

**TELLING WHAT GREAT THINGS GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU**  
**Luke 19:1-10**

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The title and idea for this sermon come from the late E. K. Bailey, pastor at the Concord Missionary Baptist Church in Dallas. If I were teaching a class at seminary, I would say that we have an eclectic conflation of various Lukan pericopes with disregard to hermeneutical principles to make homiletical impact. What I'd say to a church is I've woven the Bible stories together in a way that ain't so to make my sermon better.

None of us can forget that rhyme that has forever embedded Zaccheus in our minds.

Zaccheus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he.  
He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.  
But as the Savior passed his way, He looked up in the tree.  
And He said, "Zaccheus, you come down,  
for I'm going to your house today.  
For I'm going to your house today."

What was it that drove Zaccheus up that tree? Now, in that culture it would be uncouth for a well dressed, high profile – the scripture says wealthy – chief tax collector to climb a tree in broad daylight and crawl out on a limb. What on earth was it that would make Zaccheus throw embarrassment, shame and ridicule to the wind to do something as uncharacteristic as climbing a tree for all to see?

The scripture doesn't say why. We're left to conjecture – so let's take a journey.

We travel along the back roads of the Roman Empire. We make our way to the land of Palestine and, even further, we trek our way across the difficult terrain until we come to the city of Jericho. This is the home of the despised man named Zaccheus. We arise early in the morning, as Zaccheus would, and travel with this man to observe what he has encountered as he endeavored to collect taxes. As he traveled, he pulled out his iPhone to check the names and addresses of the people he planned to see that day.

He comes to his first stop. He knows that it is an unkempt little shanty. The paint is flecking off. It is in need of repairs. But those things don't matter to Zaccheus. The only thing that mattered to this chief tax collector was the word "unpaid" stamped across the person's name who lived there. He bangs on the door with authority. With the eerie creak of an Alfred Hitchcock movie, the door swung open, and on the other side was a frail, blind man.

"Who's there?" the blind man shouts.

“Zaccheus,” the answer comes, “and I’m here to collect taxes you owe the Roman government.”

In a trembling voice, the blind man began to explain his inability to pay his taxes. He said, “I have no family. I don’t receive any pension, and there is no society to help the blind. I want to pay you, but I am not able. Mr. Zaccheus, if you’ll give me thirty days – I don’t know how, but I’ll find the money.”

Zaccheus was caught between money and mercy. “It’s not usually my style,” he said gruffly, “but you have thirty days. But blind man, when I get back if you don’t show me the money, you’ll be blind and homeless.”

He turned, and as he walked away he thought, “Maybe I’ll have better luck next time.”

It wasn’t long until Zaccheus came to the second house. He knocked on the door. As the woman opened the door, Zaccheus saw there was a problem. The woman was completely yellow, as if there was no blood in her veins. Her hair was matted; her face was wet with tears; her speech was slurred. She said, “I know who you are, and I know why you’ve come. But, Zaccheus, I don’t have any way of paying my taxes. You see, for twelve years I’ve had a blood disorder. In that time my insurance was cancelled, my husband divorced me, and my inheritance was spent. I’ve tried everything the doctors have to offer, but I’m not getting any better. Zaccheus, could you just give me thirty days to pay my taxes?”

Zaccheus, this time, was caught between greed and grace. He said, “For some reason, I feel benevolent today. You’ve got thirty days. When I get back, I want my taxes.”

He walked away and thought, “Maybe I’ll have better luck next time.”

As Zaccheus went around the bend in the road, there stood the third house. On the front porch was a woman – listless. She stared off, not seeming to recognize that he was getting closer. He tried to speak to her, but there was no response. Suddenly, a blood curdling scream came from behind him.

Zaccheus whirled to see who screamed. On the hillside, running nude between the stones in the graveyard, cutting himself, was a cross between a man and a wild animal. Suddenly the woman spoke, “That used to be my husband. He was a good man when I married him. I’m praying that one day he’ll come back home. I ought to move on with my life, but I love him. He’s the father of my children. I don’t know if it will ever happen. No man can tame him. No man can bind him. He calls himself ‘Legion’ now, because he’s possessed by many demons.”

Now, for all the forthrightness that Zaccheus has learned – being in the business of tax collecting – even Zaccheus, the chief tax collector, the one who was always able to make them show him the money, was not really anxious to dialogue with demons. So Zaccheus began to back pedal. Before the woman said anything about the taxes, he said, “I’ll be back in your area in thirty days.”

As he hurried away, with his heart still palpitating, he looked at his iPhone – one more house to visit. When he arrived, there was a spray hanging on the door, suggesting that someone had died.

He knocked anyhow – tax season is tax season. A grieving woman, veiled and dressed in black, answered the door and said, “I know who you are, and I know why you’ve come. Zaccheus, 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.”

Zaccheus was caught between cash and compassion. Zaccheus said, “I’ve already given some of your neighbors thirty days, so I’ll be back in thirty days.”

