

**THE  
BON AIR  
PULPIT**

*James Pardue, Pastor*

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Scripture Reading: **Luke 19:1-9**

Sermon: **When You Feel Left Out**

The Bible is filled with remarkable stories of how Jesus changed human life. There were people with deep emotional problems and their lives were changed; people with physical needs and they were healed; and then people who had all sorts of wrong desires and emotions and they suddenly begin to aspiring to different ideas of what was important in life. I was recently privy to a small group in which people in the room were talking about what Christ had done in their life. I was again reminded that the same Christ who worked in Bible times is the same Christ who wants to work in our life and the same Christ who wants to change and transform us. This morning we want to read one of those remarkable stories, and we are aware that one of the reasons that it is in the Bible is to help us to understand that what God wants are examples of that that will go around in our community to be able to tell people that Christ has made a difference in our life. Someone has said one of the most wonderful and helpful sermon is the sermon in shoes. It may be that God wants to do a sermon with your shoes and to help you to be the person who will simply reflect the difference that Christ can make in a life.

So let me read you again this beautiful story about his transforming power, and then we will see how it operates in our own life:

*Jesus entered Jericho, and was passing through. A man was there*

*by the name of Zaccheus. He was a chief tax collector and was very wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see Him since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, come down immediately for I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly. All of the people saw this, and they began to mutter. He has gone to be in the house with a sinner. But Zaccheus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, here now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone out of anything I will give back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to your house because this man is also a son of Abraham, for the son of man has come to seek and to save those who are lost."*

Greg Lowry is a wonderful pastor and evangelist in California. He said that when he was young his family used to move around a great deal. So he said that he began to realize that all of the children didn't know him by his name. They knew him by a title. He was the new kid. He said he would walk through a classroom, and people would call each other by name. When he would pass by, everybody would mutter and say that's the new kid. He said that when they used to go out at recess and play and choose up sides for a ball team, he was always the last one to be chosen. He said one time he was asked to be first base---not play first base, be first base. Now many of us can identify with Greg because we, too, have recognized that we have

moved around or come to new places and really don't feel a part of the group. Some of you here this morning have recently moved to Richmond. You can tell me about all of your friends who are somewhere else, but can probably name on one hand the friends you have been able to establish now. You are in a new house, you are in new community, you are in a new job, you are trying to adjust, and you really feel like you are the new kid. You are the person who is on the outskirts. Some of you have gotten into groups, and you are aware that when they begin to talk, they tell about things that happened thirty years ago, experiences that they shared together, and yet you are there and can only tell about things they don't know anything about. So you will like a part of an outsider. Some of you live in an apartment, and you live in a community where people will say I have wonderful neighbors. I don't even know who they are. Many times in our society we build a kind of anonymous community that leaves people out, and they really don't know if they are part of the community or not.

I recognized that a few years ago. I moved to a city. Our house was about 30 minutes away from my office. So I decided I would not have the opportunity to go home for lunch, so I asked somebody one day. Tell me a good place to eat. They said the best hamburger in town, and they told me where it was. So I went over. I did not know it was one of those little small places where everybody had to sit on little small stools. Obviously, the hamburgers were very, very good because many of the people who were sitting there had a hangover. So I went in and sat down and was aware that I was going to have to get close in. If your arm went up, you were in somebody else's food. So I turned a fellow next to me on the right and said, "How're you doing?" He looked at me and said, "Why do you want to know?" I turned to the fellow on the left, and I said, "Are you O.K. today?" "Yep." I sat and ate my hamburger and french fries, and nobody said anything. I made a determination. I am never going back again. I

refuse to sit down and eat a hamburger next to a whole group of people, and nobody even knows who you are and nobody even speaks to you, and the whole idea is to go and get away from everyone else.

Some of you might identify well with a college student recently who had heard about all of the who who's list. Did you know there are over 250 who who's. You can get on a who who's of something. So he decided to start a who who's. Instead he decided what he would do is a who's nobody. So he said e-mail me in if you would like to be on my who's nobody list. Well, one lady wrote in. She said I would like to be a part (you have to tell why) of your list. She said my name is Helen. She said I suffer from self esteem. She said I have been going to a psychiatrist for three years to figure out how I can have better self esteem, but I am still suffering with it because though my name is Helen and I have been going to the same doctor for three years, he still calls me Jennifer.

