

# Ready for Jesus?

by Thaddeus Barnum

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*The sermon challenges us to reflect on our readiness to invite Jesus into every aspect of our lives, using Zacchaeus' transformative encounter as a model.*

**Duration:** 28:20

**Scripture:** Luke 18:1-30, Luke 19:1-40

**Topics:** "Jesus"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Zacchaeus and its underlying message. He emphasizes that Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and that we should not pass by or marginalize anyone. The preacher also highlights the importance of humility and allowing Jesus to enter our lives. He shares a personal anecdote about a Baptist pastor who was arrested for embezzling funds, emphasizing the need for authenticity and not hiding behind an image. The sermon concludes with a call to let Jesus work in our hearts, leading us to show grace, mercy, and generosity to others.

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## Transcript

Good evening. It's a joy to come back to Church of the Cross, and to have been all these days alongside Mark and Mandy, and alongside you. We are stationed in Connecticut, and so not too far away, but a delight for us, for me to have been here today with so many of the team and the leadership of the church, and a delight to be here tonight.

I want to pick up on the work you've been doing during Lent, on these encounters with Jesus. And if you've got Bibles with you, I would like you to go to this passage in Luke 19, and spend some time there tonight, and look intensely into this moment with Zacchaeus. When you think of Zacchaeus, what's the first thing you think of? Short.

He was short. Most times we hear this story in children's Sunday school, most people know the basic message, and I don't want to take away from that message, that here is a man, a short man who clearly is marginalized by society, and he climbs a tree, and by the time the story is done, he has invited Jesus into his home, and into his heart. And so often that's the very simple message taken away when you hear the story that Jesus comes to seek and to save the lost, that he's done that very work in the heart of Zacchaeus.

Sixty years ago this year, a gentleman in Pasadena, California preached on this text, and preached on, in conjunction, Revelation 3.20, I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, same kind of imagery of the Zacchaeus story. And that sermon, later he became a pastor, a professor at Fuller Theological, but that sermon later went to publication, and to this day has sold over 10 million copies. The man's name was Robert Munger.

How many of you know that name? One. There is somebody who remembers his name. The little book was called My Heart, Christ's Home.

Billy Graham Association picked it up. I mean, it just went everywhere, but the idea behind it is, are you ready for Jesus to come into the house? That's the point behind it. Are you ready for Jesus to come into your house today? Now.

No, no. Now. Right now.

Now. Today I'm going to be at your house. Are you ready for him? Really, and so what he does in the sermon, which none of you have heard, is literally, he's coming into the living room, he's coming into the kitchen, he's coming into the recreation room, he's coming into the closets, he's coming into the basement, and he's coming to the very things that we hide secret into our lives.

Today, 60 years later, he would come to our computers. Find out what's going on. Are you ready to actually pray the prayer? Almighty God, to you all hearts are open.

All desires known. From you no secrets are hid. And that's the nature of this.

By the time the sermon ended, he literally no longer a guest into the house, but the preacher signed over the title deed of the house, and he becomes the guest. And the Lord Jesus Christ becomes the Lord of the house, the Lord of the heart. Are you ready to invite Christ, Jesus, into your life today? And that really is messing with what we hold private.

And a good message during Lent is we reflect on the things that are, are you ready for Jesus to come into the house, into your life? Let me just say that in my world, especially as I travel among clergy, the answer sometimes is no, because we're so into the image that we're not wanting to him to pierce through the image and see us, the real us. So consequently, in Stratford, Connecticut, the papers went wild last week because of the Baptist pastor who had been known for 16 years, a loving man, a good man, a godly man, a pastoral man, somebody who works with us down at the Bridgeport Rescue Mission, suddenly is arrested. Why? Because he was embezzling funds.

Now, this is all alleged, but he handed himself in. Now they're going through trial. My friends, this is the point of it.

Here's a man who's got the image right and now publicly, now publicly everybody knows is this man for real or is he not? Has he done something he should never have done? So this is not just something that is for those who are outside. This is something for us inside. Are you ready for Christ to come into your life in all aspects and do the work he alone can do? And so often I want to stay at that point of the message.

But so much of what Luke gives us in this text takes us also to a deeper message, not to hide that or to actually shadow that away and find something else. But holding it up as well as underneath it, Luke does have another message undergirding this one. Specifically, if you look at your text, what you'll find back in

chapter 17 and verse 11 that we've really begun a movement.

Jesus is moving. He's actually on the way to Jerusalem. And so what you begin to see in this story as it unfolds, it's the last journey, the last moment as his face is set for Jerusalem.

