

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

09.01.2024 | God's Faithfulness to Pursue His People | Luke 19:1-10 | Clark Fobes | Associate Pastor

we are starting this new series for the next three weeks leading up to our 175th. If you have not gotten that invitation or seen it, there should be details in your bulletins or online, but we are going to celebrate. We're going to party hard for our 175th. There'll be a celebration service on Saturday, September 21st, if I'm getting my dates correct. And on Sunday, that Sunday, we'll have a special service, but afterwards, we're going to have a block party right outside on Waller Street in front of our church building. You'll hear from some special guests at both of those services, and it just should be a great time to recount all that God has done. But one thing that I wanted to do also throughout this series leading up to that 175th celebration is to share some stories of God's faithfulness to his people here in San Francisco, and specifically to our church.

And so throughout this sermon, I'm going to be sharing some of these stories of what we saw God do in forming his church. Now, if you're at the 9 a.m. class, we do have a 9 a.m. class for these three weeks on the history of our church, First SF, and Bobby did a great job with Brother Bobby to teach about the year of beginning of the start of our church. And so if you were there, some of what I'll share may be a little bit similar, but if you weren't there for the 90% of you that weren't there, you'll get to hear a little bit more about what God did in the beginnings of that. So to start us off, we're going to look at Luke chapter 19. So you have a Bible you can turn there. If you're new to the faith or don't know where that is, that's in the New Testament. It's one of the four gospels, and we're going to be looking at Luke's accounts in chapter 19. So you can turn there. And we're going to be reading from verses one through 10, Jesus and Zacchaeus, this story that Luke gives us of God's pursuit of Zacchaeus.

So Luke chapter 19, we're going to be starting in verse one. "And he entered Jericho and was passing through, "and behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. "He was a chief tax collector and was rich. "And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, "but on account of the crowd, he could not, "because he was small in stature. "So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree "to see him, for he was about to pass that way. "And when Jesus came to the place, "he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, "for I must stay at your house today. "So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. "And when they saw it, they all grumbled. "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner. "And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. "And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, "I restore it fourfold. "Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house, "since he also is the son of Abraham. "For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost." This is the word of the Lord.

Early in 1849, people were seeking something here in San Francisco, namely gold. The discovery of gold happened actually in January of 1848, but it took about 10 months for that news to travel to Washington and make it nationwide. And so beginning in 1849, people were coming to the city in droves to get rich quick, essentially. We have this account from the famous Annals of San Francisco, which was published in 1855. Writing that time, the book says, "These astonishing circumstances soon gathered into California "a mixed population of nearly a quarter of a million of the wildest, "bravest, most intelligent, yet most reckless, "and perhaps dangerous beings ever before collected "into one small district of country. "Gold and the pleasures that gold could buy "had allured them to the scene. "They were flushed with hope and excitement." Maybe this sounds a lot like San Francisco today. Bright, exciting, but dangerous. People coming in droves to the city to get rich quick. And yet I love the way that the early missionaries here to San Francisco viewed this. They didn't just simply see this as man-seeking outfortunes. The way they interpreted these events was it was actually God drawing the nations to San Francisco so that he would seek them. A couple years later, there were many nations represented in our city from the huge wave of Chinese immigrants, from immigrants from all over Europe, down in Mexico and Central and South America. I mean, people from all around the world were coming to our city just the same way they do today, to seek out some better life, some new hopes and dreams, some fortune.

Reverend Osgood Wheeler, our very first pastor at our church, he said this of the times, he said, "We believe there has never been a period in the history of any nation "when so glorious an opportunity has been given "to bestow so great a boon and to throw so humanizing and Christianizing "and influence over so many people and of so many different nations "as is now offered to the people of these United States." They saw there a great opportunity, but not of personal

wealth and hopes and dreams, but of God to seek out his people for salvation. And that's so often how God pursues his people. People may pursue some salvation, in a sense, physically in their lives, whether it's pursuing career fulfillment, dreams and hopes for marriage or family, living for a better place or a better life for the next generations, and yet through those pursuits, God will bring about his greater pursuit of a greater salvation, one not found in the earthly but in the heavenly. And so that's what I want to focus in on this morning is, how does Jesus pursue his people? In the midst of all of our seeking and pursuits, how is God actually the one that pursues us, his people, faithfully for salvation?

