



WEEK 3 – THE PITCH

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... the translation of the Bible we'll be looking at today calls people by the meaning of a name instead of the name itself. (You'll see what I mean.) So, what does your name mean? (Google it if you have to.) Is it fitting or were your parents way off?

OPENING PRAYER

God of Courage, open our eyes to the Outsider you have called us to reach, then grant us the strength to offer in invitation when the opportunity presents itself.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to week 3 of our series, “Outsiders,” where we have been exploring the topic that will be the focus of our entire year... *invitation*. Why will this be the theme for 2026? Well, we’ve got a great little faith community here... it’s unique. Many of you share the

things you find here you don't find anywhere else: a sense of relationship, of authenticity, of fun and energy, of love and acceptance and affirmation, that we take our faith seriously, but not in a judgmental or exclusive way, rather in a way that truly tries to live out the way of Jesus. Are we perfect? Nope. But we embrace that instead of hiding it. You can roll through those doors with your imperfect little self, and know that we're all right in that boat with you. And when you have something this unique and this cool, more people should experience it. We are called to invite others into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and if the opportunity presents itself, invite them to THIS faith community. We've talked about *why*, *who*, *where*, and today, we'll actually start talking about the *how*. But first...

Setup Question: Last week, we talked about *where* to find the Outsiders in our lives, and even go so far as to identify them. Were you able to make progress on inviting them in... why or why not?

SCRIPTURE

We've been using the story of Zacchaeus to help us understand this element of faith, *invitation*. We've talked about *why* invitation is important, namely that our world is full of Outsiders, "the lost" as Jesus described them (verse 10.) 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. Namely, because 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. 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. And last week 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.) Today, we'll get to the details... *how* do we actually break the silence. So, let's start by reading it again... this time using a fairly unique version:

Read Luke, chapter 19, verses 1 through 10, in the First Nations Version of the Bible. (Use your YouVersion Bible app to find this translation, or go to bible.com.)

Isn't that beautiful? I love how, for a name, they just use what the name means. Like, Jesus is "Creator Sets Free," because Jesus's name in Hebrew is *Yeshua* which is close to the Hebrew that means "He Saves." They use "Moon Village" because Jericho means "moon." *Zakah* in Hebrew means "pure" or "clean", so Zacchaeus is "Pure One" or "Pure of Heart." But this story of "Pure of Heart" or Zacchaeus, has helped us understand the concept of inviting others into a relationship with God, and will give us some practical steps to inviting folks into this faith community.

Question 1: The First Nations Version was written by a council of Native Americans for Native Americans, so that the gospel could be understood in a manner that was not oppressive or coercive, but allowed the reader to weave the story of Jesus into their culture and

history. Does this version give you a different insight into the story of Zacchaeus? What stands out to you?

REFLECTION

Okay, we know *why* we're supposed to do it. We know *who* we're looking for. We've put ourselves in the position *where* to find the lost. Uh... what do we do now? It's time to do the dang thing, how do we do it? Well, that's what we're going to talk about today... *how*? How do we actually break the silence and make the actual invitation? This is the tough part, I get it. It's not easy... so let's start by addressing some concerns.

The first concern usually goes like this... "Uh, I'm not a pastor. I can't just start preaching to someone. Don't you have to earn so many merit badges before you are allowed to do this? What would I even say? I'm going to let someone more *qualified* do it." First response, God uses unqualified people all the time... Moses stuttered, David was young, Mary was a virgin, Peter was hardheaded, and Lazarus was dead. But God used them, so he can use you, too. Those are just excuses. The second and better response is this: if you don't, who will? You can say, "I'm not qualified enough." But God has put *you* in a specific place for a reason, and if *you* don't introduce that person to Christ, maybe no one will. You can't wait for someone more qualified, because it might not happen. It's up to you.

Second concern, "You know, that's just not my thing, I don't do the conversation stuff. I'm just going to be nice and do good... they'll see

Jesus in that.” Well, that’s a good thing... go and love others. Don’t *not* do that. But just being nice, just doing good, isn’t enough anymore. Lots of people are nice and do good things, but people don’t find the “good road” on their own anymore without someone giving them the map and explaining how to find it. Go be nice... go be good... but they won’t walk through that door, just because you were nice to them, if you don’t also *invite* them.

Final concern, and usually the biggest one is, “Mike, it’s so awkward, and I don’t want to offend someone. You aren’t supposed to talk about religion.” This is a little tough love-ish, but... this person is searching for an answer *you* have, and you’re going to let a little awkwardness prevent you from potentially changing someone’s entire life for the better? Be bold. They’ll thank you.

Question 2: Do you identify with any one of these concerns? Does something different get in the way of you inviting someone in or having a faith conversation with a person? What prevents you from making the invitation?

“Okay, you’ve guilted us into listening... how do we do it?” Well, for that, let’s look at how Creator Sets Free (Jesus) did it. Jesus is walking through town, and Zacchaeus is up in the tree.

5 When Creator Sets Free (Jesus) came to the tree, he looked up and said, “Pure of Heart (Zacchaeus), come down from there and take me to your house, for I need a place to rest.”

