



Text: Luke 19:1-10¹
Series: "Jesus &..."
Title: Jesus & A Man Without Friends
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"And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'" Luke 19:7

The following is a true story:

As a couple prayed in their apartment, they were led to pray for "the loneliest person in all of New York City." Since the U.S. had recently bombed Libya, they prayed for the Libyan ambassador to the United Nations. Getting up from their knees, they decided to invite the ambassador to their home for the Thanksgiving weekend. Lo and behold, he agreed to come.

They were nervous, never having entertained internationals before. Yet they had a wonderful time together. Part way into the weekend, the ambassador ventured, "Could I ask you a question? Why did you invite me?" They replied, "We were praying for the loneliest person in Manhattan and you came to mind, and then we decided to invite you." Nothing more was said, and they parted with great warmth.

A letter of thanks arrived from the ambassador. Then, to their astonishment, they received a letter from Muammar Khadafy thanking them for their kindness and inviting them on an all-expense-paid trip to Libya as guests of the president. They went and were royally received and given an audience with President Khadafy.

The president asked why they had invited the ambassador, and they told him. Toward the end of their visit, the American asked if he could pray for the president and was given permission to do so. When he had finished, the president thanked him with tears in his eyes. He asked if the American would do this again. "Of course I will, Mr. President," he replied, "I'll pray for you every day."

"Oh no," said Mr. Khadafy. "What I mean is, will you do this again on national television?" The American then had the opportunity to pray in front of cameras that broadcast throughout the nation of Libya as he prayed for the salvation of the president and for his country. (From Dan Harrison & Gordon Aeschliman, Romancing the Globe, as quoted in Servant magazine Nov. 1994)

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The loneliest man in New York City needed a friend who would communicate the love of Jesus through that friendship.

There are two things I want to say this morning as we prepare to worship around the bread and the cup:

- 1) If you're a "sinner," Jesus wants to be your friend
- 2) If you're a "saint," Jesus is your friend and he wants you to be a friend of sinners.

Understand that a "sinner" is anyone who hasn't discovered that Jesus wants to be your friend. You're living life on your own terms, going your own way instead of God's way. It doesn't mean your worse than anyone else. The Bible tells us that we're all sinners because in some way, we're all going our own way rather than God's way.

And please understand that a "saint," as the term is used in the Bible, refers to all those sinners who have discovered Jesus as their friend. They are people who have realized that they are sinners and have called on Jesus to forgive them. "Saints" are "sinners" who have received the gift of salvation from Jesus. Saints are not "better people," they're members of God's family because of their faith in Jesus.

In the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 we see a lonely, searching "sinner" whose life is dramatically changed by the transforming friendship of Jesus.

If you've never known Jesus as your friend, please know that Jesus wants to befriend you this morning. And if you've already made friends with Jesus, He wants you to enjoy his friendship and follow his example by extending his transforming friendship to the lonely and searching people around you.

As we watch "**Jesus & ... Zacchaeus**" in this story, let me invite you to allow the Holy Spirit to draw you into the truth it portrays. For some, it will be a first time encounter with the friendship of Jesus. For others, it will offer us three crucial lessons about the power of Jesus' transforming friendship.

Lesson #1 – We need to be open to what God might be doing in the lives of unlikely people

“And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.” Luke 19:2

There are "sinners" everywhere looking for Jesus' friendship but they're often hidden from our eyes.

Zacchaeus was what some people call an "up and outer"...



1. He was at the top of his career - he was a "chief tax collector"

It's the only time in the New Testament that we find reference to a "chief" tax collector. He oversaw others in what was a kind of pyramid financial scheme – he took a cut from each of tax collectors under him. But because of this he was a **social outcast**. The Jews hated the "tax collectors." They worked for the hated Romans. They were "sell outs!" People had nothing to do with them. They were socially ostracized!

There really isn't much difference between the "up and out" and the "down and out" - both are "out." Both watch life from the outside of the crowd.

Zacchaeus was in the crowd along the road that gathered to watch Jesus walk by. He was short and couldn't see over the heads of others and NOBODY was going to move to let him through to see Jesus. They probably wouldn't even acknowledge his presence, so he was forced to climb a tree like a child to see over their heads.

He was a **lonely man in a crowd of people** - so common in life.

2. He was wealthy

The Greek term that is translated as "rich" indicates great wealth! Jericho, the city in which he lived, was a key trading center - anyone who collected taxes would wind up getting very rich. He had made a choice to make money his goal and he was willing to sacrifice friendship and to bear social hatred, just as long as he could make it rich!

