

With Jesus
Jesus and Zacchaeus

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If you could hang out, spend time with, share a meal with, meet one person, who would that be? If you bumped into one person and they were like, “You and me, we’re going to hang out!” — who is that person who would make your day go from “good” to “great”?

(Please view the online version of the sermon to see the video and photos of Chad meeting Willson Contreras.)

We met “Willy” and our day went from good to awesome! There’s a guy in the book of Luke who wanted to meet Jesus — and he did! His whole world got better. In fact, Jesus changed everything for this man when he got to spend time with Jesus. This man’s name was Zacchaeus and his story is found in Luke 19:1-10. Let’s read that together.

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 has come to seek and save what was lost.”

The bottom line for today is this: Jesus *sees* you in the crowd. He *calls* you out of the crowd. And he *sends* you back into the crowd with a greater purpose.

He *sees* you, he *calls* you, and he *sends* you.

Let’s look at the first point together: *Jesus sees you in the crowd.*

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. (Luke 19:1-4)

We have man named Zacchaeus who wanted to see Jesus, but couldn’t—physically couldn’t—because of the crowd. Why couldn’t Zacchaeus see Jesus because of this crowd?

Well, one, because of the “size” of the crowd. This crowd was huge. Jesus was at the center of the crowd, and with tons of people crowding him and following him. Why were they following him around?

Well, let's see:

- He turned water into wine.
- He recruited and called a group of “B Team” guys to follow him and be his disciples, all because he saw something in them no one else did. He believed in them when nobody else did.
- He spent time with outcasts and with those who society said were untouchable.
- He caused the blind to see, the sick to get well, the mute to speak, the paralyzed to walk.
- He calmed storms, walked on water, performed miracles, and did other things that nobody had ever seen before.
- He drove out demons and evil spirits, and spoke with God-given authority that caused demons to tremble in fear, proclaim Jesus as God's son, and do what Jesus told them to do.
- He raised a widow's son from the dead.
- He fed 5,000 people with a little boy's lunch.
- While he was on his way to heal a little girl who'd suddenly gotten sick and died, he healed a woman who'd been bleeding for twelve years.
- He taught the Scriptures like no one had ever heard before.

Jesus drew a crowd.

We can identify three types of people in this crowd following Jesus:

1. Outsiders looking in
2. Followers of the crowd
3. Those pursuing the king

Which one are you? The good news is, no matter where you are in your pursuit of Jesus, he's always inviting you to the next level of knowing him, loving him, trusting him, and believing in him more. We don't graduate or test out of following Christ. He's always calling us to deeper waters, inviting us to a deeper, more personal relationship with him.

The crowd that's with Jesus is in the city of Jericho. Jericho is an old city. I went there years ago while on a trip to Israel. There's a historical landmark there that symbolizes Zacchaeus' house and story. If the people of Jericho knew back then that there would be a landmark repping Zacchaeus' house and story today, they'd be horrified! Why?

Let's just say that nobody's day got better when Zacchaeus showed up. The crowd despised this little man. Why did they hate him?

Zacchaeus was a tax collector for the Roman government. And he wasn't simply a tax collector—he was a “chief” tax collector, which means he'd done well enough at his job to work his way up the corporate ladder. And he wasn't simply a chief tax collector—he was wealthy, which means he was pretty much the head of the Jericho Cartel.

See, if the Roman government charged you 30% tax on all your income and earnings, Zacchaeus would overcharge you like another 20%—and keeping the overcharge for himself.

It wasn't wrong to be a tax collector, nor was it a sin to have money. What was super shady and a sin for Zacchaeus was how he was making his money. The crowd hated him because he was robbing from them so he could have more.

To make things worse, Zacchaeus was Jewish, which means he was one of the “them”, but he had crossed over and gone to the dark side. He went to go play for the Yankees!

