

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10

Message: "I'm Coming to Your House"

(and things will never be the same)

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Zacchaeus was looking. He was not sure exactly what for, but he was looking for something. He had everything money could buy. He was a chief tax collector. His home base was Jericho, the centre of several major trade routes, so there were many taxes to collect. Being in charge of all the tax collection that went on in Jericho, Zacchaeus made easy money. But he was still looking for something that he didn't find in money.

He had heard about Jesus. For the past three years this fellow had been making headlines all over the country. Jesus had been through Jericho before but Zacchaeus hadn't paid much attention. Just another fanatic, he figured. But lately, all Zacchaeus heard about was Jesus healing people, raising the dead, teaching people. He even had meals with tax-collectors whom most people avoided and despised. With all the fuss over this popular fellow, Zacchaeus didn't want to miss Jesus this time. He wanted to get a good look.

But Zacchaeus wasn't the only person with this idea. It seems as if all Jericho was out waiting to see Jesus. Short Zacchaeus couldn't see over the crowd so he used his intuitive mind to come up with a solution: climb a tree.

Here we have this wealthy, short tax-collector climbing a sycamore-fig tree along one of Jericho's busy streets. Why? Because he wants to see Jesus. Why? Curiosity. Perhaps. But sometimes curiosity is the outward expression of an inward emptiness and restlessness. Maybe there was a greater reason which Zacchaeus didn't want to admit. He knew Jesus had a soft spot in his heart even for despised tax-collectors. Maybe he was tired of being hated by everyone and of trying to buy friends with his wealth. Maybe he was tired of having friends only because he was rich. Maybe he was frustrated with the life he was living, knowing his dishonest gains, and thinking, hoping that there was something better. Maybe he knew deep down that he had gained the whole world but forfeited his soul. Maybe he came to recognize that deep down in his heart he had a yearning that not all the shekels in the Roman Empire was going to satisfy.

It is also very likely that, as curious as he was, Zacchaeus climbed that tree in the hope that no one saw him. My hunch is that he was *hiding* up in that tree. He was peering out from behind the leaves and branches, hoping that as the parade passed by, the crowds (and Jesus himself) would be too preoccupied by what was going on at street-level to notice him up there

in that tree.

So when the parade stops, when Jesus looks right up at him, and when the rest of the crowd follows suit, I imagine that Zacchaeus' first reaction was a deep gulp and then he turned several shades of red. What now!? He knew so many people in that crowd. He knew they hated him. Would the whole mob turn on him? Would they ridicule him further? He was trapped, terrified!

What *does* happen shocks everyone. Jesus speaks kindly: "Zacchaeus, come on down out of that tree right now. I must stay at your house today!" Luke tells us that Zacchaeus fairly tumbled out of the tree and welcomed Jesus "gladly, with joy." But we still can't quite grasp what that means. For all we know, it may have been pride that was puffing up Zacchaeus' chest as he strutted in front of this fellow citizens as if to say, "Well now look here! This Jesus clearly knows quality when he sees it!"

That might be. But if that was Zacchaeus' attitude, it didn't stay that way for long. Welcoming Jesus into his house changed Zacchaeus. Meeting Jesus, listening to him face-to-face, brought a response from Zacchaeus. He underwent a radical revolution in his life. From a life of greed and theft and deceit, he committed himself to generosity and honesty. He didn't even know Jesus that well! He had not had years of classes, nor had he taken any discipleship courses. But the love of Jesus which Zacchaeus did experience changed his life. He was a new person.

Jesus explains the change. Jesus declares that salvation has come. Zacchaeus came to know the good news of great joy that God loved him and forgave him his sins. Even if his life up to that point had been more like one of those prodigals who had gotten lost in some far country, he was now found, having been sought by the Saviour. Zacchaeus may have been searching. But actually it was Jesus who was seeking him; Jesus who was seeking to save the lost.

There's an interesting detail in this story that links back to Luke 15. In that chapter Jesus was sitting with tax collectors and "sinners" and the Pharisees were criticizing him for it. Jesus tells 3 stories about a shepherd finding a lost sheep, a woman finding a lost coin, and a father finding a lost son. Jesus uses the same word for "great joy" when the lost is found as the word in this story when it is said that Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly, with great joy. Jesus has found what was lost and there is great joy!