Who would think that such a materialistic, hard-nosed person would ever be interested in Jesus? And yet, here he is, struggling to get a look at Him!

We need to realize that God is at work in the hearts of people that many of us would write off as "impossible cases."

Darlene Seale was a "tough case." She was raised in a home where she was sent to church by parents who never took her. For Darlene "church" meant sitting still for an hour and wearing a dress. "But when the choir sang," she wrote, "I sometimes stared at the stained-glass images of Jesus and imagined Him smiling at me. I desperately wanted someone's approval, because my mother's had always been scarce."

She rejected Christ at that time and in High School she became involved in the occult, in Satanism and witchcraft, all for the purpose of seeking acceptance. In College she became involved in student government and took on the task of organizing visiting speakers. On one occasion she eagerly made arrangements for a famous atheist to speak at the College. When the speaker arrived she told



Darlene to expect a hot evening. The woman said, "We'll knock 'em dead, honey. Just you wait and see." The lecture hall was packed and during her talk, the speaker never stopped hurling insults at Christians and at Christ. Darlene was stunned.

Two Christian dorm-mates of Darlene's, June & Carrie, attempted to speak, but the guest speaker berated them and shouted them down. But Darlene noticed something about Carrie. "Carrie's smile, her eyes, the way she held her Bible she meant every word."

At the end of the evening, Darlene was numb. The speaker said, "What'd I tell 'ya, Darlene? We'd knock 'em dead and we did." Darlene was supposed to drive the woman back to the airport, but looking into her face she saw a horrifying emptiness, a dark shadow of pride that made her want to run. Darlene wrote, "I had seen myself."

She quickly made other arrangements for the speaker and returned to the dorm, seeking out June & Carrie to apologize to them for the way they had been treated. When she got to their room she found them praying and over the next few months she debated faith with them, read the books they gave her and studied the Bible with them. Finally, she gave her life to Christ and renounced her involvement with Satanism and witchcraft.

"It was hard to imagine," Darlene wrote, "that God wanted to reach out to me, yet that's exactly what I had longed for years ago, as a child staring at the stained-glass images in church." (Darlene Seale, "The Atheist Who Led Me to God," Moody magazine September 1992)

Do you long for God to reach out and befriend you? Listen, you don't have to wait any longer. This morning, Jesus wants to meet with you at this table and eat with you as a friend.

Are there some "Darlene's" in your life, people who you think would never respond to Christ? Many who we might think are too hardened to respond to Christ are, in fact, just on the doorstep of faith. Be open to being used in their lives by God.

Lesson #2 – We need to be intentional about developing and maintaining friendships that communicate God's love

Jesus intentionally built relationships with "sinners" so that he could share salvation with them. I want you to notice that Jesus begins his interaction with Zacchaeus with an invitation to a relationship.

Jesus said to him...



**“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”
Luke 19:5**

1. "Zacchaeus" ... Jesus called him by name

The shock could have knocked him out of the tree! What was startling was not only the fact that Jesus knew his name, but the fact that everybody else called him "a sinner." Jesus gave him his name! It's worth noting that the name "Zacchaeus" was Hebrew for "pure, righteous." Everybody else stuck him in a category but Jesus showed him personal interest.

2. Jesus wanted something from him ... time.

Everybody else ignored and excluded him but Jesus showed him kindness and friendship. But Jesus wanted time with Zacchaeus because he had a plan for him.

Notice the insistence in Jesus' words: "I must stay at your house today." In other words, Jesus was saying, "Zacchaeus, I have a plan for you life! And it begins at lunch today!"

Years ago, Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, created a little booklet to help us share the friendship of Jesus with lost people. The booklet was called *The Four Spiritual Laws* and it contained the memorable line, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."

Jesus knew his name. He had a deep personal interest in Zacchaeus and he has the same interest in each and every one of us. For example, when he met a woman at a well outside the city of Samaria, he unfolded her life to her. She went and told her friends that Jesus "told me all that I ever did." (John 4:39) Jesus described himself as a shepherd who calls his sheep "by name." (John 10:3)

To the people of Zacchaeus' day, "sinners" were those who weren't "good enough." But to Jesus, they were people who needed his help.

To the people of Zacchaeus' day, "sinners" were untouchables. But to Jesus they were the ones he made a "b-line" for in any crowd.

