



Theme: Radical Women

“The Wife of Zacchaeus and the Generosity of Salvation”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber on...

July 31-August 1, 2021

Weekly Memory Verse:

⁹ “Salvation has come to this home today... ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”. –Luke 19:9a & 10

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “The Wife of Zacchaeus and the Generosity of Salvation”

Today we conclude a series of sermons we are doing focusing on radical women of faith. We are going to do three things together as part of this message. First, we'll do a bit of historical background on Zacchaeus and his household. Then, we'll hear from the wife of Zacchaeus, understanding that we don't know her name. We do know Zacchaeus most likely had a wife and children as the word Jesus uses in the text today as he talks about the home of Zacchaeus indicates a spouse and children and maybe even grandparents living together. In some ways, she represents the many spouses both named and unnamed in the Scriptures. When we talk about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I often will include Sarah and Rebekah and Rachel since they are critical the story of each of those patriarchs in the Hebrew Bible, or our Old Testament.

After we do a bit of background, we'll then wrap up on with how this story of the home of Zaccheaus connects to our lives today. Let's start by getting our bearings straight and understanding that this story we are looking at today comes from a specific time and place about 2000 years ago.

VIDEO Google Maps Israel and Jericho (5:00)

Let's remind ourselves that this body of water on the left is the Mediterranean Sea. The body of water at the top of this map is the Sea of Galilee. At the bottom we have the Dead Sea, and the Jordan River connects these two which is in essence the eastern edge of Israel. In today's Bible story, we are going to visit a town just above the Dead Sea. Across the river from that is the country of Jordan. Jesus is from the Galilee up in this region at the top of the map.

As we move in closer to the town above the Dead Sea we find Jericho, where today's story takes place. Jerusalem is to the left and Jericho is this green patch. It is thought to be the oldest city in the world and the foundations go back 11,000 years. Notice that this is surrounded by desert with the Judean mountains on the left and the Judean wilderness surrounding it. The city was formed here because this is an oasis which formed about the end of the last Ice Age. The city of Jerusalem is about 16 miles to the left.

Jericho Archeological Site

This is the archaeological sites at the ancient ruins of Jericho. The mountains above are the Judean wilderness where Jesus went to be tempted for 40 days and 40 nights and there is a monastery in the middle of those hills where people go to remember that time in the life of Jesus. I have been to this tree in downtown Jericho. The people in Jericho would like you to leave this tree is 2000 years old and it is possible.

Tree in Jericho

It is here that tradition says this story took place as we find it in Luke 19, where Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. There is a mosaic next to this tree with Zacchaeus depicted up in the sycamore and Jesus down below. You find this directly in front of the tree if you were ever to visit.

Mosaic

As we focus on his story today, let's close our eyes and imagine what we might hear from the wife of Zacchaeus and what it might've been like to live in the house where Jesus came for dinner as a surprise guest.

(Lights go dark and then front stage lights only, lighting cue #5.)

SLIDE The Wife of Zacchaeus

(Monologue by Joy Kilpatrick based on Luke 19:1-10)

(Lights go dark at the line, "Could I experience this salvation Jesus talk about too? Could it really be for me?!")

(Preaching lights come up.)

There are powerful ways the story of Zacchaeus, and his family, connects to us today.

SLIDE Jesus comes in unexpected ways

The first thing this story reminds us of is that Jesus almost always comes in unexpected ways. Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector of this region which means he had other tax collectors that works for him. In the Roman Empire they didn't collect taxes the way we do but use a system called, "tax farming." The Romans would determine about how much tax they should receive from each geographical region by taking a census and then they would put that area out to bid for tax collectors. The tax collector who bid the highest amount for the region would receive the job and they would pay that money up front to the

Roman Empire.

The tax collector would then hire thugs or Roman soldiers to help collect the taxes for that region, always taking in more because they needed their percentage or profit. The more taxes they could collect, the higher their profit. Since we are told that Zacchaeus was very rich, we know that he collected quite a bit more than was needed and even cheated people based on his own confession at the end of the story. How do you think people of Jericho felt about Zacchaeus, knowing that he not only collected what Rome required but even more?

