, and it is always a long way to the first limb. So this is a difficult tree to climb. Therefore, Zacchaeus sweated it out but he finally got up the tree and settled down on a limb among the leaves. He probably thought that he was secluded there—like he had his own private box for a parade.

And so he waited for Jesus, and sure enough Jesus came by...and much to Zacchaeus' surprise...Jesus knew Zacchaeus was in that tree. As a matter of fact, Jesus knew everything there is to know about Zacchaeus. He knew that he was one of the lost sheep. He knew that he was not living the kind of life that God had created him to live. And He knew that Zacchaeus was an outcast, a lonely and hated man...in search of something which would make him feel like a real human being again.

Remember another thing that Jesus said during His Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”*

So Jesus reaches the spot where this spiritually impoverished man is hiding in a sycamore tree...knowing that this man is hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for love, for God. Jesus said to him: *“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”*

And what did Zacchaeus do? *“He came down at once and welcomed him gladly.”*

And that is all he had to do. Jesus did not force Himself into Zacchaeus' home, but He certainly did ask him for a welcome.

And this is what Jesus is doing for all of us: *“Here I am!”* Jesus declares in Revelation Chapter 3, *“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”*

I would imagine that nothing could have been farther from Zacchaeus' mind than that this Jesus from Galilee would choose to stay at his house! I mean, in the crowd there must have been hundreds upon hundreds of upstanding citizens. Out of all the priests of the Temple, out of all the well-to-do and respected citizens—Jesus chose to dine at the home of the most hated, and reviled member of this community...hmmm...let's remember that, when we are trying to decide whether or not we should invite so and so to come to church or not...due to their lack of morals or plain meanness.

Of course, *“All the people saw this and began to mutter”* about Jesus: *“He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”* But isn't that what Jesus is all about? Isn't that the only reason He came to earth, and to the Cross...to become the guest of sinners?

Praise God, that we have a Savior Who wants to come and dine with us—Who is more than willing to overlook our sins and shortcomings—Who came not to judge the world but to save it!!!

How unlike Jesus are we when we pass judgment upon other sinners...thinking one sin is greater than another!!! How unlike Jesus we are when we shun or despise those who have built walls of protection up...but who, on the inside are so desperate for God! How much are we like the Pharisees of Jesus' day when we look down on others—thinking we are the righteous ones---when all have sinned and have fallen short of God's glory?

We should be humbled to the dust by our Christian faith. And if we are not, then we had better re-examine our faith. We should never 'judge' others.

Instead, we should walk this earth, so humbled by the love of Christ for sinners such as we, that we have only love for our fellow human beings—no matter what 'sin' they may be committing.

We are all in the same boat...are we not? But there is something that none of us will ever be without Christ dining in our hearts and lives...that is, sinners, saved by grace...the lost, who Christ has found!

So Jesus goes to Zacchaeus' house, and there is a lapse of time—how much, we are not told. Jesus had dinner with Zacchaeus, but Jesus didn't stay the night. They shut the door and the crowd milled around outside and gossiped, but no one knew what went on inside.

Finally the door opened, and there stood Zacchaeus! Something radical had happened to this man!!! He admitted that he had been robbing the poor and promised to give half of his goods to the poor and to restore fourfold to those whom he had falsely taxed.

Yes, something had happened inside Zacchaeus, and he was a new man!!! What Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 was true for Zacchaeus—*"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* Is this true for us as well?

Zacchaeus' parents had named him: "Pure." But somewhere along the way, Zacchaeus had made some horrible choices...mainly due to his low self-esteem.

But one day, Zacchaeus was given that great privilege to make the most important choice of all...and he made the right one...he made the choice to repent, accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior, and turn from his old ways of life—Zacchaeus was born anew!!! The old walls of protection came tumbling down!!!

Lloyd C. Douglas wrote this about what might have occurred inside Zacchaeus' house: "Zacchaeus," said the carpenter gently, "what did you see that made you desire this peace?" "Good Master—I saw—mirrored in your eyes—the face of the Zacchaeus I was meant to be!"

Have we seen—mirrored in Christ's eyes—the face of the person God meant for us to be?

Jesus said to Zacchaeus: *"Today salvation has come to this house...For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."* Jesus is still entering and passing through the Jericho's of this world...places like Bucyrus, Mansfield, Marion, and Columbus...you name it! And Jesus wants to have dinner with those who do not know Him.

Shall we tell others about this fact, so that they too may have the opportunity to run to see Him? And how about us? Has Jesus entered your home...your heart? He's knocking. Have you let Him in?