And you begin to see a theme that Luke is bringing out here, a theme where he's looking very intensely. For example, the ten lepers you'll find in chapter 17. In chapter 18, there's the story of the persistent widow.

A little later on, there's that story of the Pharisee who's arrogant, self-righteous, and the tax collector who says, Lord, forgive me a sinner. Highlighting, as he often does, those who are marginalized or on the outside. A little later, he'll say that it's the children.

You must come into the kingdom of God as a child. You must humble yourself as a child. And then he tells us the story of the rich young ruler.

Interesting story, only because here's somebody who's not marginalized by society, yet he's marginalized from the kingdom of God. And Jesus, who's got that pulse inside of him, that theme that's underneath it, I've come to seek and to save the lost. You can see it.

He's moving to Jerusalem, and that's his focus of it. And he no more finishes the ruler story than suddenly he is caught in that moment where he announces what's really going on. He tells his own, I'm about to die.

I'm going to Jerusalem. This is going to happen to me. They don't get it.

He gets it. And everything inside of me as I read this text, I want to say to Jesus, man, if I were you, I'd take some time out. I mean, you're about to go to Jerusalem.

You're about to suffer. Nobody's going to take four weeks out. Prepare yourself.

You know, just breathe and rest. And somewhere inside of him, even as this passage continues to move, he does not stop being the shepherd. So you can almost see a selflessness, a sacrificial nature of our Lord.

He's not stopping. He's got a mission. Right up to the last, he's got this mission.

He's going to seek and to save that which is lost. And even though he says what's going to happen in Jerusalem, nobody gets it. And the story continues.

And now he's moving through Jericho. What's so interesting is you'll find that as the next piece goes on, this next chapter of 19 is going to bleed right into Palm Sunday. So you've got this sense that he's really at the edge of the week when he lays down his life, when the shepherd becomes the lamb.

And yet his pulse is there. And everywhere he goes, he's got this crowd with him. And the crowd going through Jerusalem, especially in the story of the blind man, they're not a kind crowd.

If you read the story of Luke in particular, the account of the blind man, they're actually pushing the blind man down, almost like they're stepping over him to get in the front. So those in front are pushing him down. And you get this sense of, well, what the other gospel recorders call a sense of violence.

They want to be up front. They want to see Jesus. Maybe they want to be healed or something.

They're always pressing to the front. And always our Lord is doing something different. Isn't he? He hears the sound of the blind man.

Well, it seems like as you break into 19, you've got the same story going on. This crowd is moving. They're moving through Jericho.

And he's on his way. He's entering. He's passing through.

And you get the sense of the crowd and the people and the activity and the buzz that's just going around Jesus as he's passing through that ancient town of Jericho. And suddenly the gospel writer, he all of a sudden, like that great movie camera, he zooms in on this person named Zacchaeus. The unexpected.

I mean, you don't imagine of all the people, of all the dignitaries of town, he would focus on Zacchaeus. But there we've got this short man. Interesting, we've actually got a rich ruler again, because the way it's phrased in the text here is he's not only rich, but he's the ruler of tax collectors, the chief.

He's different than the Luke 18 rich young ruler, because the Luke 18 is obedient and he gives to the synagogue. But this one is rich and marginalized because he is known as a traitor. He is of the line of Abraham, of the sons of Abraham.

And yet he has betrayed the people of Israel for taking their money, getting wealthy on their money to benefit the Romans. And this short man who is rich has no honor, no dignity, no integrity. And the crowd that parts for the rich, the dignitaries, does not part for him.

He is an outcast to them. He does not get through. And clearly he's given choice.

Is he going to just say, I can't get through and go home? Or is he going to do his best to see Jesus? It's interesting the way it's phrased again. He doesn't just want to see Jesus. The way it's the way it's intimated is that he wants to see who Jesus is.

And so he climbs a sycamore tree. Now, are there any dignitaries in the room? How many dignitaries do you see hanging in a tree? There is a sense of shame that comes with this. Now, he is somebody who is the unseen of the community, and obviously he does not care.

But how many of you would like to see the mayor of Boston hanging up in a tree somewhere? Dignitaries do not do this. Just climbing the tree shows you the shame that's in his life, shows you the reality of how he engages with this culture and how the culture engages with him. I cannot tell you how often I see these people who are in a tree.

Part of my work in my life is the pursuit of not affirming the image, but trying to watch the Lord Jesus Christ touch the soul. Everything about our culture and our Christian culture majors in image, when what he wants to do is get behind image to you. He does work that's in the soul and real.

He doesn't master the outside, he masters the inside. And we find our identity, our identity isn't what we do, our identity is in him. And if we place our identity in what we do, what we lose, what we do, we lose our identity.

