

Zacchaeus Encounters Jesus

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Preacher: Richard Marzetti

[0 : 0 0] So we're looking at the story of Jesus coming to Jericho. And I've started it usually earlier than sometimes we look at these things, we talk about Jesus coming in and meeting Zacchaeus.

But I wanted also to include the story of the blind man along the way, people who encountered Jesus. Now, a few years ago, actually we were doing a street survey.

You know, those sort of annoying people when you're walking down the street and they've got their clipboard and they say, oh, they're really friendly, aren't they? They're very, good morning, could I just have a moment of your time? I'd just like to speak to you.

Well, I know what it's like to be on that side. We find it a bit hassily now perhaps. But I was trying to do a street survey. We were trying to do a street survey one day in a town. We weren't having much luck.

But we were standing around in kind of the same position and over to the side of us was a big issue seller. And we got chatting to the big issue seller and I think another one turned up and then some of their friends turned up and actually they helped us do our survey by chatting to them.

[1 : 1 2] So at the end we said to them, thank you. And they said, no, thank you. And we said, why are you thanking us? They said, no one has ever asked our opinion before. I was really telling, wasn't it?

I know sometimes you think about this in the story of Jesus walking to Jericho with the disciples. Here's somebody on the side of the road that perhaps no one's ever really asked what he wants.

No one's ever asked his opinion before. He sits at the side of the road and he's begging. Now, of course, when we read the Bible, we have to remember that those in the Bible aren't British.

I know it's a shock to all of us, even though it's written in English. But they're not British in the Bible. And so what I think is happening here, if we understand something of the culture of the time, is that Jericho knows Jesus is coming.

Because it says, let's go back to the scripture. As Jesus approached Jericho, the blind man was sitting by the roadside begging when he heard the crowd going by.

[2 : 1 8] I think there's a sense of the crowd have come out. The people of the town have come out to meet Jesus. One commentator I read who worked in the Middle East for a number of years recounts a story of when a famous general was coming to visit this village.

And the villagers heard about the fact that this famous general was coming to their village. So they rushed out of their village. They stopped the car convoy. They put a rope around the general's car.

And they dragged the car in. Because it was an honour for somebody to come and visit them where they were. And you wonder whether there's something of that going on here. Jericho have gone out to meet Jesus.

Word has reached them. So they've gone out to meet him along the way. They've not done the British thing of waiting for the queen or king to pass by. We're all behind a safety barrier and we can wave a little flag.

No, they're excited. They're excited to see this speaker, this rabbi, this healer, whose word has gone ahead. And so they've gone out to meet him and to greet him.

[3 : 21] So the crowd has gone out. The beggar's at the side of the road. And he says, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet.

But he shouted all the more, have mercy on me. And then Jesus asks a really telling question. What do you want me to do for you? And we think, well, he's blind.

But I think it's telling, isn't it? I think when we come before Jesus, actually, what do we want him to do for us? What do we want him to do for us?

And I think when we encounter Jesus, it's not, we shouldn't go out the same way as we came in, should we? Because we're encountering the son of God who has the ability to change and transform our lives.

And so I think when Jesus asked the blind man, what do you want me to do? It's going to change his life if his sight is restored.

[4 : 20] Because he can no longer earn a living by sitting on the side of the road begging. His life will be transformed. And so Jesus, when he says to him, what do you want me to do?

He's saying, if I do this, your life will be transformed. Are you ready for it? Lord, I want to see.

Lord, I want to see. Jesus says, your faith has healed you. What, faith to restore his sight? Faith to transform his life? Maybe something of both.

And so Jesus, he immediately receives his sight. He goes and he praises God. Jesus transformed his life. But he asked him, what do you want me to do? Because when you encounter me, I can transform your life.

Now, again, we're not in a British town. We're in the Middle East. And Jesus and the disciples have been walking along the road.

[5 : 21] It's probably been quite dusty. I bet they're quite thirsty. They're quite hungry. And they're approaching a town. And this isn't in scripture, but let's surmise for a moment.

The disciples are all elbowing each other saying, I wonder what's for lunch. The idea of we've been on the road for a little while. Finally, we're coming at a place to stop.

The crowd are coming out to see us. Maybe someone's going to offer us food. That would be the cultural custom of the day, isn't it? You have a visitor that comes from a distance. What do you do?