Well, you almost maybe feel that way. You may feel like you are the left out person. You are the person that nobody knows. You are the strange. You are the different one. And we live in a society today that very much treats people as numbers instead of people. Well, if you feel that way, you can identify with the person that I read about today. His name was Zaccheus. The Bible tells us some things about him. The first thing it tells us about him. He is the only man whose height is given in the Bible. It says he is short. I could identify with Zaccheus through the years. Until I was in the 10th grade, I was not over five feet tall. So I had all the labels. I was the runt. I was the little one. I was shorty. My best friend in high school was the center on our basketball team. He was 6'5". We looked like Mutt and Jeff. If somebody would say something smart, I

would always say talk to my buddy here. Zaccheus was a short little man.

The second thing you know about him was nobody liked him. Let me tell you why they didn't like him. The Bible says he was a tax collector. Now in our society people who work for the IRS have a noble calling. But not so in the Bible. You thought I meant that as a joke, but I didn't. Let me tell you why I didn't. We have people in our church who work for the IRS. Sometimes I go to people and I say my name is Jim Pardue. What is your name? Then I would say what are you doing? When I have met some of these people in our church who work for the IRS, we would get off in a corner and they said (in a whisper) "*I work for the IRS.*" You laughed a moment ago, but I picked out who laughed, and I'm making a list, and I'll give it to our friends who might be sitting right behind you. Zaccheus worked for the Roman government. Now Rome had overcome Israel, had conquered it. What they were doing was getting money to build Rome. They never developed a tax code, so if Caesar said we want \$500, then what the tax collectors did was that they went out and got \$1,000. They kept \$500 and gave Caesar \$500. The only way that would work is you had to be ruthless. You had to be a crook. You had to be clever. You had to be all of those things. So when you say Zaccheus was a publican, a tax collector, you already know some things about him. He was a crook. You know he has been stealing off of everybody. Everybody in town hates him. If you were to give a list of the ten most unpopular people in town, he would win all ten. Put a black ribbon on him. Nobody likes him. He is a turncoat. He is a political operative. He is a person who will steal from you. But you learn something else about him. He is the chief tax collector. That means he is the crook of crooks. He has stepped on everybody. He has gotten on top. He may be a little man, but

he is a big man in Jericho. He has gotten to the top, and he is very, very wealthy because when you look on the map Jericho is an oasis town when you come this way and want to go through Israel and go down into Egypt, the only way you can go is through Jericho. You know who is on the border all the time with his hands open? You want to pass through? Give me the money. Zaccheus and me.

Zaccheus, like everybody in town, had heard Jesus was passing through. I love the story that Jesus always created a crowd. People want to be around Him. People were attracted to Him. People wanted to see Him, so much so the crowd was there; but everybody hated Zaccheus. They weren't going to say, all right little man, come stand in front of me. No, Zaccheus, if you want to see Him, you have to climb a tree. And up the tree he went, interested, excited, wondering like everybody else. A remarkable story happened. Jesus comes to the foot of the tree, and He looks up, and says, "Zaccheus, come down."

Have you ever wondered like me. How did He know his name? Maybe a more important question. How does Jesus know yours? Do you understand that you are in God's eyes not just a part of a group? You are not just a number, but that He knows you, knows all about you, cares for you. You may feel you are up in some tree somewhere hiding from God, and God comes suddenly in your presence, and He looks up, and He says, "Jim, I know you are up the tree. Come on down."

Zaccheus was so overwhelmed. He said why don't you come to my house. That night I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall. I don't know what happened, but, boy, something happened! The next morning everybody was gathered around to see what was going to be said. At the press conference the next morning, Zaccheus walks up and he says I have an announcement to make. Half of my money I give to the poor. And if anybody can say that I have cheated them (and I am sure the line was all the way back down to the Dead Sea), I will pay you

