

“Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner?”

Luke 19:1-10

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In the business conference today, we shall vote on the new vision and mission statements for our church along with six core values. These statements and core values will more clearly define who we are and the direction we are headed. I appreciate all that have helped draft these guidelines.

I am particularly pleased with our mission statement, **“To lead people to a transforming relationship with Jesus and to follow him in transforming the world.”** This is what we are about at Smoke Rise. We want to help people develop and maintain a close relationship with Jesus that results in making a difference in the world.

Is there a biblical model that can help us understand this mission statement? Certainly, there are many, and one of the best is found in Luke 19:1-10. This passage tells the story of Zacchaeus.

If there ever was a man whose life was transformed by Jesus, it was Zacchaeus. As a matter of fact, Zacchaeus reminds me of another well known literary character whose life was transformed, Ebenezer Scrooge, the main character in Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. Both were selfish and greedy men who made changes in their lives and positive changes in the lives of people around them. Let me share Zacchaeus’ story with you.

Zacchaeus was probably the most disliked and mistrusted man in Jericho. He was the chief tax collector for that region, which meant he was a part of the burdensome and corrupt Roman tax system.

When Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, he climbed a sycamore tree in order to see him. You recall that Zacchaeus was a short man and was unable to see over those in front of him on the parade route.

When Jesus approached the tree in which Zacchaeus sat, he paused and told Zacchaeus to come down immediately because he was going to his house. At once, Zacchaeus descended the tree and gladly welcomed Jesus in his home.

After a period of discussion, Zacchaeus stood up and said, “Look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” To his delight, Jesus responded by saying, “Today, salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.”

This story leads to some penetrating questions that I would like to explore this morning. Follow me as I do so.

Why did Zacchaeus climb that sycamore tree? Was it merely out of curiosity that he wanted to see Jesus? I don’t think so. I think his willingness to go to great extremes to see Jesus along with his eagerness to welcome him into his home indicates that all was not right in his life and changes needed to be made. Apparently, Zacchaeus was dealing with some issues that he had not been able to resolve. Perhaps this holy man could shed new light on these issues and do for him what no one else had been able to do.

When Jesus stopped and spoke to Zacchaeus, what do you think the people expected him to say? I’ll tell you this. I don’t think they expected him to invite himself to Zacchaeus’ home. Luke even wrote that the people muttered with disdain, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner” Luke 19:7.

I think they expected Jesus to openly condemn Zacchaeus and expose him as the crook he really was. What a great time for Jesus to reign down fire and brimstone upon this heathen. The

crowd would love it. How disappointed some must have been when Jesus said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”

Why was Jesus so urgent and insistent about going to Zacchaeus’ home? Perhaps there were two reasons. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die and knew he would not be coming back to Jericho. If he was going to talk to Zacchaeus, he had to do it that day.

Secondly, what he could do for Zacchaeus, no one else could do. Zacchaeus was dealing with some heavy “stuff.” He was in need of forgiveness and direction. He was fully empty and knew it. Like Ebenezer Scrooge, Zacchaeus was probably the wealthiest man in town and also the most miserable. Only Jesus could diagnose Zacchaeus’ problem and provide the cure.

What do you think Zacchaeus and Jesus talked about in the privacy of his home? I don’t know for sure and I am glad I don’t. This was a confidential conversation and needed to stay that way. I don’t believe in airing dirty laundry. Evidently, Jesus did not either. He protected Zacchaeus’ privacy, dignity and respect. He will yours, too.

It is rather obvious, though, that Zacchaeus’ values, priorities and lifestyle were discussed. Look at Zacchaeus’ response to their discussion, “Look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” Luke 19:8.

That’s the restitution that was required of someone that had committed a violent crime. This represented the most severe penalty for robbing another. Zacchaeus was not guilty of violence and did not have to pay back four-fold. **Why did he do it?**

I think he wanted everyone to know that he was a different man. He wanted no questions left in anyone’s mind about his sincerity.

Perhaps he wanted to make up for lost time. All along, his resources could have been used to help those around him. It was time to make up for the years he lost.

Maybe, just maybe, his generosity was in response to God’s generosity toward him. He had been forgiven much. How could he calculate to see how little he could do to show his appreciation? It was time to throw away the calculators. He had lived his life up to this point pushing buttons and was miserable. It was time to follow his heart.

Transformed people want others to know they have been changed. They also want others to be transformed, too. This is what our mission statement is all about at Smoke Rise, **“To lead people to a transforming relationship with Jesus and to follow him in transforming the world.”** It is possible, you know. Ask Zacchaeus or Ebenezer Scrooge.