Zacchaeus was from the same neighborhood, from the same township—he grew up with these people. He went to school with them, lived down the street from them, even went to church with the very people he was stealing from. He was a traitor. At one point in his life, he made the choice to turn his back on his family, his friends, his name, his tradition, his values and even his faith—all to pursue power, money and influence.

And the crowd hated him for it.

Can you blame them? I mean he’s the guy that you’re like, “If I could get away with it, not get caught or get in trouble, I’d tell that guy how I really felt. I’d put him right in his place. I’d pop him in the eye and drop him like a bad habit!”

This is kind of what the crowd is doing here because nobody is clearing a path for Zacchaeus to get any closer to Jesus. This was their chance to put him in his place. They’re all pushing this “wee little guy” to the very edges of the crowd, so much so that he had to do something outrageous. He started running ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree to spot Jesus.

Now, no dignified man with any clout, recognition, or influence would ever run in public, and they sure wouldn’t climb a tree! This would show extreme vulnerability and desperation! It wouldn’t be good for the brand!

But that’s exactly what Zacchaeus does. He sprints ahead and shimmies up a tree—all to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

Here’s what we need to point out: whether you’re checking things out from the outside looking in, whether you’re here because it’s what you do, whether you’ve been coming here since you were in diapers and it’s routine, whether your parents make you or your spouse begs you, whether you think it’s best for your kids, whether a neighbor or co-worker invited you, or whether you’re actually doing your best to pursue the King closely, *Jesus sees you in the crowd.*

You are not just a number or a statistic. You are not just another face in the crowd. You are not forgotten. You are not dismissed. You are not overlooked.

I’ve been in youth ministry for over twenty years. One of the core questions I’ve been asked is, “Does God care? Is he close? Does he even see me? Does he know me? Does he hear my voice? Do I even matter to him?”

I remember Peyton Stamate, a former student from our ministry in SWMO. She shared her story with me and some of her small group leaders and asked these very questions. Her mom was a drug addict and she left five-year-old Peyton alone with her baby brother in a trailer park home while she went on another binge. Peyton remembers a burnt spoon and a slamming screen door. As a teenager sharing her story with us, her core question was, “Does God see me?”

The answer to her then and to all of us now is a resounding “YES!!”

You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You are known, valued and loved deeply by the Father. He sees you. He knows you. He knows the very language your heart and soul speak because he made you, he knit you together perfectly in your mother's womb.

Jesus sees you in the crowd.

Next, *Jesus calls you out of the crowd.*

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." (Luke 19:5-7)

Luke says that Jesus called Zacchaeus out of the crowd by name. No other name was mentioned in this story, only the one name of the one man who everyone else said didn't matter.

Jesus shows us otherwise.

Just as he sees you in the crowd, he also calls you out of the crowd.

Jesus tells Zacchaeus, "I'm coming over to your place, Zacchaeus! Today! Right now! Immediately!" Translation: Jesus is saying that he wants a relationship with Zacchaeus. He wants to be Zacchaeus' friend.

Here's why that's a big deal: Jesus knew Zacchaeus better than anyone else in the crowd. He knew his story. He knew his reputation, his good, bad, and ugly—and yet he didn't have the same reaction towards Zacchaeus as the rest of the crowd.

Jesus saying that he wanted to be his friend was something Zacchaeus hadn't heard in a while. He may have eaten good meals, but he was used to eating alone.

But this "first move" that Jesus makes shows his heart for us, even those of us who feel like, "There's no possible way Jesus would want anything to do with someone like me."

Jesus called Zacchaeus down from that tree and out from the crowd—by name—so he, you, and I would all know that you can never go so far to be too far gone from God. He sees you and he calls you.

Jesus called Zacchaeus out of the crowd and Zacchaeus climbed down and out of the tree in response, just as Jesus climbed down from heaven to have a right relationship with him.

Don't miss the language that Jesus chooses in verse five. He says, "Come down immediately. I want to come over to your house and hang out with you right now—today!" He doesn't tell Zacchaeus to go home and straighten up first. He doesn't say clean up the downstairs, do the dishes, run the vacuum, burn a candle, and stop off at the store to grab something for dinner!