At least on the side of the tax collector, the thirty days passed quickly. Zaccheus left home at the crack of dawn, as he did every day. He opened his iPhone and noticed that this was the day he was to return to those four homes – those houses that represented the most unproductive day in his career as a tax collector. He squared his shoulders and started to walk. He resolved, “No sob story will dissuade me today. They will either pay or surrender their property or be thrown in prison.”

He had to stop and check his address. The first house didn’t look the same. The grass had been manicured; the house had undergone renovation. He knocked on the door. A man with piercing eyes and authority in his voice answered. Zaccheus said, “I’m sorry, sir, but I’m looking for the man of the house.”

“I am the man of the house,” the gentleman replied.

Zaccheus answered, “No...no. I was here thirty days ago, and the man I spoke with was blind.”

He said, “I am that man. I once was blind, but now I see. Mr. Zaccheus, let me tell you a story. One day, a man told me that Jesus was coming to town. I ran up to town – I knew that it might be my only chance to meet him. When Jesus was passing by, I heard all the commotion. I asked what was happening. They said, ‘Jesus is passing by.’ I yelled, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.’”

Everyone said, “Quiet, don’t bother Him.” I was embarrassing the town council and the mayor. They said I was just being a nuisance. But it was my only chance, and I didn’t care. I shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” They tried to push me to the background, but I knew it was my only chance. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked.

“I want to see.” He said my faith had made me well.

The man said, “Zaccheus, do you have time. Sit down and let me tell you about it. This is the way it was.”

**Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
that saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
I was blind, but now I see.**

Zaccheus walked away and he thought, “This is some day. A man who is blind, but who can now see. One day I hope to meet Jesus. Maybe Jesus can do something for me.”

He comes to the second house and knocks on the door. There was a beautiful woman, radiant with joy, who answered the door. She had color in her cheeks. She had on a new, colorful dress, and her hair was fixed.

“Mr. Zaccheus,” she said, “it’s good to see you.”

Zaccheus said, “I’m looking for the woman of the house.”

She said, “I am the woman of the house.”

“Wait a minute. Do you know your blind neighbor down the street?”

“Yes, I know him. But he’s not blind anymore.”

Zaccheus said, “I know, he paid his taxes today.”

She answered, “He didn’t tell you? He sold his seeing eye dog, and he got a job.”

The woman said, “Zaccheus, when I told you to come back thirty days ago, that was nothing but a ploy. I was confident that in thirty days I would be dead. In fact, I had been praying to die. I thought that only death could deliver me from an unbearable existence. But a friend told me that Jesus was coming to town. I elbowed my way through the suffocating crowd. When I got close, I stretched out my hand, and I was just able to touch the hem of His garment. And the moment I touched Him, the blood that had been flowing for twelve years immediately dried up. But not only was my body healed, my soul was made whole. Even though my faith was inadequate, He made it, somehow, sufficient. ‘Who touched me?’ He asked. I was frightened. ‘I felt my power go out,’ He declared. I came, trembling, and fell down before Him, knowing that I could not escape unnoticed. It was clear to all the people present why I touched Him, and how I had been immediately healed. ‘Daughter’ – He called me daughter – ‘your faith has made you well. Go in peace.’”

Zaccheus thought to himself, “I don’t know how much of this I can take. A blind man who can see. A dying woman full of life.”

She said, “I know it’s hard to believe, but I needed to tell you about it. I’ve had some good days, and I’ve had some hills to climb. I’ve had some weary days and some sleepless nights. But when I look around and think things over, all my good days outweigh my bad days. I’ve made up my mind I won’t complain. Zaccheus, I haven’t had to pay those doctors any more. I’ve been able to save up a little money. Here’s my taxes in full.”

Zaccheus whirled and headed toward the third house. He thought, “This is an unusual day. I wonder if I can ever meet Jesus, like that woman. I’ve had some problems. I’ve had some painful experiences. Maybe Jesus could do something about my problems.”

Soon he was in front of the third house. He looked for the woman to be standing out front, but she wasn't there. He knocked on the door. The woman answered, but before they could start talking this handsome young man walked out from behind her. Zaccheus' first thought was, "I'm glad this woman got a new man. She should have kicked that old grave dweller to the curb long ago."

About that same time, the woman spoke up. "Mr. Zaccheus, 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. Look at him now. Doesn't he look good? He is clothed and in his right mind. Mr. Zaccheus, I owe you an apology. Thirty days ago I told you that no man could tame him. But that was before Jesus. When Jesus walked in, the demons walked out. Look at him – he's a new man. Mr. Zaccheus, if you want to be a new man, you need to meet Jesus. It will give you a new relationship with your family, with yourself, with your God. Old things are passed away, and, behold, all things have become new. He met Jesus, and it changed his life."

The man cut in. "Now wait a minute. Let me tell my side of the story. I was invaded by the demons of hell. I didn't care to be clothed. I didn't even have a shelter, but I hid among the tombs. As Jesus passed by, the demons within me shouted with a loud voice, 'What do we have to do with you, Jesus, son of the most high God? I beg you, do not torment me.' Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of me. 'What's your name?' Jesus asked the demons. 'Legion,' they said, 'for we are many.' Jesus cast the demons out."

