



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 12, 2012

Midweek Advent Worship

Sermon Text: [Luke 19:1-10](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 25](#)

Scripture of Prophecy: [Isaiah 40:1-11](#)

Scripture of Fulfillment: [Mark 1:1-8](#)

Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes

He Comes to Those Caught in Sin

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

You can tell a lot about a person by the company they keep. Have you ever heard that before? It's a nice old adage. You can tell a person by the company. George W. Bush used to say that and then, being a fairly wise man, he would put his arm around his wife and say, "I keep real good company." That's kind of a smart thing to do.

We are familiar with that. We see it all the time. We think about it. We worry about our kids growing up. Are they going to hang out with the wrong crowd and things like that. Are they going to get in with the wrong crowd and be influenced and all that kind of stuff. I understand it. I agree with a lot of it. But you have to believe those people who were muttering about Jesus really believed the adage, you can tell a lot about a man by the company he keeps.

Here was Jesus, going to the house of Zacchaeus, going to the house to eat with him. That's just something you didn't do. That was something that was highly frowned upon. It was something that was beneath the Pharisees even giving a thought to it. So when they see Jesus keeping company with a guy like this, their natural response is muttering, "He's gone to eat at the house of a sinner!" It shouldn't surprise them really, right? It shouldn't surprise us either. That's what Jesus always did. It was almost like he was hanging out with the First Century Israel Elizabeth Taylor when he was there at the well, near Samaria, with the Samaritan woman, caught in sin, "Five husbands you've had and the one you are living with isn't your husband now," when Jesus was talking with her. He hangs out with sinners.

Jesus just hung out with the wrong crowd. Again and again they kind of muttered about him. Simon, the Pharisee, remember Jesus went to a dinner at Simon the Pharisee's house? This woman who was a known sinner came and poured perfume on his feet. Simon said, "If this guy were anything, he'd know this woman and he wouldn't let her do this kind of thing." Jesus hung out with sinners.

So what do you learn about Jesus by the company he keeps? One thing you ought to learn is that he is the fulfillment of the prophecy that we read in Isaiah. "Tell my people they have received double for all their sins." The Messiah who was coming was coming to take away sins of all people, not just good people. The other thing it should tell you

is that our God loves unconditionally. He doesn't love those who deserve it. He doesn't love those who have earned it. He doesn't love those who do the right thing and walk the right way and talk the right way and dress the right way. He loves those who are caught in sin. That's every last one of us.

You wonder if Zacchaeus got a little tired when he was growing up of being called wee little Zacchaeus. You wonder if he had a bit of a chip on his shoulder and said "Some day I am going to pay back all these people." And then he worked his way to become not just a tax collector, but the only time in Scripture this phrase is used, "chief tax collector," overseeing a whole area around Jericho. Jericho was on a trade route, so this was a pretty good place to be a chief tax collector. So it's no surprise when it says he was wealthy.

The Romans didn't pay the tax collectors by salary. They didn't even pay them on commission. In fact, they didn't pay them at all. They said, "This is how much we want. Anything you get beyond that is yours." So the people hated them and despised them with a very strong and apparent hatred because they were not only supporting the occupying army of the Romans, but they were getting wealthy by taking from the people more than the Romans demanded. With the Roman army behind them, they could do an awful lot.

They were hated and despised at a level that is kind of hard for us to understand. We might utter and complain about the IRS, but this is a whole different level. This is the kind of hatred that you and I would probably reserve for what society deems the worst of sinners. In our society nowadays, that might be someone that is a registered sex offender. A registered sex offender moves in next door to you. The face has been on the news, in the paper, flyers have been distributed. How long are you going to wait until you say to them, "I must stay at your house. Today I have to have dinner with you." It's not going to happen real quick, is it? That's the kind of person that Jesus was hanging out with. The worst of the sinners.

I think you and I have a hard time putting ourselves in this category at times because we love ourselves so much that we don't want to consider ourselves as bad as Zacchaeus or a prostitute, or the adulterous woman at the well, or any of those type of things. Our sin at times becomes so acceptable to us, we don't even notice that we're caught in it.

I can't read this section of Scripture without flashing back to 23-24 years ago. The first sermon I ever preached in a church was on this text. Peace Livonia, the biggest church we have in Livonia, Michigan. Nice big church. I didn't start out in a nice little small church where there would only be 25 people there so I wouldn't worry about it if I got stuck or got lost or screwed it all up royally because those are your fears the first time you are going to preach. I went and preached at the great big church where there were 200-300 people in the first service and that much again in the second service. I got done with the first service. The roof didn't fall in. I thought I proclaimed the Gospel. I didn't get stuck and blank out or any of that stuff, so I'm pretty pumped up and I'm

pretty happy. I'm greeting the people who I don't know from Adam. One guy comes up to me. I'm smiling and saying "Good morning." I told the people that this was the first time I ever preached so they should be nice to me and not rip me apart. One guy comes out and shakes my hand. This was about 8 years after the switch from the King James to the NIV. This guy shook my hand and he said, "I've heard of a sycamore tree and I've heard of a fig tree. I've never heard of a sycamore-fig tree. What's wrong with your Bible?" "And the peace of Christ be with you also sir."