To Zacchaeus' contemporaries, "sinners" were rejected by God. But to Jesus, they were his "friends." (C.f. Luke 7:34)

In the Gospels, "sinners" are the people to whom Jesus was most attracted and they were the people who were most attracted to him. In Jesus' mouth, "sinner" was a warm word, not a condemnation. In fact, Jesus spent so much time with



them that people gave him the nick-name, "friend of tax collectors and sinners," (Luke 7:34) and Jesus didn't reject it!

In fact, one day when someone threw this nick-name at him he said...

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Matthew 9:12-13

Jesus told Zacchaeus and the crowd around his house...

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10

In fact, he always reserved his harsh words for the self-righteous and religious. He called them a "brood of vipers" (Luke 3:7) and "whitewashed tombs." (Matt 23:27)

We need to be careful how we talk about "sinners." For example, we need to be careful how we talk about gays & lesbians. Let's be clear: homosexual behaviour is sin. The Bible is clear about that. As people who believe that the Bible is God's Word about life we need to take our stand for Biblical morality. We need to be clear about sin but we also need to watch our language when it comes to talking about sinners.

Some years ago I attended a rally in Toronto that addressed the issue of homosexuality. There were gay protesters outside the church where the rally was being held and as I walked past a man in the foyer I overheard him saying to some friends, "I should get my shotgun and show those gays a thing or two..." and others words to the same effect. This was a situation where the question, "What Would Jesus Do?" would have been really applicable.

Charles Colson tells the story of Pastor John Akers and a man he calls "Fred." Fred was the security guard at the abortion clinic that John and his congregation picketed on a regular basis. Fred's was an alcoholic and his language was foul. His demeanor often frightened the children on the picket line and so Pastor John asked him politely one day to watch his language for the sake of his children who were picketing with him.

Over time the children's fear was replaced with pity. They heard that Fred had no family and as Christmas approached, they decided to buy him a present. One day, just before Christmas, they asked permission to cross the line and gave Fred a cup of hot chocolate, a donut and a box wrapped with bright paper and a red ribbon. Inside, was a cable knit sweater. "Thank you," Fred said huskily, "Thank you very much." After Christmas holidays, pickets resumed and John noticed that Fred watched his language.



One night Fred appeared at the church during an elders meeting and he was very drunk! Pastor John and an associate pastor took him for coffee. After a lot of the alcohol out of his system, they talked for hours about Christ and his power to change lives, to forgive sin and to give hope. That night, Fred prayed with them to receive Christ.

He quit his job at the abortion clinic. The members of the church offered him work and he began to work on his alcohol problem. But Fred's old employer starting visiting him and bringing a bottle with him and Fred soon slipped back into booze, he started work again at the clinic. It made Pastor John weep!

But, John continued to reach out to Fred. When John was out of town, Fred would call John's wife to make sure she and kids were OK. And John and Fred still met for lunch at their favorite restaurant, where people marveled at the improbable sight of the abortion clinic guard and the pastor sharing a plate of catfish.

"I wish this was a great success story," says John. "But the success is that the relationship is intact. People need to see Jesus, God in us, enfleshed again. So with Fred. I've built a friendship, a bridge of kindness he can walk over," and Pastor John wrote, "I'll meet him on it any time." (Charles Colson, The Body p. 360-363'

We all need to regularly remember that old saying, attributed to a great martyr for the Gospel, John Bradford²...

"There, but for the grace of God, go I."

The Bible tells us...

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" Romans 3:23-24

Years ago I read something that Joe Aldrich, the former president of Multnomah Bible College wrote in his book *Lifestyle Evangelism*, and it has stuck with me over the years. He said...

"Remember that unsaved people are not the enemy. They are victims of the Enemy."

What did Zacchaeus' need? Acceptance, friendship, forgiveness and salvation. What did Jesus offer him? Acceptance, friendship, forgiveness and salvation.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Bradford



Have you yet to discover that Jesus wants to be your friend? He wants to call you by name and be your friend. All you need to do is admit your need: "I'm a sinner and I need a Saviour." If you can do that, you're the kind of person Jesus wants to spend time with!

If you're already a friend of Jesus, maybe there's someone who needs your friendship. Is there a "Fred" in your life who needs acceptance & kindness before he will hear the Gospel? **Let's be open** to what God might be doing in them. **Let's be intentional** about building a bridge where they can meet with Jesus.

Lesson #3 – We need to be instrumental in introducing our friends to Jesus and allow Jesus to transform them

Jesus' friendship is a transforming friendship but we need to remember that it's Jesus who does the transforming.

Zacchaeus said to Jesus...