Zaccheus was really perplexed. A blind man who could see. A dying woman who is full of life. And a demon possessed man who has been delivered. "I've got some demons hounding at my heels, myself," Zaccheus thought. "Maybe if I met Jesus, I, too, could get delivered."

As he walked to the door of the last house, he thought sarcastically, "I wonder what surprise they have for me." He knocked on the door, and the cutest little twelve-year-old boy you've ever seen answered the door. Zaccheus said, "I'm sorry, I'm at the wrong house. At the house I'm looking for, there is no little boy. In fact, thirty days ago the woman of the house was on her way to bury her only son."

The boy said, "Are you Mr. Zaccheus? Mama has been looking for you all day. She said you'd be back today. And Mama said you're never late when it comes to collecting her taxes."

"Now wait a minute," Zaccheus said. "At the house I'm looking for, the little boy is dead."

The little boy said, "Mr. Zaccheus, I am that boy. I died. My Mama's worst fear was that the disease that took my daddy and my older brother would some day take me. And thirty days ago, my Mama's worst fear came true. I got real sick. And my mother prayed for me. She stayed by my bedside all day and all night. But I died. My mother had saved the money to pay you, but she had to use that money on my funeral. As the mourners led the procession out of Nain, there was another procession going on. The procession of death collided with the procession of deity. Now Mr. Zach, you know that death and deity cannot occupy the same space. And there we were at the gate – death and deity. Jesus laid His hand on me, and something began to move in my body. I came back to life, Mr. Zach. When I sat up in my casket, it scared the undertaker so bad he pushed

me on out of the casket and gave my mother her money back. Mr. Zach, here's the money for your taxes."

By the time the boy finished talking, his mother came out. She said, "He's just twelve. He knows a little bit, because he's been through it. But let me tell you, like only a mama can tell you. You got a little time? Sit down, Mr. Zaccheus."

He said, "Tell me about it."

She said,

**Great is thy faithfulness, O God my father,  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;  
As thou hast been, Thou forever will be.  
Great is Thy faithfulness,  
Morning by morning your mercies I see;  
All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided;  
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.**

Zaccheus closed his book. He'd collected all of his taxes. But, more than that, he'd heard the stories about Jesus. On his way home, he passed a friend.

"Hey, Zach. Have you heard?"

Zaccheus answered, "I've heard all I can handle for one day."

The friend said, "You've heard Jesus is in town?"

"Yeah, I've heard."

The man said, "You'd better hurry up. He'll be leaving soon."

His little feet began to pitter patter along the dusty road. His life began to flash before his eyes. "I wonder if I can meet Jesus. All my life, I've been a successful failure. I've been a paradox – an oxymoron. I've been rich in the things of this world, but poor in the things of God. Maybe Jesus can do something about the emptiness that fills my soul."

So Zaccheus ran uptown. When he got there, the crowd was so tall – and he was so small – he couldn't see a thing. Zaccheus decided the only way he had a shot at it was to run ahead of the crowd, ahead of Jesus. That's when he saw his chance – that's when he saw the tree, the sycamore tree. Wide branches, short trunk.

What would drive Zaccheus, a wealthy, well-to-do, chief tax collector, up a tree to see a Jewish rabbi?

Zaccheus went up that tree because he was empty, because he had been a successful failure, because he had seen what Jesus was doing in the lives of other people. Zaccheus was really, probably, only wanting a glimpse of God. But he got to see Jesus face to face.

Jesus stopped when He saw Zaccheus in the tree. Jesus looked at him, with His piercing gaze, and said, “Zaccheus, hurry up and come down, for I’m going to your house today.” Zaccheus had heard the command of the Christ. And Zaccheus came down from that tree. He received Jesus gladly.

The people began to grumble. Jesus’ choice of host didn’t go well with popular approval. Didn’t He know that Zach was a tax collector – the chief one at that? He had long defrauded the people of God in getting the money for Rome, and getting a little extra for himself, too.

The crowd had written off Zaccheus, but Jesus didn’t write him off.

It’s a story about God’s salvation, God’s kingdom coming to an outcast.

Zaccheus’ life was changed by Jesus. “Lord, I’m going to give half my possessions to the poor. And anybody I’ve cheated on the tax, I’m going to pay them back four times what I owe them.”

Jesus declares, verses 9-10, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

There are some of you here today who are exactly like Zaccheus. You’re curious about Jesus. You want to climb up and get just a glimpse. You’ve heard about what Jesus has done for others. You’ve heard about those who had sin in their life. Like the man bound in chains because of demons, you’re bound in bondage to the guilt and disappointment and tragedy of sins of the past. Just like Jesus set the demoniac free from the demons of hell, he sets you free from your sin.

You, just like Zaccheus, have heard of all the things that Jesus can do – that He is the giver of life, the holder of hope, the Christ of joy, the healer for the wounded, the bearer of the broken. And you ponder, like Zaccheus could have pondered, “What will Jesus do for me?”

And today, Jesus looks you eye to eye, as you stand in the curiosity of the tree, and says, “Come down. I’m going to your house today.”

The testimony of a tax collector.