You offer them food. Of course you do. You offer them to come into your home and say, come into my home and let me feed you. And so they would have come out. Perhaps who would be most likely that Jesus' house he would enter?

Well, from the crowd's point of view or the town's point of view, you go to the most prominent member. You go to the mayor's house. You go to the chair of trustees house, whoever it might be.

[6 : 20] You go to the most important member's house for dinner. Maybe the disciples are thinking, maybe there's lamb. Maybe there's a fatty calf.

Who's got lamb today for dinner? Lamb? Oh, I knew it. There we go. They're all thinking. They're salivating. They're thinking, we're going to stay for dinner.

We're going to get lunch now. We're going to be fed. We looked after. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. That's a point we were trying to make earlier when we had Charles here and we got him to go through Jericho.

This, I think, would have been against cultural custom to ignore the offers of hospitality. Jesus passed through Jericho. The disciples are probably saying, well, hang on.

We want to stop. We want to have refreshments. We want to have a break. We want to get fed. But Jesus passes through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

[7 : 22] So like any tax collector in any age, he's not light. He is believed to collaborate with the Romans. And so he is a bit of an outcast amongst the people of Jericho.

But he wants to see. He wants to see who this Jesus is. And he wants to go and find out what's going on. Many years ago, as a family, we went to Spain.

And my mum used to tell this story of a time we went to this department store in Spain. It was a great big thing over many different floors. And my brother and I were with my mum.

And suddenly my mum turned round and my brother wasn't there. And my brother was five. Anybody who's five? Maybe. Maybe at the back there somewhere. Anyone been five? Okay. A few of us.

My brother was gone. My brother was lost. And my mum ran around frantically trying to search for my brother. Where on earth could he have gone? I mean, he's five. How far could he have got?

[8 : 23] Everywhere she went and asked. Terrible Spanish, whatever. She went and asked the people at the department store. You know, I've lost my son. He's five. Where on earth is he? He was on a different floor.

How did he get to a different floor? And he was just quite happy wandering around. And the thing is, I don't think he knew he was lost. You know, he was just quite happy exploring.

It was just my mum was just relieved to find him. I said, oh my goodness. But I don't think he knew he was lost. And I wonder how Zacchaeus feels when he sees Jesus. Has something been going on?

Has the Holy Spirit already been working in his life? Or is it a revelation when he sees Jesus? Does he know he's lost already? Or is it the sight of Jesus and perhaps what he stands for and what he said and what he's heard?

That actually he begins to feel something stirs inside. He thinks, I want to see this man. I want to find out what he's got to say for himself. I want to know if I encounter him what that will mean for my life.

[9 : 25] Now, Luke, when he writes his story, gives us a little bit of detail. And he says that Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore fig tree.

Now, a sycamore fig tree, we probably heard in Sunday school, he's got nice big leaves. Zacchaeus could hide behind the nice big leaves. But a sycamore fig tree has figs. It has sticky fruit.

Certainly in modern times, you would not have a sycamore fig tree on the road in or out of your town or village because of the sticky fruit. Because once you tread in it, you then tread it everywhere.

You tread it in your home. You tread it everywhere you go. So it's possible that the sycamore fig tree was not on the main road. And therefore, I think it gives depth to the story that Jesus doesn't just walk by and see Zacchaeus in a tree.

He actually has to come off the main thoroughfare. But Zacchaeus, having found a tree that was big enough for him to get up and hide in and to see Jesus, that Jesus perhaps has to step slightly out of his way to go and find Jesus.

[10 : 38] And I think it paints a wonderful picture of this idea that actually Jesus isn't just passing us by, calling us out to be his. He's actually making a concerted effort to come and find us.

When we think about Jesus, do we find him or does he find us? The idea that Jesus came out of his comfort zone of his presence with God, out of heaven, to come here on earth.

He went out of his way. And I think here in Jericho, when he comes for Zacchaeus, he goes out of his way. He breaks the social custom by not going for lunch at the most important person's house.

He walks through the town at the other side. He goes out of his way to meet Zacchaeus. And say, he says, Zacchaeus, repent of your ways.