Salvation had come to his house. Not because Zacchaeus was now doing good works in his generosity. Remember that Zacchaeus did not approach Jesus on his own. He didn't

make a bargain with Jesus as to what he was going to do only to then have Jesus say, "Because you have done this, I will now save you." Instead it is Jesus who first calls to Zacchaeus. Jesus initiates the going to Zacchaeus' house. Although the watching crowds conclude what was so common to conclude in that day (namely, that a holy person going to a sinner's house will thereby become contaminated by the sinner), with Jesus it was always the reverse: the contagion of sin did not sully or dirty Jesus' holiness but Jesus' holiness overcame sin and brought holiness to the person who did not have it before.

Something like that happens here. Jesus, by grace, nabs Zacchaeus, brings grace to his house, and so saves Zacchaeus. So when this once-crooked tax collector stands up to declare his intention to begin sharing his wealth and to pay back for past swindles, he is not trying to gain God's favour. He is showing that the grace of God that came to him from out of the blue is already taking root. Zacchaeus is just living out the new identity Jesus had already brought to him. When grace comes to us, it always results in a gracious lifestyle!

So what does Zacchaeus have to do with the start of a new year? Well, it might be a bit of a stretch, but he got a new start, a new page in his life; he became a new person. It's like a new year, a new calendar, and the new opportunities that come with it.

And so like Zacchaeus, so for all of us: Jesus is coming to your house this year and things will never be the same. When, how will you meet Jesus this year?

You might not be asking him to come, but you will know that he is there. By grace he will come. It might be in special events, when you graduate from grade school or high school or college or university, Jesus is coming to your house. When a loved one in your family or friendship circle dies, Jesus is coming to your house. When you celebrate a birthday or anniversary, Jesus is coming to your house. When you get up in the morning for work, Jesus is coming to your house. When you get home after a day of shopping or studying or working, Jesus is coming to your house.

Jesus is coming to your house whenever you read his word. Try it. This year, if you do not already do this, take time every day, or at least 4 days a week, to read a portion of the Bible. Welcome Jesus into your house through his word. Start with the gospel of John. Listen to Jesus' words. When you read them, ask yourself 2 questions: is there a promise that God is speaking in these words? Is there a some instruction in these words?

Jesus is coming to your house this year, and things will never be the same. In fact, Jesus not only comes to your house, you and I become Jesus' home. He doesn't just come to visit once in a while; he lives with us. How will you welcome Jesus into your house, into your

life this year? “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.” (Revelation 3:20)

And more than that, more than Jesus coming to your house and in your life, how will you bring the presence of Jesus into the life of another person? How will you bring the good news of salvation into the life of a “tax collector,” the one who is looked down on and labelled as no good? We have our own ideas of who “those” people are. It may be a label we give to someone who dresses poorly or lives in “that” neighbourhood, or someone with special needs, or who gets suspended from school. How will you help them experience grace, God’s love?

When Jesus comes to our house, to our lives, and to the lives of others, he brings salvation. He brings good news of great joy, forgiveness of sin, peace with God. He brings a new purpose and perspective on life. Zacchaeus realized that his priorities needed to change. He realized what made his life seem so empty, even though he had so much. His focus was no longer on acquiring more wealth, but on caring for others, as Christ had cared for him.

Maybe you are starting this new year with some of your own restlessness. Maybe you are tired or frustrated over your own efforts and how they don’t seem to be very meaningful. May there is some emptiness in your own life and you are looking for something more.

Or maybe you are excited about this new year. You know how Jesus has already impacted your life and you are excited about what is next. You are excited about what Jesus is going to do with you and through you.

Jesus is coming to your house. Let him make a difference in your life. Let his good news, his salvation, affect your decisions and actions and priorities. Let the presence of Jesus in your life affect your attitudes, your anger, your habits.

For some of us, Jesus coming to our house this year will bring about some radical changes. But they will be wonderful, knowing the joy of Jesus’ presence.

For some of us, Jesus coming to our house will affirm the joy we have. It will add a new and rich meaning to the life we live for him. It may add a new determination and dedication to live Jesus’ presence in the lives of those around us.

Jesus is coming to your house this year, and things will never be the same. Look for him. Welcome him. Let his presence be seen in your daily living, throughout the year.

Amen.

Questions about the Scripture reading:

1. What is the key verse or idea? What supports your conclusion?
2. What do you learn about God and His way with us?
3. What do you learn about people?
4. What do you learn about the Christian life?
5. How does the passage - challenge?
 - test?
 - warn?
 - inspire?
6. What is the promise claimed?
What is the example to be followed?
7. What ideas does it give for prayer?