People also didn't like the Jew who was willing to work for the Romans and collect taxes to help pay for the Roman soldiers they didn't want there as the occupying force in the holy land. They believed Jewish tax collectors didn't care about their own people or even their own dignity but only cared about money. Also remember that Zacchaeus and his household, including his wife, had put up the money for those taxes so if people were not going to pay as they have the right to take it out on you or your family. The tax collectors didn't care if people were poor because they needed to get their money and so they would do anything to take those from people.

Philo was a Jewish philosopher who lived at the same time as Jesus wrote extensive about the Romans occupying what we know as modern-day Israel. Philo recounts the story have a family that was so poor they couldn't pay their taxes, so they fled. The tax collector then gathered that person's family and demanded they tell him where they went, or they would have to pay the taxes themselves. When the family refused to turn over the location of the refugees and they couldn't pay the taxes themselves, Philo tells us what happens.

GRAPHIC Philo

“Fashioning a basket full of sand to their next with cords, and

suspending it there as a very heavy weight, and then placing them in the open air in the middle of the marketplace until they would faint, or possibly die.”

Can you understand why people didn't like tax collectors? In the Gospels, this is why they are mentioned in the same breath with drunkards, prostitutes, sinners, and tax collectors. What must have been like to be married to someone despised like this? My guess is that you would begin to live that characterization as a notorious sinner.

The story takes place just seven days before Jesus will be put to death on the cross, as he is traveling from the northern region of Galilee down through Jericho and then will head to Jerusalem for the final days of his life. At this point, Jesus is the most famous preacher in this entire region, having been teaching and doing miracles for three years with now thousands of followers. This is no longer a small movement of just 12 disciples. Large crowds gathered in anticipation of his arrival because word spread that this man preaches with authority, not like our normal preachers!

Word also had spread that people were healed when they came into contact with Jesus. The blind could see in the lame walk. The demons were cast out and his people just touch the hem of his garment they could experience healing. Jesus had said thousands of people with fish and bread and so some came in search of a free meal.

We may not think about it this way, but many came out to see Jesus because he was the most controversial figure of his day. We think about Jesus as comforting us and healing and saying things we love to hear, but if you were alive and listening to Jesus 2000 years ago, or if Jesus showed up to preach here today, I can guarantee you he would say things that would make you mad. I promise that you would want to leave the church after hearing Jesus preach, even though you know his message. People

either love Jesus or they hate him. He had a way of comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable which made many people uncomfortable.

Jesus often offended people when he preached, and mostly that was the religious leaders and people in positions of power. They didn't agree with his interpretation of the Scriptures, the Hebrew Bible during a time of Jesus, and some no doubt came out because it was fun to see who Jesus was going to irritate that day. Crowds would gather to see what crazy talk would come from this rabbi!

Jesus also was controversial by what he did. In his day, rabbis would separate themselves from those who were sinners. But Jesus was known for being a friend of sinners and tax collectors. This helps us understand why Zaccheaus wanted to see Jesus, because he was a CHIEF tax collector who was persona non grata in Jericho, but he is heard there is a rabbi coming to town who was a friend of tax collectors. How can this be?

We also learn that Zacchaeus is short. When I was a kid, I used to picture him like Sonny and Cher, with a tall, gorgeous wife. He comes to this crowd, and he can't see because of the height so he tries to move his way through the crowd to get a glimpse of this man Jesus. No matter how hard you tried, I imagine Zacchaeus couldn't move through the crowd. Why is that? Because people don't like him, and they are not going to let him get closer to Jesus and they are. Zacchaeus is a tax collector and sinner, and Jesus is a rabbi. Here's what they are thinking: "If anyone should get to see Jesus, it should be me because I go to synagogue regularly! I know the Bible backwards and forwards. I tithe and I'm nice to people. I should get to see Jesus, not that guy! He can stay back in the back because he is a sinner and a tax collector!"

The religious people of Jericho were becoming an obstacle for Zacchaeus to see Jesus. Let's think about that for just a minute. Let's sit

with it and let it sink in. They could've looked at this whole situation differently. They could have said, "Hey look, Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. If anybody in town needs Jesus, its Zacchaeus. Imagine what could happen as Zacchaeus comes to faith in Jesus! He might not charge us so much in taxes anymore. He might turn into a nice guy. Let's part this crowd and let Zacchaeus up front!"

