

Making Disciples Who Make Disciples

Ministry year 2021-2022

Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

Pastor David Palmer

June 26, 2022

TEXT: Luke 19:1-10



This morning we continue in our series of disciple-making. We're in a year-long series. If you're keeping track, this is Week 41. We are finishing this month looking at how Jesus teaches us to obey Him. We're looking at the specific topic of how Jesus' teaching guides us into righteousness, how faith in Jesus changes the way we live, and how it impacts the lives around us. We've been seeing together that disciples are learners. We have a working definition:

*Disciples are committed followers of Jesus
who learn to obey Him over time
and joyfully share Him with others.*

In our passage this morning, we look at a moment when a man meets Jesus. It's a passage that has a number of surprises in it. It's a passage that answers a number of questions that we have, whether we can express them or they lie hidden beneath the surface. Our passage begins with a story that helps us to see, in a way, that sinful people live in sinful ways. We see this in the example of Zacchaeus, but, surprisingly, we will see that sinful people who live in sinful ways are actually drawn to Jesus. That is surprising, but the most surprising part of our passage is what happens next, what happens in the end. We see that sinful people who believe in Jesus begin to live in new ways. This short passage really puts the gospel on display. It sets the themes of discipleship and disciple-making before us, and so, I invite you to journey with me as we go through this passage.

The text begins in Luke 19:1 where we read that Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. Jericho is the oldest city on planet Earth. It's the city that Joshua conquered. It's the city that

the priests went around and the walls fell down. It's a city that is on the edge near the Dead Sea. It's the city that marks the beginning of the great ascent to Jerusalem. When you travel from the Jericho Road up to Jerusalem, you're always going up. The road from Jericho goes up to Jerusalem, and this road up to Jerusalem was a significant pilgrimage route. It was also a route that was known for highway robbery because there's only one way to go. There were lots of hidden places along the way. This route has a nickname in Hebrew today as "the ascent of blood" because of so much robbery that happens all along the way. Jericho is an oasis city, and when you visit Jericho, it's the last really lush, green place near the Judean wilderness. It's a wealthy city for many reasons. It's a city of trade and commerce, and in particular it's a place that brokers the trade in balsam. Balsam, the balm of Gilead, was a very expensive perfume, and it was treasured for its medicinal properties. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that the Roman army actually fought to obtain the balsam groves, they were so valuable. You'll see that that is important for our story.

Jesus entered Jericho. He was passing through, and He was on His way to Jerusalem. This text takes place just before Holy Week and sets Jesus on His way there for Holy Week. As He is passing through Jericho, the text comes into focus in Luke 19:2 with a man that we meet named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is the Hebrew name *Zakkai*, which means "pure" or "clean." Yohanan ben Zakkai is one of the most famous figures in Judaism. That's not this man's father but a different Zakkai. More than his name, which is a Hebrew name, so he is a Jewish man, we read two other things: he was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. For those with ears to hear, these two words often go together. Tax collectors are rich. They are those in society in the first century who have the vocational calling that they have secured by bidding for the office. In the Roman period, taxes that are paid are received to support the function and authority of the Roman Empire. There is a poll tax; there are land taxes. Most people don't mind paying taxes that they know about, but then there are all kinds of other secondary taxes, indirect taxes. How much of a gallon of gasoline is actually taxes? It's a significant portion. In first century Israel, there were the known taxes—the poll taxes, property taxes,—but the vast majority of taxes were taxes that were collected on the export and import of goods, upon goods that passed through certain key trade centers. There were three main stations of tax collection of these customs, sales taxes, if you will. There was one in Caesarea on the coast. There was one in Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee, and there was this one at Jericho. The one at Jericho is the one where the most amount of revenue could be received because it was the Jericho Road that led the great pilgrimage crowds to come up to Jerusalem. There was no other way to get there.

