

Zacchaeus: A Model Of Christian Stewardship

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

- [0 : 0 0] The story this morning is that Jesus, who has been struggling for a long time, has at last got a rich man that wants to be a disciple. It wasn't easy, but here we are, that happy consummation for which we've been laboring these many weeks, through the Gospel according to St. Luke.
- I'll tell you more about that, but here we are also in the midst of a gray November with the leaves all turned to mush. Phil Van Der Zem is the Premier of the province for the next few years.
- Expo is over. Christmas is close enough to cause anxiety, but not close enough to cause very much excitement as yet.
- The civic election had a wonderful turnout to vote. No further comment for the moment. And we at St. John's are struggling to become a church.
- And I think it's a very real struggle that we're facing. I heard this week, which just impressed me, that somebody went to visit Nicaragua, saw the Christians in that war-torn country and said, that's what I am.
- [1 : 2 4] I'm one of them. And came home and put their Christian life in order. And I just pray that as you and I come together to worship on Sunday morning, that you have a sense of, that's what I am.
- I am a Christian. And that we have the same kind of desire to put our life in order. I don't think it happens for us here. St. John's Shaughnessy is almost too good to be true.
- There's so many nice people and nice homes and nice living. There's so much around us. I think it's a real work of amazing grace that God can put us together into a church.
- I'm sure he wants to do it. And I'm sure we want him to. And I think if we look carefully at the story, we might see ways in which he could take us and give us such unity in Christ, such care for one another, such love and concern for one another and for our world, that people would want to join us.
- Whatever it is you've got, I want. We turn a lot of people away from here, you know. People who come and check us out some Sunday morning and then they're gone.
- [2 : 5 1] Maybe it's that we're a little bit too nice. I don't know what it is. But it's difficult in the kind of social and economic structure we're in for us to come together.
- I always think it's like once upon a time I used to be a boat driver. That was for one happy summer of my life. And I made the great discovery that if you're sitting in the cabin of a boat and you've got all the lights in the cabin on, you can't see where you're going.
- And I think that's one of the problems of us. We've got all the lights on around us. We leave a little darkness around us in order that we can see the direction we're moving in outside spiritually.
- And it's hard when all the lights are on to see where you're going. We need to see where we're going. We have nice homes, nice children, nice schools, lovely countryside.
- We're trapped very often in a spirit of greed and of unconscious elitism. We're caught in the illusions of power, in the pursuit of unattainable fantasies.

[4 : 12] And we find it very hard to take God seriously. We want to be on his side, but we're not sure that he really understands.

And so we have to keep our distance. Judgment we don't consider to be a happy prospect. The thought that we may be wrong is overcome in our own minds by the fact that we at least are sincerely wrong.

And that should compensate the difference between what's happening to Sinclair Stevens being tried by the media and by this royal commission or whatever it is, and having his life spread across the country in all the newspaper articles.

I don't know how you'd like that to happen to you. I'm not keen on it happening to me. I would much prefer to be judged by God. I know that he has all the facts straight, and that the only witness he needs to call is my own heart.

And he's the judge. That judgment I find preferable to being judged by my fellow man. And we have in this parish, we try and come to grips with the reality of what it means to be a church, we have in this parish a wonderful stewardship committee.

[5 : 45] Really quite amazing, both in the talent and gifts that they have, and the diligence with which they have worked to bring us to the parish, to the point in this parish where they're going to put a decision to us in the next week, and I'm going to try and prepare you to make that decision in some of the things I'm going to tell you today.

On the human level, their efforts end up with a letter that will come to your door this week, and for some, maybe 300 families, a visitor will come to your door next week.

The purpose will be to put a small piece of paper in front of you and ask you prayerfully to consider your own life and the practical reality of your own commitment to Jesus Christ.

You may not think that's what you're there for, but then I want to tell you this. There's a congregation in the New Testament, and a knock comes at the door, and you open the door, the congregation opens the door, and there Jesus, the Lord of the church, is standing, and he says to them, You are neither hot nor cold.

And I would spit you out of my mouth. That was hard that such a knock should come at any congregation, but it was Jesus who said that to them.

[7 : 23] Then he said, You say you are rich and prosperous and need nothing. I tell you, you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Their vision of themselves and Christ's vision of them was entirely different. But don't leave us here, because there's good things still coming for this congregation.

Lukewarm, though they may be inflated with a sense of their own importance, though they may be, Jesus says to them, I have gold, and I have clothing, and I have eyesore.

It was thought that that particular congregation was at the center of a banking community where they specialized in gold, that they were at the center of a community that produced very fine cloth, and that their medical school at their university produced a miraculous eye saw that healed eyes.

And so Jesus went to them and said, But I have gold of a value far more than all your veins. I have clothing far finer than all that you can produce with the world's finest wool.