But does that happen? Is that how they are thinking? No, they simply see a tax collector that they can't stand. They want to make sure everyone else is to see Jesus before him. The truth is that this is how religious people, even pastors, even Christians, act today about people who are far away from God or who don't fit into a religious box. Hopefully, this is not anybody here at Summit Church, but it can happen in other churches! Sometimes, the way that we talk about our faith with a judgmental tone or actions, we push people away and keep them from Jesus instead of making room and doing everything we can to part the crowds.

We religious people are often the number one reason why nonreligious people don't go to church or experience Jesus. We are either obstacles who keep people away from Jesus, or we reflect the love of Jesus and draw people to him. Here's a question that each one of us should wrestle with. Which one am I?

SLIDE Do I reflect God's love or am I an obstacle?

I love how the wife of Zacchaeus wonders if this Jesus will accept her or if she should listen to the voices of her neighbors or those in her community who see her with disdain. The most recent research from Barna which was just released this last week shows a disturbing trend continuing from the Millennial Generation now into Gen Z. The survey was done in 2005 and then 2015 and again in 2020. People in the youngest generations were asked their perception of Christians and they were given positive and negative options. In previous surveys they found that 66% of

young people believe that Christians are hypocritical, giving that attribute the highest-ranking. That number today is now 71%. But it's been overtaken and now the highest ranked attribute given to Christians by younger generations is judgmental and that number stands at 73%. 58% said they perceive Christians as intolerant of other people's views and 55% said they believe the Christian faith is a private and exclusive club where they are not welcome.

That's the bad news. **The good news** is that more younger people than ever are wanting and willing to have conversations about faith and about Jesus IF we are willing to have conversation and not a one-way monologue where we talk, and they listen. The really cool part about the Barna report is that it gives us suggestions about how to have positive interactions with the next generations and they begin with building relationships based on kindness and compassion.

Are we obstacles or do we reflect the love of Christ? Remember that the first words of Jesus to his disciples were not to give up their sin and learn their Bible and get their lives in order. The first invitation of Jesus to people who fish and collect taxes for living was to follow him so he could teach them to fish for people and draw them to God.

Zacchaeus was rich and powerful which meant he probably had a beautiful wife and kids and a beautiful home in a gated community with the membership to the Olympic Games country club and a gold-plated chariot. He has everything and yet he still desperately wants to see Jesus so badly that he will climb up a sycamore tree and embarrass himself in front of the crowd which he can't penetrate. Zacchaeus reminds me of that song by U2, "***I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For,***" or the Rolling Stones, "***I Can't Get No Satisfaction.***"

Here is a man who is wealthy beyond imagination for most people in the first century, with everything which is supposed to make you happy,

and yet he is still not happy. It's interesting that one of the main groups of people coming out to see Jesus are tax collectors. Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, was preaching and baptizing people in the Jordan River right near Jericho and the gospel of John tells us that, "Even tax collectors were coming," to be baptized and have their sins washed away as they repented and returned to God. We see this theme over and over again which is summarized in Luke 15.

BIBLE

1 All the tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ² This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

Why were tax collector so drawn to Jesus? Maybe it's because Jesus then goes on to tell the parables of the lost coin in the lost sheep and the lost son. Jesus understood that having money, sex, and power still doesn't give us what we are looking for or the satisfaction that our heart desires.

If you win the lottery tomorrow, you will probably have an awesome month and maybe even a great year, especially since we can travel again. But we know that almost every lottery winner is unhappy and miserable and often broke before it's all said and done. Each one of us is looking for more that can satisfy our hearts. We are looking for love, meaning, connection with God and with others in something bigger than ourselves. Zacchaeus is looking for something more. Then we read this happens.

BIBLE

⁵ When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."

Notice that Jesus knows Zacchaeus' name and he wants to be a

guest and break bread in his home with his family. What do you think the crowd did when Jesus offers this invitation? I'm sure they gasped and some even said out loud, "Are you kidding me? You're going to that guy's house? What are you thinking?"