He says right now, today—immediately!

And Zacchaeus welcomed Him gladly. Some of us think that before we can respond to Jesus, we have to first clean ourselves up. We think that to follow Christ, we first have to right all of our wrongs or fix what's broken. Then and only then we can respond to Jesus.

That's not the deal Jesus is looking to make. He wants to take from Zacchaeus his very worst—all of his shame, all of his sin—and in exchange offer him his very best: his love, his forgiveness, his mercy, his grace, his hope.

Jesus *sees* you and he *calls* you closer still.

Let's take a quick look at verse seven: "The people saw this and began to chirp; they had strong opinions. 'Look at Jesus, how he goes to be a guest of a sinner.'"

The bottom line here is when you choose to follow Jesus, you can't worry so much about the opinions of others that you lose focus on the one whose opinion matters most: Jesus. A thousand flies don't outweigh an elephant, and the elephant in the room here is Jesus.

We need to worry less about what other people will think of us if we chose to follow Jesus and worry a little more about what Jesus will think of us if we chose *not* to follow him.

For those of us who are in the crowd, there's a lesson here for us, too: may we never hold someone back from a closer walk with Jesus because we somehow lost touch with what brought us close to him in the first place.

I think about the disciple Matthew here. What was his profession before he started following Jesus? He was a tax collector! Don't you think that at some point while Zacchaeus was climbing down from the tree and making his way through the crowd Jesus shot Matthew a look, like, "Dude?! Really?! You of all people?!"

May we never hold someone back from getting close to Jesus, because we forget the tree that Jesus first called us out of.

Jesus sees you in the crowd, he calls you out of the crowd, and then *Jesus sends you back into the crowd with greater purpose.*

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 save what was lost." (Luke 18:9-10)

Jesus didn't tell Zacchaeus, "If you want a new life and a fresh start, if you want my hope, my peace, my promises, my forgiveness, my mercy and grace, then you must give to the poor and you must pay back four times all that you stole from everyone." He simply offers Zacchaeus his grace and then Zacchaeus responds!

We see the guy who once made a calculated risk to leave behind everything that mattered most so he could try to chase down all the wrong things for all the wrong reasons making another choice. He realized that no earthly material could fulfill anything eternal and he chose to pursue Jesus. He called Jesus "Lord," which means that he surrendered his life to him. If he can, then you can too!

Zacchaeus' response to Jesus' grace was an epic display of restitution! Zacchaeus was quick to say, "Let me give to the poor and let me make things right with those that I've wronged—not because I have to, but in light of what you've given me, in light of what you've done for me, in light of what you've pulled me from. I want to. I'd love to. How could I not do this? I get to!" I mean, he's like Chick-fil-A at this point: "It's my pleasure!"

Jesus is excited to send him back out into the crowd with a greater purpose! Zacchaeus is about to show up and make everyone's day go from good to great, all while giving God the glory.

Jesus changed everything for Zacchaeus, and he rewrote his story. Zacchaeus' kingdom impact was incredible because of it!

Jesus was excited. He shares not just his excitement, but his mission and purpose of being here on earth: to seek and save the lost! He didn't always do that. He often told people to, "Shhh—don't tell anybody about this; let's keep this between us."

But not here! He's like, "Salvation has come to Zacchaeus, and the Son of Man, well, I came to seek and save what was lost!"

He sees you in the crowd.

He calls you out of the crowd.

And He wants to send you back into the crowd for a greater purpose—to help him carry out his mission to seek and save the lost.

He changed everything for Zacchaeus and he wants to do the same for you.

He sees you. He calls you. He sends you.

But here's the most convicting part of the story for me. It's found in verse 1: "Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through."

I'm thinking of Peyton....

In your Jericho moments, you can bring Jesus with you and help someone in the crowd's day go from good to great!