The way that people secured the tax collection office was the opposite dynamic of what you and I know when you get a bid to do a big project. When you are going to do a big project at your house, you get a bid, and what do you do after that? You get another bid. You take a deep

breath after the first bid and you say: "We are going to bid that out. Someone else may give us a better price." What do you do after that? You get a third bid. Parents and grandparents know this is a vital part of parental instruction to pass down to the next generation: "Don't contract with the first bid that you get, and you try to get the lowest price." Tax collection works in the opposite way. The Roman officials received bids from people who offered to serve as a tax collector, and they looked at one bid and said: "Well, this man says he can collect 10,000 shekels. Let's wait for another bid." The next one says he can collect 20,000 shekels. Another man says he can collect 30,000, and so you sell the office of tax collection to the highest bidder. The problem is that those who collect the taxes are then allowed to keep whatever they can collect above their committed rate. It was a system that required insider knowledge. It was a system that encouraged corruption. It was a system that was connected with the perception of disloyalty. The funds that were collected were sent to Rome. They paid for the Imperial lifestyle; they paid for Roman armies; and they paid for so many things that those in Israel despised and lamented. It required the consent of insider people, and Zacchaeus is one of those men.

I want to point out this morning, first of all, that the way Luke introduces Zacchaeus as a chief tax collector makes us gasp. That he is rich is known, and for the hearers of this story, they would recognize that wealthy tax collection comes on the heels of corruption. It makes us grieve. Do you grieve when business leaders act corruptly? I grieve. Do you grieve when government officials act corruptly? Do you grieve when military contracts are put out in public view and you think: "How did we pay that much for this?" Systems that encourage corruption make us sad. They also make us angry, and yet they should not surprise us, because the Bible teaches us that sinful people act in sinful ways. This is important, especially in church. It's especially important in church because sometimes in church strange things happen to us when we come across the threshold. We come across the threshold of the church, and we have a way of thinking sometimes inside the church that disconnects with how life really is. Sometimes inside the church, Christian people become upset when they see non-Christian people acting in sinful ways. Has that ever happened to you? You think: "You shouldn't do that!" And the truth is, why not? Zacchaeus had a pretty good gig. He had bid for the job. He had the job. He was in the position, and it was very lucrative. If people are not living for Jesus, they act in sinful ways.

The surprising part of this passage, though, is what happens next. ***Sinful people who act in sinful ways are drawn to Jesus.*** This means that bad people want to get close to Jesus. This is surprising. Zacchaeus was seeking to see who Jesus was. On account of the crowd, he could not because he was small in stature. I have a special place in my heart for Zacchaeus on this point. I'm not a man of great stature. In my experience, people who are short tend to be resourceful and they plan ahead. I used to live in China and my teaching partner in China was 6' 9", and he

didn't have to plan ahead. He could see for miles, it seemed. I was often buried in the crowd. George Houck, was a long-time member of Kenwood. His widow, Marion Houck, sets a beautiful example of dedication to be in church on Sunday mornings. She comes with a walker, and she never misses. George and I golfed together. We were both about the same height. One of my favorite stories of George Houck was one time when the president of the United States was passing by and George knew he wouldn't be able to see him. So George got off of his motorcycle and jumped through a hedgerow and found himself right there with the president of United States! Zacchaeus plans ahead. He runs ahead. He climbs up into a sycamore tree to catch a view of Jesus.

Sycamore trees grow near Jericho. This is an image of an old sycamore tree in Israel, in Netanya. This tree is a thousand years old, and as you can see, it looks like a great climbing tree.



The bonus part of climbing up in this sycamore tree is that once you get high enough, you have leaf coverage. So Zacchaeus could have climbed up into a tree like this and be able to see Jesus, even perhaps heard him, but he would have been hidden by the leaves. Well, when Jesus comes by, He looks up he looks up, and He says in Luke 19:5:

"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

Jesus sees Zacchaeus, and we don't expect that. We don't expect famous people to notice individuals in a crowd, and yet Jesus does, and He summons him to come down: "I will stay at your house." Zacchaeus hurriedly came down from the tree and received Him joyfully. Imagine this: a personal audience with Jesus.

