

Salvation and Your Community

Casting a Tall Shadow:

Luke 19:1-10
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I don't think that we will sing this much more in our worship service. However, let's try it one more time:

*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 that tree
And He said, "Zacchaeus, you come down!
For I'm going to your house today
For I'm going to your house to stay"*

The two lines are quite forward: "For I'm going to your house today, For I'm going to your house to stay." Jesus actually said to Zacchaeus:

Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. (Luke 19:5, NIV)

That is forward. Jesus didn't go to Zacchaeus' house to hang with him. He went there with the thought: "*I must stay at your house today.*" He had an agenda.

When I originally planned this series, I wanted to discuss how salvation affects our work, finances and relationship to the community. However, I felt strongly impressed that God wanted to say something else to you and me. I think God is concerned that we are missing the point. What is the point?

Well, listen! I don't always feel good about what I say and do in my family, with our church and in our community. Most often, the bad feeling results from behaviors, which I regret.

At one time, however, God showed me that my feelings weren't just because of current failings. They were seeded deeply in my soul as verbal judgments and attacks found their way into my heart. As a pastor, I see many of you struggling with self-degrading thoughts and opinions. I don't think they got there because one day you woke up and saw yourself that way. I think they sunk into your heart as Satan attacked you through different people and experiences. Yes, Satan will tempt you to sin and then use them against you. He'll combine your personal observation of your sin with the attacks he has inspired in others, so that you, like me, will have trouble receiving and feeling love because of what you have come to believe about yourself.

One day God made it clear that I was messed up in my self-dislike. Words formed in my mind, that I now understand were his, that he loved me not because I would serve him, but because he enjoyed being close. He really loved me, and my problem wasn't in how he expressed his love, but in my Satan-corrupted opinion of myself. I suffered crippling deception engineered by the Father of Lies. Zacchaeus suffered that deception. His life was crippled and driven by Satan's grip on him and on the people of his time. Although he was a circumcised child of the covenant, he was alienated from his heavenly Father, a lost sheep of Israel. Consequently, his behaviors caused problems... for everybody, even if it wasn't obvious.

The point is that we were not made to live alienated or estranged from the love of God. How do you know one loves you without a relationship? How do you know God loves you if you are not involved and intimate with Him? All the talk of God's love may be comforting, but it is superficial if it's not personally experienced. Indeed, we construct a substitute God who is tolerant and distant. That kind of relationship is irrelevant. It is like the prodigal son who nearly starved to death despite the love of his Father. In Jesus' story recorded in Luke 15, it wasn't the father's love that hurt the boy. It was the boy's vision of a tolerant and distant father. It was the

son's estrangement from his father. That is the point. Are you intimate with God who is holy and loving? How do you have that kind of that relationship? How do you know have it?

We see with Zacchaeus that if you get to know the Savior, his salvation will make a difference in your work, in your home and in your community. If you commune with Jesus over God's agenda, you experience changes in what you think, how you feel and what you do. These changes will affect your workplace. They will affect your family, and they will affect your community.

Look at Zacchaeus! What prompted him to give his half his wealth to the poor? Can any of you relate to this? Remember, he is caring for the community that spurned him. They chided Jesus for going to his home. What did he hear from Jesus that got to his heart? Did he learn that God his Father really loved him? Did he learn that God his Father had been helping him even though he was rebellious and greedy? Did he learn that he had been deceived and that God his Father had a plan for his life, a plan that would reveal God's love to others?

Zacchaeus shows us that through Jesus we can have an intimate relationship with God. Zacchaeus shows us how we can have an intimate relationship with God. We must welcome the Spirit of Jesus to stay with us and communicate God's agenda. Zacchaeus shows us how we can know that we have an intimate relationship with God. We will be affected by God's attitude and actions. We will be directed by God's desire. We'll grow like God in attitude and actions. After staying with Jesus, Zacchaeus cared about his community and he shared his resources with those in need.

If you are really reconciled to God so that you are in communion with him, you will begin to affect your workplace, home and community. God's salvation will unfold in each of those places. You'll seek his favor and holiness at your work. Your life at home will change to

reflect the presence and perspective of God at home. The community will find God's love and generosity in you.

Have you welcomed Jesus to stay with you and share God's agenda? What is changing in your life because of Jesus? What opinions and practices are changing? Are you feeling the love and favor of your heavenly Father?

What impressed me with Zacchaeus is that Jesus' stay changed not only his work ethic and treatment of others, but it also changed what he did with his accumulated wealth. Instead, of passing it on to relatives when he died or insuring that his life would be comfortable, he used it to advance God's agenda in the world.

In the Bible I find it interesting that Abraham and Jacob voluntarily tithed their income as an act of gratitude and dependence on God. I find it more than interesting that Moses would receive their volunteer pattern as part of the commands to live in covenant with God. A tithe or tenth of our income is a sizable piece. It really helps us make a statement that we depend on God and our priorities are his kingdom. Has something changed in your heart and mind so that you tithe with joy? Or are you uncomfortable that I brought up the subject?

Listen this whole series is not about raising money for the church. However, I can tell you that the Jewish temple suffered when the Israelites did not think they could afford a tithe. So many of God's priorities were neglected! Unfortunately, that is happening with Bethany and so many churches in America. Early in my doctoral studies my mentor was Finance Chairman of a large, affluent church. Over 60 percent of their membership was professionals with above average income. My mentor, however, found that if they had reduced all their member families to California welfare payments, and each member family tithed their income to the church, they would have tripled their budget. These people were religious, but it is hard for me to believe that

Jesus was staying with them like he was Zacchaeus. If we are not becoming like Christ in our working, our home-life and our community, then truly are we grieving and resisting his Spirit? Wouldn't we at minimum be moved to tithing partnering with God like Jacob who told the Lord that he was depending on God?

As an act of faith I invite you to make the commitment that I and many others have made. We will at minimum tithe whatever God puts in our hands. More than that, we will use our time, talent and wealth to engage in whatever business God wants us to perform... and we expect him to show us. Indeed, he is showing us. How about you?

Even as I invite you to fill out that Tithing Promise and put it in the offering plate, I ask, 'Is your life full of acts of repentance and faith like we see with Zacchaeus?' That is salvation unfolding.