I think the first way that Luke tells us in Luke 19 is that Jesus seeks out the most unlikely people. If you're familiar at all with the story of Zacchaeus, he was the least likely candidate for Jesus to seek out for salvation. We're told that, first of all, he was rich. This is a detail that comes very early on when we're told about Zacchaeus being its chief tax collector and was rich. Now, this may not mean much to you, but this is significant because earlier in Luke 18, Jesus had just dealt with a young rich man. He's just dealt with a young rich man who Jesus concludes in Luke 18, verse 24. He says that he had become sad and said how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. And just a couple passages later, we hear of a rich man that does enter the kingdom of God. So he was an unlikely candidate because Jesus just said the rich and the wealthy, it's hard for them to enter the kingdom of God.

We're also told that Zacchaeus, if you remember from, if you were in Sunday school and heard about Zacchaeus, he was a what? A wee little man. Now, this is interesting because to be wee or little in those times meant that he was probably under five feet. Some people think he was legally a midget, four six. It's not going to be ashamed of if you're legally a midget today, you can get a placard for your car for that. But he was short for his time in place. Now, that was probably true and true indicator of his physical stature. But the detail that we're told in verse three, we're told that on account of the crowd, he could not because he was small in stature. This is specific language that some commentators even think, while it does refer to physical stature, it has some derogatory connotations for his social status. As people looked down on him physically, they also looked down on him socially because of his profession. We're told he was the chief tax collector. Tax collectors in their day were already despised because of the profession that they held. Tax collectors would go and collect taxes for lands, goods. They would collect anything that was due to the Roman government from the people. But those taxes were not set by the Roman government. They had some base standard, but the tax collectors could raise those standards or those amounts however much they wanted. And so often tax collectors would raise them higher to skim a greater profit from the people they were extorting. This also being in Jericho and Zacchaeus being a chief tax collector probably meant that he was one of the wealthiest tax collectors of the day. Jericho was a large city of trade and goods. And so it was one of the most wealthy cities. We're told that Herod set up a summer house in Jericho. It was an oasis of sorts in the desert and the most wealthy and rich would go there for their pleasure and leisure.

And so here we have Zacchaeus, rich chief tax collector, meaning he was the most rich and wealthy, but also the most despised of people because he was extorting the very crowds that he was amongst. But also because he was an employee of Rome. He was he sided with the political enemy of the people of Israel. Zacchaeus, he was also not just a non-religious person. He was irreligious. We're told that his name is Zacchaeus. This was likely a Jewish name. It quite possibly could have come from the Hebrew name of Zechariah. It could have been a shortened derivative. But in Hebrew or Aramaic, it would have meant clean or innocent, which is ironic because for Zacchaeus being a rich chief tax collector and low in social status, he would have been anything but clean and innocent in the crowd's eyes. Here is the least likely candidate because not only is he a Jew that sided with the enemy, he's a Jew that's ignored all of God's laws and his promises to his people. And in pursuit of his own wealth, much like those early people in San Francisco, he was seeking out something outside of what God intended for him. And yet Jesus finds Zacchaeus, the least likely candidate, and he seeks and pursues him and seeks him out.

Jesus is in the business of seeking out the least likely people for salvation. This is something we can tend to forget, especially if you've grown up in the church. You may just kind of think, well, it's normal that Jesus seeks us out. We've grown up in the church. We know the Bible stories. But we think that we are all likely candidates because we've grown up in the church. Or if you've been in the church a long time, we can start to get this impression that we might be the likely candidates and anyone else outside the church are the unlikely candidates because God has brought us here or we've grown up in the church or been here a long time. And we can sometimes think, especially if you're in a very homogenous place, that there's one predominant people that God is in the business of seeking out, and that's based on socioeconomic class. If you're middle or upper class, it may be hard to fathom that God is for the lower and the poorer

classes. Depending on maybe political persuasion. We've seen this a lot in our day where people on the left and the right are often at odds thinking the other side is the enemy, and that can become true of those in the church as well. We can get this idea that we might be the ideal demographic, and anyone else outside of our demographic is weird or foreign or different. They don't have any business coming into the church.