6 He quickly climbed down the tree and with a glad heart welcomed him into his house.

First, notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't look up and go, "Zacchaeus, I know what you've done. You've lied and cheated people out of money. You've betrayed your fellow Jews. You've lived in such sin and evil, shame on you." He doesn't condemn him... though he could. Also notice, his first words aren't even to invite him to church. He doesn't say, "let's go to synagogue and talk to the priests... they can explain it all better than I can, anyway." What does he do? What's the first thing he says? He says, "come on down," which okay, yeah, I mean, dude's in a tree. But then he says, "let's go hang out." He identifies this man who is obviously longing for the healing Jesus can bring, and he says let's go hang out. Is that awkward? Nope. Is that offensive? Nope. Does that require a theological education and Reverend as a title? Nope.

The first step to breaking the silence and inviting someone into a relationship with God, and eventually opening the door to inviting them to this faith community, is building a relationship. This is why handing out tracts on the street corner doesn't work. This is why just being nice and doing good isn't enough. This is why even a booth at the farmers market or a float in a parade, is only a way to prime the pump. Invitation also has to include this step. Even for Zacchaeus

2000 years ago, but especially in today's society, people will not listen to your invitation unless you have a relationship with them. And Jesus knows this, and so that's what he does... he says, "let's go hang out." There's always a relationship before he invites them to join his faith community. The same needs to be true for us. As we talked about last week, there is an Outsider that God is putting YOU in the life of, it might be someone you know well, a friend, co-worker, relative. Or, it might be the barista at the Starbucks you go to every morning. But there is an Outsider God is preparing you to invite. This is step one... just build a relationship. Begin to build a connection.

Question 3: Throughout this series, we've encouraged you to consider someone that God might be calling you to invite. Where does that relationship stand now? How can you build something deeper that might lead to a faith conversation in the near future?

This first step is important. Build the relationship. Because, what will happen for you is what happens next for Jesus. With a "glad heart," Zacchaeus invites Jesus to his home. Something (aka. The Holy Spirit) is already working on Zacchaeus's heart. It's as if Zacchaeus could feel that this brokenness within him might just be on the path to healing when Jesus makes this connection. So even if the brain doesn't fully get it yet, the heart does. When you develop a faithful connection with the person that God has laid on your heart, their soul is gonna feel that. They may not even fully know why, but they'll be drawn to it and to you because you are not the only one at work here. The Spirit is in it, too. And when you're faithful enough to knock, the Spirit is

working in the heart of the Outsider, and they'll open the door the rest of the way. Here's how we know... Zacchaeus takes Jesus to his home. And we know from the last few verses that something miraculous takes place in Zacchaeus's house. (I would love to be fly on that wall!) Something starts a spiritual conversation that will change Zacchaeus's life forever. When you open the door and build that relationship, listening to the nudging of the Holy Spirit, the opportunity to break the silence will present itself. You won't have to force it... you won't have to bring it up. They will open the door for you. It will sound something like, "what are you doing tonight?" You could say, "oh, I'm going to the small group for my church." And here's where the Spirit kicks in. They'll want to know more. "ah, what church do you go to?" "I'm part of the Connection, it's actually really cool, you should come." Easy peasy. Did that take a degree in theology? No. Was that awkward or offensive? No. You're offering them the path to the good road.

Here's another way it often happens. Remember, people are drawn to Jesus out of their brokenness. So, when you open the door to the relationship, the person will want to open up to you about something they're struggling with. This response is a little deeper, but still an easy answer. When you ask how they are, they'll be drawn to opening up to you, and say something like, "You know, I'm struggling... mom's in the hospital." And you can say, "I'm really sorry to hear that." The conversation will progress to a point where you can say, "you know, I don't know if you're religious or anything, but man, my faith is what gets *me* through those tough times." And because they are longing for

healing for their brokenness, they're not likely to shut you down. They'll say something like, "ah, I grew up in the church, but don't really go anymore." "Oh, why not?" "Uh, man, they were WAY out there, handling snakes and stuff." And there's your opening... "ha, you should come with me to The Connection, our pastor is a little weird, but he leaves his rattlesnakes at home." Boom, that's it... that's all you have to do... let God do the rest. This is what Jesus does for Zacchaeus. The Spirit is already working on his heart, and Jesus just has to open the door. He first builds a bit of a relationship, then, when the opportunity presents itself, he takes advantage. That's it... it's truly that simple. This is not brain surgery. This is not Doctoral level evangelism. This is as simple and as practical as it gets. Build the touch point, and open the door. God is already working on that person's heart... so all you have to do is be faithful it the invitation.

Question 4: Does this feel like something you can do? It takes a little courage and getting over that initial awkwardness. Consider the person you've been thinking about inviting. What would this conversation probably look like? Can you make the invitation?

CLOSING

We've talked about *why* we need to invite. We've talked about *who* we need to invite. We've talked about *where* to find them. Well, this is the *how*... If you've got your eyes open to this, and you're looking for those Outsiders, the people who are yearning for Jesus out of their brokenness... all you have to do is build the relationship, and then, when the opportunity presents itself... make the invitation. Like

Creator Sets Free (Jesus) did for Pure of Heart (Zacchaeus), you just might change someone's life forever for the better, and help them find the good road.

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