How do you think Zacchaeus felt? Here's why this is important. Jesus knows each of our names. **Jesus knows your name and he longs to look you in the eye, wherever you are standing or sitting**, in the tree or far away from any church or anything you might have done which keeps you from coming to God, and say to you, "Jeff, don't be so far away up there in that tree. Come down. I want to eat with you in your house today."

This is why tell you as your pastor as often as I can that **you were made by God to be loved by God**. God knows your name and longs to break bread with you again. God came in the person of Jesus Christ to come into the home of Zacchaeus with his wife and children and friends and offer something our hearts long for which is salvation.

SLIDE The Generosity of Salvation

God longs to free us from the chains of our past, from our brokenness and hurt and pain and the things people say about us so we can then become generous. The part of this story that is meant to be audacious is when Zaccheaus promises to restore what others have lost. Here is the big idea that the wife of Zaccheus verbalizes. Remember that Jesus will go to the cross in one week and take with him the sin and hurt of all humanity, even Zaccheaus and his wife. The only thing we must do is say "yes", and then we respond as we experience the freedom offered by Christ.

One of my favorite memories as a pastor was several years ago when we did our annual river baptism service and a man who had been attending our church asked me to "dunk me good!" He had lots of money, but a rough past and he left a trail of broken relationships. After he came

out of the water, he hugged and said, “Could it really be true? Am I really forgiven?” All I could think of to say was, “Yes, and now you get to live into that freedom.” Over the next few years, I watched him become one of the most generous people I know. Some of his family called me and were angry that he was spending their inheritance. One of the people most upset was his wife. I tried to lovingly remind her it all belonged to God so it would be okay. Eventually, their relationship was restored, and they found more joy and less attachment to money and things. When I did his funeral, his wife was grateful he had found salvation and shared that gift with her. They found what they were looking for.

My prayer for each of you as your pastor is that not only you find that for yourself, but you become generous and are willing to offer it to others. I pray our lives will be ones that remove the barriers that can stand in the way of people who need Jesus and a generous salvation. This is what I believe it means to be the presence of Jesus Christ to the world.

We come to this time of Communion today, and if you have not done so at home, I invite you to grab something to drink and something to eat that you can use as the bread and the cup. I remind you that Communion is an open table in our church. You don't have to be member here or anywhere else to receive this tangible reminder of the generous salvation offered to each of us. One of the reasons this is an open table is because of stories like that of Zacchaeus and his wife and family, reminding us that Jesus went to the home of the most unexpected and offered them grace and mercy.

SLIDE Communion

I remind you that on the night Jesus was handed over to be crucified, he first gathered with his disciples to break bread and drink the cup. He offered them these as the bread of life and the cup of salvation, just as he offered that to Zacchaeus and his household one week earlier. As we

come to this table, I invite you to hold your elements in your hands and close your eyes. As you close your eyes, picture yourself at the back of this crowd in Jericho. You know this man Jesus has what you need, but you can't see him. You climb this tree to get a better view, and to your surprise, Jesus stops and looks you right in the eye. He calls your name and says he want to come to your home today. **What is your answer? If you have never answered this question, it only takes on word. Yes.** If you feel you are ready, I invite you to pray that one word prayer and receive the generosity of salvation.

God, we thank you for Zaccheaus and his wife and his home that experienced salvation. Help us to have hearts that are looking for you. Help us to be looking for others and making sure we are not obstacles to your generous salvation. If we have said "yes" today, help us to taste this gift of salvation in the bread and the cup, remember that you ate and drank with Zaccheaus, his wife, and his family that day, and you long to do that with each of us. We pray these things in the name of your Son Jesus, Amen.

July 31-August 1 Order

1. Ely Welcomes people
2. Two Songs, followed by prayer and Lord's Prayer
3. Welcome and invite people to wave and be seated.
4. Invite children to go to Summit Kids.
5. Connect bag.
6. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - Celia's Farewell
 - River Baptism Service
7. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
8. Video bumper plays.
9. Sermon
10. Prayer after sermon
11. Offering Reminder
12. 1 Song of Worship
13. Prayer
14. Meditation Moments reminder by Jeff
15. Closing Prayer