I've had a few encounters with famous people, brief ones. I remember when I met an NBA player in the Charlotte airport. Everyone around was whispering. I just feigned ignorance. I was carrying a very large piece of luggage in my travels, and I just turned to this man and pretended like I didn't know who he was. I said: "Hey, I have this really heavy box. Can you help me carry this?" He said: "Sure, man." So this NBA player and I walked through the Charlotte airport carrying this heavy box, and everyone was whispering, thinking that I was good friends with him. When we took a group of people from Kenwood to Israel, I had an unexpected encounter with a world leader. We were going through the streets of Jerusalem near St. Anne's Church, which is actually a small piece of France in Israel. It's a strange, long story, but it's a church that was built by the Crusaders. It has great acoustics, and every together French dignitary in Israel

has to visit St. Anne's Church. We had just been there. We sang a few songs, we were walking back through these crowded streets when, all of a sudden, a ring of security men came. I looked through the crowd and I saw Emmanuel Macron, President of France! I did what you would have done. I shouted out: *"Vive la France,"* and then put my hand out, not really thinking. Surprisingly, he stopped. He shook my hand, and he said: "Where are you from?" I told him, and then he said: "Enjoy this place." It was just a few seconds. What really would have been extraordinary is if he had looked at me and said: "David, it is so nice to see you here. Why don't I come to where you're staying tonight, and we will have a lengthy conversation." That would have really changed our trip!

That's what happens to Zacchaeus. Jesus sees him, and He doesn't just greet him. He doesn't just call him by name. He says: "Zacchaeus, get down here. I'm coming to your house." Isn't that surprising? But, sinful people are drawn to Jesus, and the good news of the gospel is that ***sinful people are received and welcomed by Jesus***. The text takes a surprising turn in Luke 19:7. It seems like a moment of great joy, and yet we read that when the crowds of people saw it, they all grumbled: *"He has gone to be the guest of a man who's a sinner."*

The New Testament records many instances of grumbling. Grumbling is a great word in English. It's an onomatopoeic word. When you say grumble, you are grumbling. Grumble is like murmur. When you say murmur, you are murmuring. In all the grumbling passages in the New Testament, this is the only place where we read that they "all grumbled." Sometimes there are just a few grumblers. This time everyone grumbles because the Zacchaeus is the chief tax collector. He's a disloyal person. He puts our lives, our livelihood, in danger. He's a corrupt person. All of his loves are disordered. He has taken our property and given it away. He is despised, and Jesus picked him? It's a scandal. Every time tax collectors are mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, they are mentioned in a positive light—only on the count that they are drawn to Jesus. They are often grouped with another generic group of sinners: tax collectors, and sinners. They hang out together. It's their section of the cafeteria. It's their section of the bleachers. This is the tax collector and sinners' section. These are like the bad men of the New Testament. In Luke 15, the tax collectors and sinners were drawn near to Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes grumbled: "He receives sinners and eats with them." It's this situation in Luke 15 that prompts Jesus' most famous teaching of all, a set of three parables: a man with 100 sheep who has lost one, leaves the 99, goes and finds it, and brings it home and gathers his friends and neighbors and says, "Rejoice with me. I have found my lost sheep; a woman who had 10 silver coins and lost one, lights a lamp, sweeps the house, seeks diligently, and when she finds the coin, she calls her friends and neighbors and says, "Rejoice with me, I found my lost coin; and in the climactic parable of the three, a man with two sons, one son who requests his inheritance while the father is alive, and he wastes the inheritance, liquidates the family

property, shames the father, lives a wild lifestyle—or as the New King James translates, a “prodigal” lifestyle—and yet returns, is received and welcomed and restored.

Sinful people live in sinful ways. We have to be careful not to make that “us” and “them,” because if we think about it, that's actually all of us. Sinful people live in sinful ways, and sinful sense people are drawn to Jesus. Sin has a way of weighing us down, choking life, producing guilt and shame, and we somehow that if we go to Jesus, He can help us. Sinful people who live in sinful ways are drawn to **Jesus live in new ways**. Zacchaeus stood up in his home, upon receiving the Lord, and he announced publicly in Jesus, and Zacchaeus, when he meets Jesus and Jesus comes to his home, shows us that **sinful people who believe in** Luke 19:8:

“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

This is astonishing! Zacchaeus doesn't go through an extensive two-year discipleship journey to get to this point. It's a response to the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