[8 : 46] And I have eyesore that will not only heal your eyes, but make you see what you have never seen before. That's what Jesus says to them.

He says, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. I pray with all my heart that we as a congregation could cling wide the door and accept that invitation that Jesus will come among us with the gold, with the clothing, with the eyesore that we so desperately need.

Our clothes aren't good enough. Our gold isn't secure enough. And our eyes are not able to see what the Lord wants us to see, even in the person sitting next to you.

We can't see. I can't see. We can't see each other. Until Jesus comes in and distributes that gold, that clothing, and that eyesore.

It's in a sense like this. The stewardship committee are going to give you a piece of paper. There's perhaps three important books that you have to consider as you answer that piece of paper.

[10 : 15] Your diary, your curriculum vitae, and your bank book. And in your diary, you can see how much time you have available.

In your curriculum vitae, you can see all your strengths and all your weaknesses. They don't usually appear, but in this curriculum vitae, we want to put them down.

And your bank book and the mess you are in financially is all there, right in front of you, very eyes. Well, that's when we come to the story of Zacchaeus.

Jesus, you see, spends the whole of Luke's gospel looking for a rich man who will become his disciple. If you read the gospel of Luke, you cannot but be assured, convinced, convicted, that Jesus is interested in a rich man, but he can't find one that will pay any attention.

Jesus is interested in rich people, but rich people are not interested in him. And so you get the rich young ruler who turns away.

[11 : 30] You get Dives and his five brothers who will not hear what he has to say. You have the rich fool that he has given such abundance that it overflows.

And he thinks only of himself. You have the Pharisee, a man of social prominence and some wealth, who invited Jesus in to have supper with him.

And after they were sitting down, he said, how come you don't wash your hands? Or on another occasion, when a Pharisee invited him for supper, Jesus came and the Pharisee wondered that this woman wiped Jesus' feet with her hair from the tears which he had shed from her eyes and anointed the feet of Jesus with ointment.

Jesus said to him, you have loved a little. She has loved much. You see, it was very hard to persuade anybody.

Jesus got to the point where he said, there was a certain great king who had a wedding feast for his son and he invited all the proper guests and they all said to him, I cannot come.

[12 : 51] You know the chorus of the children, I cannot come. I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow, I have fields and commitments that cost a pretty sum.

Pray, have me excused. I cannot come. Excusing themselves from coming to the banquet to which the king of kings summons them.

So Jesus keeps looking and he comes to a blind man. The blind man in his terrible poverty says, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

And Jesus says, what will you, what do you want me to do for you when he says that I may have my sight? The blind man knew what he wanted. So often the rich men don't know.

We don't know what we want. We've got so much. Well, then he comes to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus, we're told, was a man who was the chief tax collector and rich.

[13 : 59] He knew that if you want to get rich, you get where the money is moving and you siphon a little of it off for yourself. And he wanted to know who Jesus was.

He seemed to have heard about Jesus and peculiarly enough, Jesus had heard about him. And so Jesus is coming along the road and Zacchaeus scrambles up a tree in order to see him.

Zacchaeus did not need public approval. He'd long since forgotten about that. He was not ashamed to climb a tree, to go out on a limb.

And Jesus said to him in a wonderful sentence, I think, Zacchaeus, come down from the tree. Today I am going to stay at your house.

Jesus invited Zacchaeus home to his own house. Great principle of stewardship there. It's Jesus that owns your house.

[15 : 09] I hope he invites you home there sometime. to maintain your home. So that he went and welcomed Jesus into his home that Jesus had invited and then he the murmurers started going and that's most often what religion is made up of is murmurers.

The people who sit and pass judgment on other people and it's means to whisper and you can just hear the murmuring going through the crowd as Jesus goes into the house of the chief tax collector and the murmuring starts up and it's a terrible terrible thing all the way through scripture the murmurer reminds me of that reality which I think you may know about that the best place to hide from the gospel is in church because nobody realizes you're hiding and you can get involved in the kind of Pharisees and scribes and the murmuring and the criticism and the prejudice and the misinterpretation and you can go on and on and on with it they turned against Jesus and against Zacchaeus who was and welcomed

Jesus into his home it turns out that Jesus that Zacchaeus went out and stood up to them and he told them things they didn't know about him their whole understanding of him was based on their prejudices about him they had cast him out of their society they wouldn't accept his testimony in a court of law they had rejected his membership in the in the in the nation in a sense torn up his citizenship card Jesus knew who he was and Zacchaeus after he had spent some time talking to Jesus went out and stood up to them this little man with great courage and great conviction he told them I if I defraud anybody return fourfold right now I want to declare publicly that I'm going to give half that I have to the poor you see what Jesus had gone in he'd gone over his his his bank book he said you only need half of this get rid of the rest he'd gone over his curriculum vitae he said well