But that's one of the reasons why I love FirstSF. Because if you look around, you see how diverse we are. Not just racially, but socioeconomically, cognitively, political persuasion. You can't be at our church very long and think, "I'm the most likely candidate. Everyone else is the least likely." Because you don't have to go very far before you find someone that's completely on the opposite end socially than you. It's a reminder that God is seeking out a diversity of people for himself, even the least likely of people. This is something we've seen in our long history as FirstSF. Early on, only three years into the history of the church, First SF was part of starting Third Baptist Church, which is still around today. Which is actually originally First Colored Baptist Church. I'm glad they changed the name. Now, some people may think that First Colored Baptist Church was started because First SF wanted segregation. But actually, there was a larger contingency of blacks at our church that wanted a church for themselves. And the pastor at the time, Benjamin Briarley, and another pastor gladly sent people to start this new church to reach that population. And were part of the installation service. It was something to be celebrated, not segregated. FirstSF was also part of reaching some of the early Chinese immigrants in 1870, starting a mission school for them, not here in this building, but in the very first building in the church basement, trying to seek out the Chinese who were moving to the city.

But there's another really amazing wave of God's moving to find the least likely candidates that happen in our time in SF. It's one that I've asked some of you about because there's not much about it. But in the 1870s, when God started bringing hippies into the church who had met Jesus while tripping on LSD, and yet who genuinely found Christ in those moments, our church was part of starting the living room cafe on Haight-Ashbury to minister to the hippies on the streets of Haight-Ashbury to seek them with Christ. And it was through that ministry that Lonnie Frisbee actually became a disciple and was saved and went on to help the Calvary Church movements. Our church was part of that early beginnings. See, God has always been in the business of pursuing out the least likely candidates. And as soon as we start to think that we are likely candidates of the faith, we have to remember, and we don't have to go very far back to remember that we were once, as Marsh even reminded us, we were once at odds with God.

None of us were likely candidates for salvation. The Bible tells us that all of us were turned against God. All of us were seeking our own wealth and way, and yet God intervened to seek us out himself. See, if God has pursued you and me the least likely of candidates for salvation, why couldn't he go and seek out others that seem just as less likely for salvation outside of our church doors? Jesus seeks out the least likely candidates, and he takes the initiative in that seeking. This is our second point. Jesus is the one that takes the initiative in the seeking. Jesus is the one that pursues Zacchaeus in this story. If you look at verse 5, as much as Zacchaeus has a sense where he's seeking for something in Jesus, he's actually quite distant in the story. Yes, he climbs up on a tree, he's observing, but at no point does he, do we get any intention where he's actually trying to encounter Jesus.

Jesus is the one that seeks him out to encounter him. If you look at verse 5 again, "When Jesus came to the place where Zacchaeus was perched in the tree, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." See, Jesus is the one that looks up. How do you know to look up? It was said at the time that these sycamore trees likely had large leaves by which Zacchaeus could hide behind. So it's very possible Zacchaeus was trying to get a glimpse of Jesus without being seen. Remember, if he was shamed in society, he would not have been seen doing an even more shameful act. Jesus knew to look up at that very moment and recognize Zacchaeus perched in a tree. Not only that, he calls him by name. How did Jesus know Zacchaeus's name? It's possible that maybe Jesus heard the name Zacchaeus being thrown around in the crowd. Maybe Zacchaeus being the chief tax collector, he was a notorious person in Jericho and people hated him, so it's possible. Jesus knew the name, but I think there's a really simple answer. Jesus, the Son of God in his divinity, knew the very person he was seeking out. He calls him by name.

Imagine you're Zacchaeus and you're shamed in society, you're hiding up in a tree and the very guy you're trying to get a glimpse at, maybe just out of curiosity, calls you out by name when you thought you're hidden in the dark. Zacchaeus may have freaked out at the moment, and yet that was a sign of God pursuing him. It reminds me of my daughter when we first came to the church, everyone's saying, "Hi Kara, how's it going?" And every time she would look at me and say,

"How do they know my name?" I'd say, "Well, you know, it's magic, right?" But see, this is not that kind of seeking where people just word of mouth knew who Zacchaeus was. Jesus knew by word of mouth. He knew the very person by name he intended to seek out and call upon. Jesus pursues Zacchaeus. He takes the initiative. And in this initiative, Jesus doesn't just find him, he seeks to restore honor to him. Something that I think we may miss in our Western individualistic lens. But when Jesus says, "I must be in your house," he's associating with Zacchaeus. And in associating with him, he is the guest of honor here in Jericho. All the crowds are running to him. And yet Zacchaeus here, he is the shamed person here in Jericho. By Jesus associating with him, he is now bringing some of that honor onto Zacchaeus. Again, we said that Zacchaeus was someone that was probably looked down upon in society for many things. But even this act of him going in a tree when he goes ahead and climbs up into it. This was actually probably a shameful act in Jewish society.

