

RESPONDING TO JESUS

Luke 19:1-10

December 31, 2023

1. Introduction

- a. Welcome—Guests
- b. Happy New Year—last day to give in 2023
- c. Last Series: Loved
- d. Next Series: Stewards of the King
- e. Today: Responding to Jesus

2. Scene 1: **Spiritually curious people play hide and seek with Jesus.**

a. **Luke 19:1-6**

- b. The sycamore tree likely had big, thick leaves so he would have been hard to spot.
 - i. We had sycamore trees in Clearwater.
 - ii. We want to see Jesus, but don't want him to see us.
- c. Or do we? Ultimately, when we play hide and seek, we want to be found. Have you ever played hide and seek and never got found?
 - i. STORY. I had an experience in childhood of hiding under a stairwell behind a big toy box. It was too good of a hiding place because no one ever found me. Coming out of hiding on your own is kind of depressing. Being sought is exciting. Being alone and forgotten is not.
 - ii. Some of us play this game with Jesus. We're spiritually curious enough to be here. We want to see what Jesus is up to, but we don't want him to see us. But on another level we kind of hope Jesus will find us. Then we might experience the kind of joy or peace others seem to experience, but we're missing out on.
 - iii. We're kind of like Zacchaeus perched awkwardly up in a tree.

- d. Well, Jesus found Zacchaeus. When he did, Zacchaeus responded immediately and received Jesus' invitation with joy.
 - i. We would expect shame and embarrassment, but evidently Zacchaeus was ready to be found.
 - ii. In Luke, the tax collectors were ready!
 - 1. Matthew, another tax collector, responded to Jesus' call by throwing a feast with lots of his tax collecting friends.
 - 2. Jesus tells a parable about a tax collector who cries out to God for mercy and his prayers were heard, rather than the religious proud.
 - 3. People who have lied and cheated and brought real harm to others are not disqualified from receiving Jesus.
 - e. Many of us get stuck here. Spiritually curious but unwilling to respond like Zacchaeus.
 - i. STORY. Benjamin Franklin loved listening from a distance to the famous preacher, George Whitefield. Franklin was curious, even drawn to the message of Jesus, and he kept coming back, but just couldn't do it. Couldn't receive Jesus and follow him.
 - ii. Either we can't get over the cost of receiving Jesus and following him. Or we've done that, and we still feel like something's missing.
 - 1. Thankfully the story doesn't end here.
 - 2. But there's another place we can get stuck and fail to respond to Jesus.
3. Scene 2: **Spiritually proud people play judge and jury with Jesus.**
- a. **Luke 19:7**
 - b. Some of us compare ourselves to others and reach a very different conclusion. We don't think our faith comes up short of others, we assume it surpasses them. Deep down, we might even question why Jesus has

such patience with the Zacchaeuses of the world. We become kind of like this crowd who, rather than playing hide and seek with Jesus, played judge and jury with Jesus.

- i. Like Simon Cowell, they scrutinized every performance of Jesus as he traveled through the villages teaching and healing and ministering to the people.
- c. Commentator: the crowds “like Jesus’ miracles, but they do not care for his personal associations.” Especially the tax collectors and sinners.
 - i. When a tax collector named Matthew was called by Jesus and threw a feast, the religious crowds grumbled to Jesus’ followers, “why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (5:30)
 - ii. As Jesus gained a large following, Luke 15:1-2 says the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him, and the spiritually proud people grumbled, “this man receives sinners and eats with them.”
 1. This comment begins a section in Luke some call the Gospel of the Outcast in which we find a series of stories, teachings and miracles from Jesus showing that he came to call the least expected, the least worthy, to be his followers.
 - a. In Jesus' words from Matthew 15:24, he came to find the lost sheep and save them.
 - b. Who are these lost sheep?
 - i. They are the wayward who’ve strayed from the straight and narrow path.
 - ii. The financially strapped who cling to every penny
 - iii. Those who’ve wasted time and money making stupid decisions
 - iv. Those who know a lot about business, but not much about God
 - v. Those who are too sick to work and live on handouts from others

- vi. Those who dutifully serve in thankless jobs for a lifetime
 - vii. Those whose who have diseases that isolate them from society
 - viii. Those who are victims of a broken legal system
 - ix. Those who are perpetrators of a broken legal system
 - x. Those who are too young to be included with the grown ups
 - xi. Those who are too broken to be included with the healthy
- c. These are the lost sheep Jesus came for. People who might think of themselves as unworthy or disqualified, but they are they very ones Jesus, the good shepherd, goes out of his way to find and rescue. These are the people he has dinner with.
- d. Whether down and out or up and out, they are spiritually humble. They know they aren't perfect, and in the Gospel of the Outcast most of them wind up receiving salvation. But they don't find acceptance by the spiritually proud. To the spiritually proud, these are all sinners, and it is a scandal that Jesus would spend his time with them.
2. The crowd are spiritually proud. They follow Jesus around, huddling close to be in his inner circle, and complaining every step of the way, playing judge and jury for nearly everything Jesus did. To them, there is no place for the outcast.
3. And so when Jesus called out Zacchaeus and went to his home, they muttered under their breath how ridiculous it is that Jesus would be the guest of such a sinner.
- d. Being stuck spiritually proud is no better than being stuck spiritually curious. But there is a right response, which we learn from Zacchaeus.
4. Scene 3: **Spiritually responsive people thread the needle.**
- a. **Luke 19:8**