It's the opposite, he makes us his, regardless of what we do, regardless of how long our obituaries are when we're done. Oh Lord, just make me somebody faithful to you, where my identity is rooted in who you are. I had a man come to me, a schooled, educated pastor, a man who was debating between getting his

doctoral work or going into pastoral ministry.

And he came into my office and I thought that was going to be his talk. But to put it in kind language, if you don't mind, just to guard safe ears, he was hooked by the things on the internet. And he couldn't get out.

And every part of his life was ensnared. He was the dignitary who was out front because his image was perfect, but his soul was up a tree, locked into a bondage. A bondage that is stealing our present culture.

I met with a guy out of Philadelphia, Westminster Theological, who's been the lead on marriage counseling for CCEF, which is the lead out of Westminster Theological. And I asked this marriage counselor, what's the one thing that you're seeing over the last five years that you haven't seen before? What's the dominant pressing issue? What's the thing that's happening in marriages that you're surprised at? What's your lead story today? And what's it been over the last few years? He said, no question, absolutely no question how to answer. It's hooked on the stuff on the internet that's got our men hooked.

And I say men because it's probably both, right? It's just I deal with men. He said, that's it. There are lots of souls that are up a tree in shame, which makes this story riveting.

Because as the crowd is moving by, everybody is looking at Jesus. Everybody's pressing in, everybody wants what they want. And there is the dignitary himself passing by the sycamore tree.

You've seen it in parades, haven't you? That once in a while, when suddenly there's somebody that you want to see, and suddenly he looks up and he sees Zacchaeus. His eyes look over to Zacchaeus. Can you imagine being seen by the dignitary? But it's not just that he sees him.

His eyes stay on him. So much until Zacchaeus sees Jesus seeing him. For some of us, that's the most dangerous look of all.

When Jesus really sees us. And the story doesn't stop. Jesus himself stops.

Can you imagine all this crowd and all that sound and all the activity? And he not only sees him, but he actually stops and faces him. So that he not only sees Jesus, Zacchaeus not only sees him, but the crowd sees Jesus seeing him. Couldn't you imagine the crowd saying, oh, somebody's got to give him the inside gossip on the man in the tree.

He must not know. He must not know who that man is. He must not have the inside on the man in the tree.

Somebody tell Jesus why not to look, not to talk. That's not somebody we talk to. And yet Jesus opens his mouth to speak to him.

And you almost want to hear what Zacchaeus always hears. Look at him in the tree. Isn't that stupid? I mean, look at him.

He's in a tree. Always the mocking. That's always been the sound Zacchaeus has heard.

Always from the culture, pushing him down. And now Jesus is going to talk to him. Will that be the tone? It's the tone he always knows.

But instead, Jesus does something that is, if you read the Gospels, you're almost stunned by what he does. How many of you know the name of the blind man in Luke? Careful. You may know the blind man's

name in Mark.

See, you've got to be careful here. Luke doesn't tell us his name. The leper that was healed of the ten, what was his name? The rich young ruler, what was his name? The persistent widow, what was her name? What was the name of the good Samaritan? Do we have to call him the good Samaritan for the rest of our lives? What was the name of the prodigal son? What was the name of that woman at the well? What was the name of the centurion? So many times we see the stories, we don't know the name.

And there in Jericho, he says it, Zacchaeus. The shepherd knows us by name. Can you imagine the dignity given to Zacchaeus in front of anybody? Everybody at that moment when Jesus speaks his name in front of everybody publicly.

My friends, in one way, the story doesn't need to go on. He's done everything right there, all the work that needed to be done. He knows him by name.

And conferred upon him integrity and dignity of soul in front of everybody. All he needed to do was say, that man is a son of Abraham. And press on his way.

Or maybe like Matthew, he could have said, follow me. But to be honest, there's only a few days left. And of course, he then does publicly something that you've got to ask the question at the end of the day.

Who really is this story about? Is it really about Zacchaeus? Yes, it is. But it's really about the crowd too. I love the fact that Luke doesn't say it's the Pharisees or Sadducees here.

He's dealing with the crowd. He's dealing with the crowd, the culture, the mindset of the crowd. That has disparaged and marginalized the man in the tree.

And what he's doing now, he's doing publicly. That everybody needs to grasp this. And he does what you can't imagine.

My friends, have you ever gone through suffering? Do you know what it's like to be sick? Do you think it's amazing when your world falls apart, you lose your job, you don't know where your finances are coming? How many of you love to think about somebody else other than yourself when you're going through things like that? You know what? This stinks. Who can I bless today? Doesn't happen, does it? When I get messed up, you're out, I'm in. You need to think about me too.