We have been looking at justice in the month of June, and sometimes we think of justice as retribution—punish the wrongdoer. That's part of justice, but the Bible also says that part of justice is restoration. What happens with Zacchaeus is that he initiates restoration of property that he has wrongfully plundered. The ESV says: “If I have defrauded anyone.” The Greek text uses a very vivid word. The Greek text uses the word “sycophant,” which is actually an English word. We don't use it very often, but it's used to be a flatterer in English. The image in Greek is very vivid and somewhat playful. A sycophant is literally someone who shakes the fig tree. A *syco* is a fig and a *phant* is someone who reveals it. How do you show figs? You take the fig tree and you shake it and the figs drop. The image is of someone who is trying to get more than their share. Have you ever done that? Have you ever gone to the grocery store and seen the fresh organic strawberries are on sale? Then you think you really want more of those, so you run to the back of the store and start grabbing all the organic strawberries you can. That's the image. The image is the figs that have fallen and are ready to be harvested aren't enough for you so you go and grab the fig tree and you start shaking it until the figs drop and you gather all you can. That's how the text describes defrauding. It's taking more than your share, and Zacchaeus echoes God's Word in Exodus 22:1:

“If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.”

He restores, and sinful people who live in sinful ways, who are drawn to Jesus, all of a sudden start to live in new ways. We celebrated new life in Jesus this morning in baptism, and that new life starts, and that new life grows, and that new life gains momentum. What are you doing now that you didn't do before? That's my greatest joy as a pastor. I love it when people say:

"I've stopped sinning in this way." That's great, but the new life in Christ is really exciting. What are you doing now that you didn't before, and what can you do if you have received Christ to model restoration?

Zacchaeus' response to the gospel shows us the power of salvation, and I want to end with two observations that are really both implications for us, and that's how Jesus explains what just happened. In Luke 19:9, Jesus says:

"Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham."

First implication is: ***Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ brings with it a recovery of our identity.*** Zacchaeus was a Jewish man, but he was perceived as disloyal, corrupt, and in love with the wrong power, and Jesus restores his identity. Isn't that beautiful? Jesus says publicly: "He's a son of Abraham." It's just like what the father does at the return of the prodigal son. The prodigal son came home thinking: "If I could just have enough food to eat like a hired servant." That's all he wanted, just to survive. And when he came, the father cut off his speech, and the father said to the servants: "Bring quickly the best robe, put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, for this my son was dead and is alive again." When you put your faith in Jesus, you will regain your identity. It is the only way, and Jesus' interpretation of this passage tells us what we must do, and that is that we must also trust in Jesus. And when we do that we will regain ourselves. Our sins will be forgiven. We will begin to live in new ways, and we will recover our identity.

The second implication for us is in Luke 19:10: ***Jesus is seeking the lost.*** This is one of the most powerful sentences in the New Testament because it's when Jesus tells everyone why He came. Jesus says:

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

The Son of Man, that great glorious image from Daniel 7, the divine Royal Son, has left His throne in heaven. Jesus has come to this world, and He is seeking you. He is seeking the lost. Jesus comes to lay down His life, to offer Himself for us. Zacchaeus reveals for us what happens when people meet Jesus. They recover their identity, their sins are forgiven, they restore life that's been taken, and this dramatic encounter reveals for all of us the saving mission of Jesus. That's what we need to be about as a church. We need to be about following Jesus who came to seek and to save the lost, and we need to celebrate the recovery of every single life. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, You are great and glorious. We trust You today. We thank You for this powerful story of a corrupt, sinful man who is drawn to You. We thank You, Lord, that You received him, and You teach us that You will receive us. Lord, use this incident to reveal Your saving mission in

the world to seek and to save the lost. And so we desire to come to You this morning. Lord, I pray for those here now or are listening online who are wondering: “Will I be received if I come to Jesus?” May they hear Your resounding “yes.” And Lord, for those of us who have received You, may Your Holy Spirit begin to work in us so that new life flows out of a recovered identity, and may we as a people celebrate the recovery of each and every life. Hallelujah!

In Jesus’ Name, Amen.