Even today, who climbs up in trees? Little kids, right? Not grown men. Grown men aren't seen climbing up in trees, having a good time. But especially back then, if you think about what they wore, the traditional garb were these robes that they would wear. They were flowy. They covered and gave you shade. But they were very flowy. And so for Zacchaeus to climb up in a tree meant, like the story just before this, and not long before this, of the prodigal son when the father lifts up his garments, exposing his undergarments, Zacchaeus would have had to lift it up, climb in a tree, exposing himself to the crowds below. Zacchaeus was doing a shameful act, but probably not because he was that curious to find Jesus. I think this was more likely a sign of the shame that Zacchaeus already felt in society. He was at his ultimate low. There was no further shame he could bring upon himself, because he was amidst the very people he had wronged and was extorting as an irreligious Jew, as an enemy of the state, as someone who had been a chief tax collector pursuing wealth over God. And yet Jesus seeks out this man who is shamed in society to lift him up and restore honor to him by being the guest of honor coming into his home.

You know, for someone to receive the guest of honor in their home was to be honored because it meant this honorable person in society chose you to reside in your house. It would be kind of like if Steph Curry was looking for a church in San Francisco and he chose FirstSF. Now, why wouldn't he? Because we're a great church, let's be honest. But if he chose our church, that would say something about our church, wouldn't it? We would think we have the honored guest of San Francisco here in our church building out of all the other churches. There's not that many, but out of all the others at least, he chose ours. It would bring some greater honor to the people around him.

And that's the very same thing that Jesus is doing when he seeks out Zacchaeus. He bestows honor upon him and he lifts him up. See, when Jesus seeks us out, he doesn't just seek us out in initiative, but he seeks us out to honor us, to lift us up. That may not always feel like the case because we still feel beset by sin. We may still feel like the world gives us a lowly status. We may still feel lowly in the world because of our status. And yet it's true of every one of us, if Jesus has sought you out, he doesn't look at you as someone that's lowly, rejected and despised. See, Jesus became lowly, rejected and despised. Why? So that we might become the honored, exalted people in the kingdom of God. So regardless of how the world looks at us, Jesus looks at us not with a despicable but with honor, lifting us up.

Regardless of what we may feel in this world or what the world thinks about us, when the king calls you personally and he calls you to come into his kingdom, when Jesus seeks and saves you, you are now considered a child of the king. So what greater honor is there in the kingdom than being a child of the king, being an heir of the throne? When Jesus seeks us out, you are not a worthless nobody. You are an exalted somebody in God's kingdom. And this pursuit of Jesus is radically offensive. It's radically offensive in counter-cultural in their day and age, but it should remind us of the radically offensive nature of grace. If you look at how the crowds respond in verse seven, when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Here we see a crowd, a society that's not rejoicing at a sinner repenting and turning to God. This is actually not like the underdog story that we've come to so love in our American culture. We love the story of an underdog, right? We love watching these documentaries of the underdog sports team that comes out of the ashes and becomes the champion.

That's not really what was happening here. It's more like the most hated, despised person, the most evil person in society, and that person being specifically chosen and called by God to save them. It'd be like if Steph Curry came in here, came to our church, we go back to that illustration, and he needs a place to stay for the night. Who do we most naturally think he's going to stay at? He's going to choose the most loyal Warriors fan, but instead of choosing that person, he chooses the one Celtics fan in our church, Mr. Bobby Evans. You would think, "What? Steph, come on. There are

hundreds of better candidates than Bobby." Don't go to the Celtics fans' house. I mean, if you're not Warriors fans, you don't like Celtics fans. No one likes Celtics fans but Celtics fans. See, for Jesus to choose Zacchaeus was so radically counter-cultural that the people would have despised not just Zacchaeus, but now Jesus, that's the very thing that happens. Or maybe think about if you work at a large company and you have a boss, an honored boss, people love him or her, and that boss is taking a special interest in an employee to lift up and promote. You would think they're going to choose a hardworking employee. They're going to choose the one that everyone likes, the one that produces good numbers, but instead that boss goes and chooses the most hated employee, the laziest, the one that doesn't do a good job at the work that you think should be fired, and that's the very person the boss chooses to promote and honor and exalt.