Here's a guy that was just so wrapped up in his venom towards this new translation that a sermon was preached about how we're all lost and Christ Jesus came to seek and save we who are lost, and all he got out of it was "sycamore-fig tree... what a dumb translation." Do you think he saw himself as Zacchaeus that day? I don't think so.

You and I, we can get caught up in our own pet sin like that really easily too, can't we? Zacchaeus knew his sin. Every time he walked into a synagogue, every time he walked down the street, he could see the stares. He could feel the body language saying, "You are a filthy rotten sinner and I hope you burn in hell forever." He knew his sin. So he wanted to see Jesus. You and I, we get so wrapped up in our stuff and we get so used to certain things that we at times don't even see our sin. We make excuses for it. We say it's not that bad. It's not like I am (fill in the blank).

Anytime we love ourselves more than God, we sin. Anytime we don't do what God tells us to do, we sin. We need to recognize that is worthy of hell. Quit ranking sins and start confessing them and putting them on Jesus. That's what our God calls us to do. What you find is that Jesus came for dirty rotten messy sinners like you and me. If we were just a little spot, just a quick little wash would clean up our sins, then he wouldn't have had to leave heaven. But because we are so corrupted, he had to leave heaven and he had to come and seek and save people like you and me, people that are so lost at times we can't even see it. But that's what he did.

He came and he hung out with a bad crowd, which is every single human being on the face of the earth. He came and lived with a bad crowd, that's every single person that ever has lived or ever will live. He came and died for the wicked crowd, that's every single person that ever has lived or ever will live, and that's you and me. That's what he did. He chose you to be the company he wanted to hang out with. He chose you to be the one he would die for.

That changes us, doesn't it? Wee little Zacchaeus. A changed man, huh? They are all muttering about what a filthy rotten guy this is. We aren't told what the conversation was with Jesus, but Zacchaeus was changed by it. He was not the same Zacchaeus as before he climbed up the tree after he spent time with Jesus, right? "If I stole anything from anyone, right now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." The Law only demanded twice the amount. He is going beyond what God's Law demanded because he has been changed. It's not a matter of keeping score and I have to do this so now I'm right with God. It's "I'm right with God. This Jesus, the Son of Man who has come

to seek and save the lost, came for me!" He's changed. And it shows. You could see the company Zacchaeus kept, couldn't you, by what he now was doing. That's a thought, huh?

A "filthy rotten sinner" that you might think of today, can they tell the company you keep when you interact with them? Can they tell you are a little Christian, a little Christ, that has come and wants to share the One who came to seek and save the lost? Are your attitudes different than theirs are? I can see how Zacchaeus got caught up in the power that comes with wealth, but it left him empty, didn't it? It left him climbing trees just to get a look at this Jesus fellow. You and I buy that same lie of Satan, don't we? I've said it before. You probably heard it before.

We all at one time or another think to ourselves, "If only I had a little more money, life would be better." Rare is the time when you and I ever have the thought, "If I had a little more Jesus in my life, my life would be better." In fact, I've heard people say we talk too much about this stuff. It just shows we don't deserve what God has given. We haven't earned it.

Zacchaeus was changed. He didn't just stop stealing, he started living in a way that reflected who he was... a redeemed child of Christ. Do people see us as a redeemed child of Christ, or do they see us as no different from the people around us? That's a humbling question, and it's one we need to ask ourselves. Then we need to say, "Lord, when I'm at my best, you are working through me so people see the company I keep, but we all have to admit, Lord, there are days when my sinful nature is winning out and people can't tell the company I keep." Then we go to that phrase, that beautiful phrase that Jesus spoke... "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." We see that he has taken our sins away. And when we reflect on that and contemplate it and take it to heart, not just mouth the words but take them to heart, it changes us. It will. That doesn't mean you and I won't fight against that change that the Spirit works in us at times. But God's love for us in Christ radically changes us. The closer we are to him, the more we keep company with Jesus, the more those around us will see it.

Jesus himself tells us Zacchaeus did this because of faith. He says, "I tell you the truth. Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham." He's not just talking physical, because Zacchaeus had been a descendant of Abraham for a long time. But this day it changed. He had the faith of Abraham. The faith that believed God's promises when there was no reason to believe it. The faith to believe what God says. Not because we can understand it. Because the Spirit works that in our hearts.

The Spirit doesn't stop there. He wants to work in our lives so that we can be the person that brings Jesus to the worst of sinners, not just ourselves, but to those around us who are still living in the darkness, caught in sin. You and I get to be the light of Jesus Christ. Amen.