Turn around, turn back to God. He doesn't say any of that, does he? You think, well, did the Bible writer miss something else? Or have we just got what we need to hear today for the Bible writer to say?

[11 : 46] Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. Jesus, instead of going to the most honoured person's house, now invites himself to the most dishonoured person's house.

The person who is least likely to house Jesus and to welcome him in for a meal and the disciples. They're all probably going to each other and saying, what on earth is going on? Why are we going to his house?

Don't you know who he is? He's a tax collector. But Jesus says, I must come to your house today. Grace visits us first, doesn't it? Grace visits us first.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Grace visited us first. Zacchaeus, I must come to your house today. Zacchaeus, is he convicted by the Holy Spirit?

Is just that grace so overwhelming? You would come to my house? That encountering Jesus transforms his life.

[12 : 51] Just like the blind person at the side of the road, an encounter with Jesus transforms their life. It transforms Zacchaeus. Everyone else can't accept it, perhaps, because grace is unfair.

What do you mean you're going to the least honourable person's house? That doesn't make sense in terms of cultural customs and honour and dishonour and an honour and shame culture.

Jesus takes the shameful route. Scripture talks about Jesus takes our shame. Jesus goes and he takes the costly decision to go to the dishonourable person's house.

The crowd muttered. The crowd were against Jesus. Surely the best way would be Jesus to have held a rally, to preach to the most people and got the most converts. But he goes to the most dishonourable person's house and he goes to the shameful person first.

To set the example, to say, I don't live as you live. I don't see as you see. I see something different. Zacchaeus, I'm going to stay at your house today.

[13 : 57] Zacchaeus stood up and said, look, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. If I've cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount. I mean, is that hyperbole?

Is that exaggeration? But still, it's a heart transform that says, I am going to live differently from now on. Because they've encountered Jesus.

Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house. That it's evidenced by his words that he now believes and trusts in Jesus. Because this man too is a son of Abraham.

Even the dishonourable, the shameful, even this one too is a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Amen.

Let's pray. In a minute, I'm going to ask you to think about who you would like Jesus to see. Or what you would like Jesus to see.

[14 : 53] What situation you would like him to see. And then I'm going to ask you to fill in some sycamore fig leaves. And put on our sycamore tree. That we can pray about those things.

But let's just get ourselves ready. Maybe you're thinking about that this morning. Jesus hears the blind man. Jesus asks a direct question.

What do you want me to do for you? What do you want me to do for you? Jesus sees Zacchaeus. Perhaps he goes out of his way to see him.

To search for him. Is there somebody you're praying for you would love Jesus to go out of his way to find? Is there something you're dealing with at work, in your family or community, that you would just like to bring before Jesus for him to see and to deal with?

Let's pray shall we? What do you want me to do for you? Ask Jesus. Lord we make our prayer requests this morning. Those that have been pinned to our tree.

[16 : 04] Those questions, situations that we're carrying Lord Jesus. We hand them to you this morning. We put them in a place where you can see them.

And we ask Lord that you will see with eyes of grace and compassion. Perhaps healing too. That you may come and meet us where we need you.

Lord we pray for those we would like you to see. Maybe there's people we've been carrying for some time. That we've been praying for. Need the healing touch of your hand. Maybe just need to know the joy of being called into your family.

And coming to faith. Maybe there are others that we are praying for at this time and we've put to our tree or we're carrying in our heart. Lord that you may see them. We're grateful Lord that you go out of your way to find them.

Lord step through the fruit and the muttering of the crowd. Lord that you may see them and call them down to be part of your family. Lord we present situations to you in our work, our family, our community.

[17 : 20] Perhaps things we're struggling with or going through. Lord we pray for those situations that perhaps we face this week. We put them on our tree that you may see them. We carry them that you may hear them.

Lord that we may know your presence in those times. Lord there are times when we do. We're like Zacchaeus and perhaps we're at the back and we just can't quite catch a glimpse of you.

And we just love to see your whole face and receive all that you have for us. Your whole blessing. Lord if there's a crowd, if there's honour or shame issues that are getting in our way from seeing you fully.

Lord will you come through and just push those things aside that we may see you fully. That those things that we've been struggling things, those things that perhaps we find shameful.

Lord you will take those upon yourself. And that we will know your healing in Jesus name. Come to us we pray. Amen.