That's a little bit closer to what was happening in Jesus' time. They would have thought if Jesus was going to choose anyone, it should have been the religious, it should have been the Pharisees that kept the law in their eyes perfectly. It should not have been a sinner, someone hated by Jews, someone who sided with the political enemy with Rome. But that's the very person that Jesus seeks out, and it's radically offensive. See, we don't really understand grace until it's a little bit offensive to us. You think about the people that maybe you have the most disdain or hate for in your lives. People you may think, "Well, I would not choose that person as a candidate for salvation." If it were up to me, I would not choose to save that person. Those may be the very people God is after. Those are the very people God seeks to pursue and choose for himself, to honor and lift up and bring into his kingdom.

That's a little bit like how the beginnings of the church in SF was like in 1849, when Reverend Wheeler first took the call to come to San Francisco. People were imploring him to move there, he was hesitant, but finally when he accepted the call, one man, the president of the Baptist Society, he said this to Reverend Wheeler, you've probably heard it if you've been around our church in a while, he said, "Do you know where you're going, my brother? I would rather go as a missionary to China or coach in China," which was southern Vietnam at the time, "than to San Francisco. Don't you stir a step, my brother, unless you're prepared to go to the darkest spot on earth." We have in the history of the Annals too that many people looked at San Francisco as the vilest, most morally corrupt people on earth. They were the people furthest from God's kingdom, least worthy and deserving. And yet what's beautiful is that our church, our Baptist Society is at the time, many of the other churches, that was the very place they knew they had to go, because that's where God was seeking out a remnant for himself. Amongst the least likely, a grace so radical that it would offend, a grace so offensive that it would honor those who should be dishonored in society.

And Jesus bestows this honor on Zacchaeus as he takes that very scorn himself when the crowd scorn turns from Zacchaeus to Jesus. See, Jesus, he pursues a people because of that great reversal where he takes on our shame, our scorn, our dishonor, and all the hatred and disdain in societies placed on him so that he may now bestow on us an honor in God's kingdom. This brings us to our last point. Jesus seeks to save the lost. Jesus seeks out the least likely of candidates. He takes the initiative, and he does the seeking because he's out to save the lost. God pursues Zacchaeus here as someone who is lost, not just someone that's shamed in society, but finds some lostness that recognizes his lostness.

If you look at how he responds in verse 8, Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "The holds Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." I think Zacchaeus is demonstrating a couple of things here. One of those is that he is someone that has pursued all these riches and wealth in the world, and yet it's come up empty. He's pursued anything the eye could please, anything that someone would desire, and yet he recognizes when he's found Jesus, when Jesus has found him, none of that matters at all. Zacchaeus came to a point where he realized what he was looking for was not in this wealth and riches in the world, but a man who's found his heart's longing in Christ. Zacchaeus, he responds in a way that's not a, this is not a requirement for salvation, it's a result of the radical grace that he has encountered in Christ. This also leads Zacchaeus to a radical change in his lifestyle. Radical grace results in radical repentance.

Because if you think about Zacchaeus' actions here, if he was a tax collector, extorting people, when he now comes to Jesus and he says, "If I've wronged anyone, I need to right that wrong," that means that Zacchaeus either would have had to quit his job as a tax collector in extorting people or completely change his practices to become a just and righteous tax collector. But he also seeks out reparations. He says, "If I've wronged anyone, I'll restore it fourfold." This is

probably, this is not just something Zacchaeus pulls out of thin air. Again, if he was an irreligious Jew, he was at least aware of Old Testament law. This probably came from Exodus 22.1, where paying back someone for a stolen sheep was meant to be done fourfold. Exodus 22 says, "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep." If you think that all that Zacchaeus has wronged other people in, that means all these people in Jericho he's wronged, he needs to restore fourfold. That's a lot of money. But on top of that, he also says he's going to give half of his possessions to the poor. If you think about Zacchaeus, even though being a rich man, if he cuts out half his possessions, that leaves him with half, and out of that half, he's restoring fourfold. This radical repentance that led to generosity probably led Zacchaeus even into some form of poverty as a result. Here's a man that found that all of the riches he was looking for mattered nothing when it came to the riches to be found in God's kingdom.