And yet look what our Savior is doing. Look what he's doing this last week before he goes into the last week. Look what he's doing.

Today, today Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house. We're having lunch today, you and me. I wish I could frame this a lot longer than we have time wise.

But what Jesus is doing here is so significant because it's a community event. It's not just an individual event, it's a community event. Do you see that? That he's actually saying we don't have permission to marginalize.

That doesn't mean we condone the behavior. We don't have a permission to marginalize. I have come to seek and save that which is lost and crowd.

I've come for you. You have no right in doing to him what you've done to him. Pushing him down, pushing him out.

He is a son of Abraham. Today, I'm coming to his house. Sometimes in the broad expanse of the Bible, I'm amazed because where did the Lord show up into Jericho when he showed up in Jericho the first time we hear about Jericho? What house did he go to in the Old Testament when he went into Jericho's house? Rahab.

He went to Rahab's house. Now he's going to Zacchaeus. Does anybody get a message here? Are you listening? Can you hear? Do you know Rahab? Do you know the story of Rahab? Let me just finish it for you.

Her name is written in Matthew 1. In the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will find the name of Rahab. Isn't that stunning? And now of all the people he could have blessed in Jericho, guess who he's blessing today? You know, the thing that's amazing about this, because most of us, I wonder how you'd react. How would you react to know today, right now, Jesus is coming to your house.

Right now. How many of you would like to say, I'm in? Make it about eight. She's going to do some cleanup before you get there.

How many of you are ready now? That's the thing about Zacchaeus that's so amazing. And all of us, guess what he does? He jumps out of the tree. Little guy.

He comes down. He's ready. And that is part of the joy of this message.

The man is ready. Are you ready? Are you ready for him to bulldoze into your life? I don't mean bulldoze. Yes, I do.

He's coming now. Now. Are you ready for him now? Every aspect of your life.

Is it true? All things uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. And Zacchaeus says yes. And welcomes Jesus into his house.

And you actually see the mark of salvation. That salvation came to visit. And you know it because the mark is inside of him.

How do you know the mark is there? Because generosity becomes. It just pours out of him. Mercy comes into his heart.

And generosity to the poor. And to all I've defrauded. Suddenly.

He doesn't care about being right with the community right now. He cares about being right with the Lord. With Jesus.

And he has mercy just come straight into his heart. Suddenly it explodes out of him. The stuff with money.

The stuff with all that I've done. I'm going to give half of what I've got to the poor. And I'm going to go to the people I've defrauded.

And I'll up it four times what I've done to them. And Jesus just. He stands there and says.

Today salvation has come to this house. This is a son of Abraham. The son of man has come to.

Come to. Seek. And to save.

The lost. And he no more says that. Than the story that follows right after in 1911.

It's one. It just moves. And as he was saying this.

For the people he tells the story of the ten talents. What have I entrusted you with? And when the talent story is done. We've got Palm Sunday.

My dear friends the message underneath this text is strong. Yes it's about Jesus coming into our house. But his message to the crowd.

The message to us all is. We pass by nobody. We pass by nobody.

Underneath as he's going to the cross. The one thing he's saying to us. The thing he's been saying all through this.

From the leper to the persistent widow. To the tax collector. To the children.

Only the children to enter the kingdom of God. We must humble ourselves to the rich young ruler. To the blind man.

Now to this man named Zacchaeus. My dear friends. We pass by nobody.

This is supposed to be the heart of the church. That we are those who go out. Does not mean we condone behavior.

But what it does mean. Is that we take the compassion. That Christ Jesus has for us.

While we were still ungodly. Still sinners. And take that compassion.

And let mercy explode through us. In the city of Boston. In our own families.

To our own wives and husbands. To our own friends and neighbors. Mercy explodes.

Because salvation has come to this house. This house. And when it's come to this house.

We see people in sycamore trees. We see the people that are pushed down and cast out. And especially the ones that we as a church push out.

And cast out. Because we love with the mercy with which we've been shown. We love with the grace with which we've been shown.

And this really becomes the message undergirding. Behold our savior. Encountering a man.

Who through the man. Teaches the crowd. And teaches us all.

We pass by nobody. The grace that has been shown to us. We give.

The mercy that we've been shown. We give. It starts in the heart.

Are you ready for Jesus Christ to come do work in your life? Let him. Come to the table tonight. And let him do the work inside you that needs to be done.

And when he's done. You'll know it. Because mercy and generosity.

Will fill your soul. And you'll wake up tomorrow. And you will see the people.

That you have not yet seen. Even though you may see them every day. And you will give as has been given to you.

This is the repulse underneath the Zacchaeus text. We pass by nobody. In Jesus name.

Amen.

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