back four times as much. The Jewish law said you were to pay them back equal plus 20%. He said I will pay you back four times as much. What happened? What happened to the little man who wanted to show he was a big man, who grabbed and clawed and finally got to the top where everybody had to look up to him? He walks out the next day and says I am giving it all away. I constantly am amazed at how Jesus is able to change human life. People have their whole value system changed. People begin to say what I thought was important isn't important. Now I want to go a different route. It may be in your life you understand that getting close to Jesus is going to be a transforming experience. You are going to understand the difference that it has made in your life. Suddenly you are going to feel that what you have been looking for is now found. Christ has made a difference. I know a lot of people who look like something on the outside but they are quite different on the inside. Zaccheus, why would you want to go up in a tree and see Jesus? Are you in a personality cult? You just want to see somebody famous? Maybe Zaccheus, maybe what people see is not the real you. Maybe on the inside there is a longing and a yearning, and maybe this transformation wasn't go quick after all. Maybe you held enough in your hands to realize there is nothing to lose. Maybe there has been something there that you have come to realize is what you have really been looking for. I talk to people all of the time who tell me all of the various things they have been involved in, and then they turn and say but, you know, I've really been warming to something else. Zaccheus really wanted something else. Jesus was able to help him to turn his life over to Him. Jesus turned and said something to Zaccheus that I want you to hear Jesus say to you. He said, Zaccheus, you are an example of what my whole life is about. I am in the business of seeking after people who are lost. You need to hear today that God has been looking for you. I know what you think. You think God is up there, and I am

down here, and I don't know if there is any connection at all, but I want to tell you there is. I could ask one hundred people in this room to stand up and to tell you their life story. Their life story is this: one day they gave their life to Jesus Christ, and then they looked back and began to realize how God had worked in their life to lead them to that decision, and how they were aware that was the hand of God. And suddenly they understand, this is what God has been doing all the time in their life. And in your life God has been there and worked in your life, and done all sorts of things to try to bring you to Himself, to where He could transform you. Many times people come to me and say Oh, praise God, pastor. I found the Lord. Well, I know what you mean by that. But really it is better said the other way. The Lord found you. Because He has been looking for you, and He has been working in your life. I can tell you He will never leave you alone because He is in the process of always trying to find you. He knows your name. He knows your needs. He knows your hurts, and He has been looking because He wants to bring you to Himself. But he said something that you need to know about you. He gave you a little four letter word. It is the word lost. Not immoral, not mean, not criminal. Lost.

I said thirty years ago I have had one experience where I really was lost. A friend of mine when I lived in south Louisiana invited me to go out one night to jig frogs. He said we are going to a certain place. It was a part of a swamp area. I asked, do you know where you are going? He said oh, yes, I know where I am going. I asked, do you know how to get out? He said, I know how to get out. I will pick you up at nine o'clock tonight. We got in this little boat, put that little coal miner's cap on with the light. You go up and down the banks, and the light glistened off the eyes of

the frog, and you reach out. We reached out. I pulled them in. Then I heard something go "rumpf." I looked around. My light went down, and I realized we were visited by another reptile. He backed the boat out. We were leaving that place for sure, leaving and going down. After a while we got the snake out. I said I think I am ready to go home. So he said O.K., and we left. After a while he stopped dead, and he said was there a body of water right back over here? I said nothing on me is working well tonight. He cut the motor off and stopped, and said I don't know where we are. We waited for several hours until finally another boat came by and helped us. Now listen. I knew where I wanted to be, but I didn't know how to get there. I could have all the dreams and all the hopes. and I could say I want to be there, but I didn't know how to get there. You know what Jesus says about us? Apart from Him we are lost. You can tell me the person you want to be. You can tell me what you want to do with your life, but the problem is you don't know how to get there. What Jesus has come to do is take you by the hand and say, listen, I'll help you get home. I will help you be what you want to be. A friend of mine was lost. He said as he stopped, I am going to wait because my wife will understand that I am lost and she will get somebody to come and find me. You are valuable to God, and He is looking for you, and He wants you. He wants to take you from where you are to where you could be. Zaccheus up the tree dreaming of a man you wished you were. Come on down. I'll take you where you need to be. Some of you in this room need to be taken to where you need to be. Christ wants to come and take you by the hand, and take you where you ought to be. Some of you need to just come down out of the tree, take His hand, and follow Him, and become what you need to be. Some of you in this room have already been found by Him.

You need to come to help us to find others, to be an example of what Christ can do in a human life, and you need to come and be a part of our church's family.