I want to restore you to the nation you belong to he said this is a son of Abraham a son of Abraham by blood a son of Abraham by faith he said then he went to him and and said to him this is the time you have left in your life I want you to be my disciple and to serve he said salvation has come to your house this day so he went over all his books in a sense rewrote them for him the way he was going to spend his time the way he was going to spend his money the way he was going to understand himself as a person that's really what the stewardship committee is trying to get all of us is to understand who we are and most of all to understand who we are in relationship to one another because this because of our independence because of our pride because I guess of our arrogance so much of the time we don't need each other so we try and live our lives privately even our Christian lives and it doesn't work we belong to each other we need to serve each other in Christ well that's what happened to

Zacchaeus several helpful questions come out of this story I'd like you just to ask the four of them it says of Zacchaeus when Jesus came to his house Jesus said to him today salvation has come to your house Jesus had come he interpreted his coming as salvation I want you to look at the house you live in the family you live among the friends that you associate with and ask yourself the question has salvation come to my house then I want you to ask the more difficult question are you a murmur you don't understand who Jesus is and you don't understand Zacchaeus you can criticize both because we're a very sophisticated and very educated congregation terrible damage is done by criticism all the time between us we're not restoring each other and renewing each other but we're tearing each other apart and criticizing each other we are in a competitive society we don't understand one another and we don't understand Jesus are you a murmur thirdly can you acknowledge Jesus as the head of your house your home and family

[21 : 02] I know it seems very impractical to say that and probably very pious if you were to say well certainly we do it would sound just hopelessly mushy but there is a hard reality to it when you know yourself to be a committed disciple of Jesus Christ and like Zacchaeus are prepared to go out and stand in front of the people who despise you and say this is what I believe and this is what I'm prepared to do to stand and and confess the reality in your life of what's happened because Jesus is the head of your house and of your life as salvation come to your house are you a murmurer can you acknowledge Jesus as the head then I think probably one last question that I'd like to put to you and that to myself are you willing to climb a tree for Jesus to see him just mixing with the crowd you can stay hidden from his gaze and he will stay hidden from yours you will just be totally absorbed in the busyness of the crowd scene in which you live your life and the question is are you prepared to stick up to go out on a limb to climb a tree do something that probably would embarrass you socially to associate with somebody who perhaps didn't really belong in the company that you like to keep to confess before men a faith which sets you apart like up a tree are you prepared to do that it's a very simple story isn't it

I apologize almost for telling it but I know how terribly important it is how in this wonderful story of how a rich his life transformed comes to be a disciple of Jesus Christ there is in that a story which we at St.

John's very much need to hear we need to hear it as a congregation we need to hear it as members one of another in the body of Christ want to talk some more I'll be in the chapel after this earth amen let us pray for the whole state of Christ's church militant here in earth let us pray for Christ's holy catholic church almighty and ever living

God who by your holy apostle has taught us to make prayers and supplications and to give thanks for all people we humbly beseech you most mercifully to accept our alms and oblations and to receive these our prayers which we offer unto your divine majesty beseeching you to inspire continually the universal church with the spirit of truth unity and concord and grant that all they that do confess your holy name may agree in the truth of your holy word and live and live in unity and godly love let us pray for peace on earth we beseech you also to lead all nations into the way of righteousness and so to guide and direct their governors and rulers that your people may enjoy the blessings of freedom and peace and grant unto your servant

Elizabeth our queen and to all that are put in authority under her that they may truly and impartially administer justice to the maintenance of your true religion and virtue today we should remember our new city council our new mayor let us remember particularly a member of our congregation Philip Owen as he works for us in this city as an alderman let us pray for our missionaries at home and abroad give grace oh heavenly father to all bishops all priests and all deacons including our clergy here and especially to thy servant

[27 : 12] Douglas our bishop that they both by their life and doctrine set forth your true and living word and rightly and duly administer your holy sacrifice prosper we pray you all those who proclaim the gospel of your kingdom among the nations today let's remember Jack and Jean McLeod in New Caledonia Jessica Bell in Cape Dorset Jim and Louise Walton and Prince George and here at home let's remember the navigators and especially Don and Shirley Laurie Richie and

Sandra Spidell and Mike Abercroft to all your people your heavenly grace Lord and especially to this congregation here present that with meek heart and due reverence they may hear and receive your holy word truly serving in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life the part of our service to God in this congregation is the music that is produced sung by all of us that led by this choir by the director

Ed Norman so today let's pray especially for these people and we most humbly beseech God in his goodness to comfort and succor all who in this transitory life are in trouble sorrow sickness or any other adversity especially those for whom our prayers are now desired in this time of quiet we■■■ for the people ■■■i in this walking year■ and i and these

So, let's go.

We remember before you, O Lord, all your servants departed this life with faith and fear of you.