This is again something that Reverend Wheeler noticed when he came to San Francisco, how everyone was so fixated on their wealth. He says this, "As the eye that has looked the noonday sun, full in the face, he's only a sun, so the miner sees nothing but the glitter of gold, and hears nothing but the clink of coin." I love Reverend Wheeler, who's a poet in his writing and his speaking. He mentions all throughout his storytelling that many people were so fixated, captured by gold in wealth, that even when they were sitting in their services and he would ask them what they thought of the service, they would immediately run to all their business calculations. These were people captivated by wealth and riches, and yet Zacchaeus, he realizes all that captivated the heart with wealth was nothing compared to what was to be found in Christ. Wheeler also recognized notes for us that there were people that found that treasure in wealth and yet gave it up like modern day 1849 Zacchaeus' that gave it away for the sake of the church. There were two men early on in the church's history that gave away \$8,000 for the start of the church. Now that may not seem like a lot today, but by 1849 standards, where \$1 was equivalent to \$41 today, that would have been over \$320,000 to gift to the church for the start of the building. See, when people encounter Jesus, money is not something to control us. Money is not something that masters us or uses us. Money and wealth, as Zacchaeus demonstrates, is something to be used for God's glory in his kingdom. There's a radical transformation that happens in Zacchaeus' life, and Jesus seeks out Zacchaeus and people like us to save lost people, people that are lost in these pursuits of the world that realize there is nothing to be found in the world around us.

Jesus seeks out the lost because his desire is also to save. In chapter 19, verse 10, we have this statement that's often said is Jesus' paradigmatic or enigmatic statement for his ministry. He says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." It describes all of what Jesus came to do to seek and save the lost. All throughout Luke's narrative, we get glimpses of this salvation. But I think there's some really fascinating details in this story with Zacchaeus that tell us that Jesus is in the business of seeking people out to save them. First off, in chapter 19, verse 5, we're told that Jesus had to stay at Zacchaeus' house. It could literally be read, "It was necessary for Jesus to stay at Zacchaeus' house." I think in a sense, Jesus is saying, "It's necessary for me to seek you out to save you." Also, there's a strange detail in Luke chapter 19, verse 1. If you look at verse 1, we're told that he entered Jericho and was passing through.

That may not strike you as interesting at all. It's a footnote. Jericho is often a footnote in the Gospels in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. In all the Gospels, Jericho is mentioned only five times, twice here in Luke and three once in every other Gospel. And all the times Jericho is mentioned, it's literally just as Jesus was passing through. Now, that may be for a number of reasons. One of them could be because there were multiple roads to get to Jerusalem. You could go straight down through Samaria. We see Jesus do that when he encounters the woman at the well in John chapter 4. You could take the coastal routes, which was breezier and nicer. Or you could take this inland routes that kind of weaved around and went through Jericho up the road to Jerusalem. Jesus didn't have to go through Jerusalem. He didn't actually have to pass through. He chose this route for a reason. And in all the Gospels, like I mentioned, Jericho is a footnote. Nothing happens there except in Luke chapter 19. This is the only instance in all the Gospels of Jesus doing any ministry, at least recorded for us, in Jericho. And that singular ministry is to seek out Zacchaeus. It's almost as if Luke is saying Jesus had to pass through Jericho because he had to find Zacchaeus. Jesus is doing something here where he's orchestrating his entire path up to the cross, passing all these towns to save people along the way. And Zacchaeus is fascinatingly one of those very people that Jesus literally moved around to find.

See, when God pursues his people, he literally pursues us. There will sometimes be circumstances and situations we will go through where we may think, why did that happen? If God is sovereign and he brings things about, what was that for?

Why does he bring us into obscure situations? Why do bad things happen to us is the common question. Why do all these different situations or things happen? I think a very clear answer could be Jesus is in the business of seeking out his people to pursue them and save them. See, Jesus is the one that clearly will orchestrate things in our lives to bring us to himself. Something that our sister, Marsha, mentioned for us. He will also orchestrate things in our lives to continually pursue us and draw us to himself. Every little detail in our lives is not by accident. Jesus is in the business of seeking out and pursuing his people faithfully. And I think in most of us, if we think hard enough about certain things in our lives, we could find instances like that. Where God brought us through some strange circumstances simply for the sole reason that he was pursuing us.

