



THE OUTSIDERS

WEEK 4 – THE CLOSE

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... we finally get to the point of our story today where Zacchaeus invites Jesus to his home, (well, Jesus kinda invites himself. But, do you really say “no” to that?) So, are you the entertainer? Do you enjoy hosting parties, rolling out the red carpet? Or are you the hermit... “no one comes to my domicile but me.”

OPENING PRAYER

God of Transformation, grant us the courage to make the invitation that might bring someone closer to you.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we conclude our opening series of the year, “The Outsiders,” where we have been exploring the topic that will be the focus of our entire year... *invitation*. For the last time, let’s remember why we’re doing this. I’m pretty sure you all really like this church. I mean, I hear

you tell the stories of what you find in this faith community that you don't find anywhere else... support and relationship, genuine human beings who allow you to be yourself, too, love and acceptance and affirmation, people who take our faith seriously, but not in a judgmental or exclusive way, but in a way that truly tries to live out the way of Jesus. That's all pretty unique and amazing... There's only one piece of being a faith community that I think we've let slide a little, and that is *invitation*. So, that's why we're doing this series... if we have something so good, why wouldn't we want more people to experience it. We've covered a lot of ground in the last 3 weeks. And so, today, we're going to finish with one more reason that inviting others into a relationship with Jesus Christ is important. But first...

Setup Question: Last week, we were challenged to pray for God to lay on our hearts the name of someone we might be called to invite. How's that coming? Who do you think God might be asking you to break the silence with? Has the opportunity presented itself? If you're struggling, share why. It's okay, be honest... this stuff ain't easy.

SCRIPTURE

We've been looking at one story from the Bible to help us, the story of Zacchaeus. Hopefully you've gained a better appreciation for this story. It's not just a children's story with a certified banger of a song to go with it. No, it's a powerful story of brokenness, of healing, of relationship, and ultimately a great reminder of why we're called to invite others in. So, let's take one last look...

Read Luke, chapter 19, verses 1 through 10.

We've talked about *why* invitation is important, namely that our world is full of Outsiders, and if we have an answer to the brokenness they're feeling, it's our obligation to offer it to them. We've talked about *who* our target audience is. See, we are a church full of Outsiders, folks who know what it means to feel ostracized, left out, or rejected (verse 7.) And for every one of us, there's a 100 more out there. So, those are the people to whom we are called, because *they* need a place to belong, a place where they go from outsider to insider, a place where they are loved and accepted as a child of God, nothing less. Then, we talked about *where* we find those folks... Outsiders exist in the spaces between home and worship, and as Jesus did for Zacchaeus, we need to keep our eyes open for them, (verse 5.) Then, last week, we got into the details... *how* do we actually break the silence? And the way Jesus did for Zacchaeus, it begins with building a relationship, and then, when the Holy Spirit presents the opportunity, having the courage to make the invitation. Today, we'll look at one more aspect of this story that can motivate us to introduce others to Christ.

Question 1: This is the last time we're sitting with Zacchaeus's story... so, what have you learned? Has your impression of this story changed over the last month? What has caught your attention most about what you've read, digging into the story for the fourth time?

REFLECTION

Last week, I addressed some of the concerns that prevent us from talking about our faith or inviting someone to worship or Connect Group with us; that it can be awkward, that you don't feel equipped enough, or, you might be resigned to just being nice and they'll see Jesus in that. (Check out last week's reflection guide if those are your concerns.) But there's one more concern that I want to address that will help us close this series. It usually sounds something like this: "Mike, I believe what I want. They can believe what they want. I'm not going to push my theology on someone. So, inviting someone just isn't important to me." I get that, I understand it... you can find a lot of truth in a lot of ways to live this life.

But there are a few responses to consider. First, the way we're suggesting to do this is not coercion... you're not forcing anything on anyone. Don't be a "creepy Christian" where someone can't even have a conversation with you without you trying to get them to come to church. That will turn them off. (We all know a few creepy Christians.) You're building a relationship, and when the door opens, making an offer. That's it. The second response is, if you follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, the person He lays on your heart, is *looking* for this. You're just the one helping them find what their heart is already looking for. Zacchaeus's heart was already looking for Jesus, Jesus just showed up. Finally, yes, there are a lot of positive ways to live this life. But I'm a Christian precisely because I believe that following Jesus is the best way to live this life. So, I want to offer that to as many people as possible and then let them decide. That's all

Jesus did for Zacchaeus. Jesus opened the door and offered him healing for his brokenness. And Zacchaeus took it.

Question 2: Consider this concern and the responses. Does this concern resonate with you? Is it something that prevents you from sharing your faith? Are the responses motivating for you, or do you not think about it? Discuss!

Addressing this concern opens the door for us to discuss what can be the greatest motivating factor for introducing others to Christ: the outcome. I mean, if, when you invited people, there was never any change in their life, then what would be the point? If living a life in Christ is no better than how they were living, there's no reason to invite. But if there's a change, if when you offer this life to someone and when they take it, it changes their life forever, that would motivate you to do it, right? So, let's finish with that... what change does it make for Zacchaeus?

⁸ Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

⁹ Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

For someone who was just called a sinner, an outcast, a cheat and a liar, this is quite the turnaround. Jesus goes to Zacchaeus's home, and

they have a conversation. Somehow, somewhere in this conversation, Jesus does what Jesus do... Zacchaeus's life is forever changed. He meets Jesus and is so changed, he commits half his possessions to the poor and to repaying anyone he has cheated 4-times as much. That is a life changed. That is a difference. That is someone who has been sought and saved from the life they *were* living, because Jesus opened the door and made an invitation. This is what can happen when we do the same. When we open the door for an Outsider to find Christ, their brokenness can be healed in a way perhaps their former life couldn't offer. Their life can be changed in a way nothing else could do. That is a difference. That matters.

Hopefully, you can relate. Likely, you are a life changed because of Jesus. You are a life that is different because Jesus walked by you, looked up, got you out of your metaphorical tree, and entered your home. The difference you have felt can and *should* be offered to someone else. This is why invitation is SO important... not because we want more people on a Sunday morning, but because their life can be changed. Their brokenness can be healed. They can find hope and meaning and worth and acceptance. These good things are out there for them to receive, if you are bold enough to introduce them to it.

This is why invitation will be the focus of our year: Maybe now more than ever in our world, we are surrounded by Outsiders. We are surrounded by people who are hurt, broken, and searching for healing... if we have the answer, shame on us if we keep it to ourselves.

Question 3: Perhaps the greatest motivating factor for introducing someone else to the love of God through Jesus Christ is recognizing and articulating the difference it has made in *your* life. Take a moment to reflect on this, then share with the group. What difference has a relationship with God made in your life? How might this help you share your faith with the person God has laid on your heart to invite?

CLOSING

This faith community can be a force for seeking the Outsiders and opening the door for their lives to be forever changed for the better if *you* are willing to do it, if *you* are willing to be bold enough to make the invitation. Will you commit to this? It's truly easy... we've talked about why, who, where, and how. Now, we just have to get out and do it. This year, I want you to commit to bringing AT LEAST one person into this faith community. That will be our mission, our goal for 2026. Pray for God to lay on your heart ONE person to invite... and bring them with you. And if you listen for that name, if you are serious about praying for that person, if you build the relationship with holy intent and open the door, the Holy Spirit will be working on them already, and when the time comes, be bold enough to make the invitation. You never know whose life you might just change for better and for good. Because there is a world of Outsiders who need a place to belong... might as well be us.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**