- b. Before Zacchaeus, the last encounter Jesus had with a rich man ended very differently. That man had wealth and authority just like Zacchaeus. Not only that, he had kept God’s commandments all his life, unlike Zacchaeus. But when Jesus called him to give his money to the poor and seek treasure in heaven, it was too much. That man went away sad.
 - i. **Luke 18:24-25.** Jesus responded, “how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”
 - ii. Yet this is what Zacchaeus did. He squeezed a camel through the eye of a needle. He did the impossible.
 - 1. He gave half his goods to the poor, showing an immediate change of heart from greed to generosity.
 - 2. He took on the highest repayment consequence in the OT law for those he’d cheated—more than the Jewish law required for his crime—showing an instant change of heart from swindling others to humbling himself.
 - iii. And Jesus is about to say in effect, “now this is what salvation is!”
- c. Zacchaeus was a model of spiritual responsiveness. He was done with hide and seek. He upped his game and threaded the needle.
 - i. **STORY.** Dina likes to sew, but sometimes she can’t get the thread through the eye of the needle, so I give it a try. As you know, it’s not easy. You can get stuck for a long time trying to thread a needle!
- d. If you aren’t stuck with spiritual curiosity or spiritual pride, chances are most of us are stuck wondering what to do with this kind of spiritual responsiveness.
 - i. If this is what faith is, we all come up short in comparison to Zacchaeus.

- ii. What are we supposed to do with this story? Is this really the standard?
 - 1. We compare ourselves to stories like these or the faith of the OT prophet Elijah who prayed and fire came down from heaven, and we wonder if we have the real deal.
 - 2. So what do we do with Zacchaeus? Thankfully, this isn't the end of the story.
5. Reversal: This story isn't primarily about Zacchaeus. It's about Jesus. **Jesus brings salvation by doing the seeking and the saving.**
- a. **Luke 19:9-10.**
 - b. Turns out Zacchaeus wasn't the only one playing hide and seek. Jesus sought Zacchaeus and found him.
 - i. Jesus called Zacchaeus by name.
 - 1. Zacchaeus is a Hebrew name meaning, "clean, innocent, righteous."
 - 2. Of course this man was none of these things up to this point, but Jesus had plans to change his life.
 - ii. Jesus called him down immediately and declared the *divine necessity* that he stay at Zacchaeus' home that day.
 - 1. Divine Necessity
 - a. As a 12 year old boy, "I must be in my Father's house." (Luke 2:49)
 - b. At the beginning of his ministry, "I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose." (4:43)
 - c. Foretelling his death, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected and be killed, and on the third day be

raised.” (9:22, 17:25)

- d. Passing through Jericho, to Zacchaeus, “I must stay at your house today.”
- iii. I believe the crux of the story happens in between the scenes, while Jesus is staying with Zaccheaus.
1. No one knows how much time elapsed between Jesus’ calling Zacchaeus down from the tree and Zacchaeus’ statement, but I think there was some time there. Enough time for Jesus’ love to penetrate Zacchaeus’ heart and change him at the core.
 2. It didn’t take long for the transformation to take place. For Zacchaeus it happened in the span of one day. Sometimes it’s like that.
 - a. Saul was a man who persecuted and killed Christians. Then one day Jesus confronted him, and he did an immediate 180.
 - b. It still happens today for many people. But most of us haven’t experienced such a dramatic turnaround. Does that mean we’re still lost?
 3. I don’t think so. Zacchaeus is certainly a model of spiritual responsiveness, but the point of the story isn’t how quickly he was changed. The point of the story is that the Son of Man—Jesus—came to seek and to save the lost.
 4. I don’t think we need to compare how long it took Zacchaeus or someone else with how long it’s taking us. I think we need to hear and believe that Jesus came to seek you and seek me and save us, and we need to receive him into our lives like Zacchaeus did and let him stick around.
 - a. I think Jesus says to each of us, I must stay at your house. And when he does, things will start to change.

- i. John 15:4. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.
 - ii. Revelation 3:20. Behold I stand at the door and knock. IF anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.
- 5. I think we need to open the door, come down from the tree, and trust that he's working in our hearts every day in every situation.
 - a. If you're playing hide and seek with Jesus, you need to know he's already found you. He knows your name.
 - b. If you're playing judge and jury with Jesus or other people, recognize your own pride and respond with humility to Jesus.
 - c. If you see the camel and the needle and wonder if you'll ever have the faith to measure up, you need to know he can change you. He knows your need.
 - d. Rest. Trust. Abide. Jesus is the one who does the work of changing us.
- c. Finally, Jesus declared Zacchaeus to have received salvation because he, too, was a son of Abraham.
 - i. Being a tax collector (i.e. extortioner) didn't disqualify him from receiving the promised Messiah of Israel. He wasn't too lost, and neither are you.

6. Invitation

- a. Don't get stuck being curious.
- b. Don't get stuck being proud.
- c. Respond to Jesus this year.