You know, I think about it in my life. I was just talking about this with my dad the other nights. I first became a believer through my middle school, Westport, Lutheran. Did not grow up in a Christian home. I was introduced to Christianity through my grandparents, as I've mentioned. But the first introduction to Christianity was through this Lutheran middle school here in San Francisco. But the way I got to that school, I still look back with a sense of fascination. I was talking about it with my dad recently. He had mentioned leading up into sixth grade. As San Francisco often does, they change the way that the lottery system works. If you're a parent, you know how frustrating that is. And so I was banking on going to APG in any middle school where all my friends were going. Yeah, not a great school, but sure. And the year right before, for whatever reason, the superintendent decided, everyone needs to stay in their districts. You can't cross districts. Now, that landed me at the school in my district, which was not a very good school, because I didn't grow up in a very good neighborhood. My dad, he was curious about it. I won't say the name of the school, but he had a friend that taught there, and he went to him and said, "Hey, you teach at this school. My son is supposed to go there. It's his district school. What's it like?" And the teacher thought for a moment, and he looked at my dad. He said, "Well, is your son big?" My dad said, "No, not really. He's a small kid." And the teacher said, "Well, can you fight?" Which my dad said, "He took two years of karate, but it wasn't very good at it." And he said, "Then don't send your kid there." And so that set my parents off on a path where they knew I could not go to my public middle school, and they were searching for a private middle school for me here in the city. And if you've been here for a while, you know many of those are Catholic. And so I remember as a kid driving around to five or six or seven different Catholic schools.

Back then, I don't know how it is now, but back then, to get into these Catholic schools, you either had to be Catholic or you had to test in. Now, I was not Catholic, so my only option was testing in. And I don't know, for whatever reason, I didn't think I was that dumb, but I took six or seven tests, and apparently I failed all of them, because I got into not a single Catholic middle school. My dad's friends were telling him, "Well, just lie and say you're Catholic." My dad being an irreligious atheist said, "No way. I'm not going to lie about a religion I don't believe in." So that left me without a school in the two or three weeks leading up to the new school year. Remember my dad telling me this? He walked into the principal's office at West Port of Lutheran, essentially begging for a spot because I had no school in two weeks' time, and to which the principal said, "Oh, you're in luck. We have one spot, and it's yours." It's crazy when I think about the path that God sent my family on to lead me to one of maybe just a handful of schools in the city that were not just Catholic, but Bible teaching, gospel preaching schools. And through that school, I opened the Bible for my very first time. Through that school, I met people that went to Sunset Church, that led me to their youth group, and which led me to faith. And I'll share that to boast about my story, but as an illustration, we all have stories like that, don't we? Where you can think that God is orchestrating our lives and circumstances to seek out His people. Where you can recall there are moments where even the most outlandish things were happening in your lives, and yet just like Zacchaeus, Jesus had to bring that about to seek you out, to pursue you, so that He might also save you.

Jesus seeks out the least likely. He takes the initiative, and He seeks us out that He might pursue us and save the lost. Which means, church, if you're someone that Jesus has pursued and found, our job is also to be an agent of God's seeking for other people. See, we recognize that the story of grace doesn't stop with us. That story continues and flows through us, as God will continue to seek and save others, so that we become not just recipients of grace, but ambassadors of grace. We may sometimes think in San Francisco, we are in the, again, the least likely of places where God is presently seeking people to save them. It's hard to be a Christian here, if you are one. It's hard to continually stand firm in the things we know to be true in Scripture, and yet which 96% of our city denies. But, again, just as 175 years ago, not much has changed. Reverend Wheeler recalls preaching in this city. He says in his memoir, It may feel like that sometimes being here, doesn't it? Like literally the city is against us. But there's another side to the story that he ends

on, thankfully. He recounts the joy and hope of being a preacher of the gospel in a dark city. And he ends with this. He says, "To have tested the truth and the blessing of the gospel of peace, to have realized in the path of duty even the gates of hell cannot prevail against."

Such a time as this church, 175 years later, to proclaim our duty in Christ, to have tested the truth for those that stand for a minute, and to recall and remember the gates of hell will not prevail against people, because God is faithful.