“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.” Luke 19:8

“And furthermore,” he said, “if I’ve defrauded anyone in their taxes, I will pay them a penalty of four times the amount I’ve stolen.”

Jesus' friendship alters our life. Zacchaeus called Jesus, “Lord.” Jesus was now his Master. Jesus now called the shots in his life; theft was sin, therefore it was out; money was dethroned by the Lord Jesus Christ. The change began instantaneously because it was Jesus who made the change! We need to trust that Jesus can change people – after all, he changed us AND he’s still changing us!

Bob McAlister is a volunteer with Prison Fellowship. One Friday in October of 1985, while visiting death row inmates in a prison in South Carolina, he stopped at one cell he'd never visited. The sight was horrible. There was an inmate sitting on the floor, as McAlister described him, "looking like a pale, dirty shrimp."

The floor was strewn with papers, half-eaten sandwiches, toilet paper, and old copies of pornographic magazines. The cell stank. The man stank. His hair was matted. His face, chalk-colored.

"And all over his cell, all over the man," wrote McAlister, "crawled dozens of cockroaches. He didn't even move as they swarmed over his shoulders, his hair, his legs."



The inmate's name was Rusty Woomer. McAlister called his name but there was no response. It seemed as if Rusty was trying to talk but something wouldn't let him.

McAlister was a Southern Baptist and he didn't often think in terms of demonic warfare or the physical presence of evil. But that night he knew he was facing it. Satan had a hold on this man.

So Bob called on the name of Jesus to cast out the evil and death in that cell. Then he said, "Rusty, just say the name, 'Jesus.' Call on Jesus." Slowly Rusty whispered, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus."

Bob gripped the bars: "Rusty, look around you, son. Look at what you are living in!" Rusty began to slowly look around, his eyes widened as he saw the roaches all over him.

Bob said to him: "Jesus can give you something better. Don't you want to pray to give your life to Him?" Through the bars, McAlister led him in prayer. "Jesus," Rusty prayed, "I've hurt a lot of people. Ain't no way that I deserve You to hear me. But I'm tired and I'm sick and I'm lonely. Please forgive me Jesus, for everything I've done. I don't know much about You, but I'm willin' to learn, and I thank You for listenin' to me."

Visiting hours were over and McAlister had to leave very quickly after he prayed with Rusty so on Monday Bob could hardly wait to get back to the prison to see if it had been real or a dream. When he got to Rusty's cell, he couldn't believe his eyes.

"The walls were clean," McAlister wrote, "bare and glistening from the scrubbing they had received. The smell of disinfectant still hung in the air. The garbage was gone, the bed was made, and the roaches were history. Rusty stood smiling and erect, enjoying his surprise. 'How do you like it?' he asked. 'I spent all weekend cleaning out my cell 'cause I figured that's what Jesus wanted me to do.'"

Did you catch that? "I figured that's what Jesus wanted me to do."

"Rusty," said Bob, "it may have taken you all weekend to clean your cell, but it took Jesus only an instant to clean your life." (Charles Colson, *The Body*, p. 393-395)

The Bible tells us that God's cleansing forgiveness is absolutely thorough...

“though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” Isaiah 1:18



Is there something in your life that really needs to be cleaned up? Jesus wants to be your friend and give you something so much better. Why not invite him in this morning?

His invitation to friendship is open. It's an open invitation to sinners like you and me...

- He asks us to acknowledge our sin.
- He invites us to ask for His forgiveness
- He offers it freely to us by his grace to be received as a gift

Will you accept it today?

Are there "tough cases" like "Darlene" in your life? Let's believe that God is at work in them. Let's faithfully live for Christ and let's pray that God's work will become evident in their lives.

Are there "Fred's" in your life whose spiritual progress has been "one step forward, two steps back"? Let's keep the bridge open so that they can meet with Jesus.

Are there "Rusty's" in your life whose lives need the transforming power of Jesus? Remember, he's the one who makes the changes, not us. Let's be available to be used by Jesus, but let's allow Jesus do the work of change in their lives.

During our communion services we have a packet of envelopes containing the names of people we're praying for to come to Jesus. This morning I want to lead us in prayer for these people as we prepare for the Lord's Table. Will you join me as I pray...

- Prayer for salvation for friends, family, co-workers and for all those the Lord has brought into our lives and who need Jesus

- Welcome of New Members:** Virginia Behiel and Susan Evans
- Invitation to the Lord's Table**
- Songs of Communion:**
 - Before the Throne of God Above
 - I Will Glory in My Redeemer
- Benediction**