



## Into the Neighborhood Part 3 – Jesus and Zacchaeus Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are in Part 3 of *Into the Neighborhood*, and we have to start by seeing how many of you grew up going to Sunday school. I will start and then let you finish the song. *Zacchaeus was a wee little man and wee little many was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.* And then the Lord said... "*Zacchaeus you come down, For I'm going to your house today!*" Who knows this song? I was singing this the whole way to church this morning, multiple times, over and over again. I asked my son, "Did you sing *Zacchaeus was a wee Little Man* in Critter Street at Woodland Hills." He goes, Dad, we're more of a Veggie Tales church. I didn't really get that one."

We as a church believe that Jesus is still seeking and saving the lost. I know that during that last worship song, as you prayed for your family, many were praying for their children to come back to the Lord. There were many praying that their children would place faith in Jesus for the very first time.

Today we're going see, as Jesus moves into the neighborhood, this invitation that he gives to you, each person in here, whether you're a believer or not. And we're going to see three illustrations from the scripture today, three passages.

If you have your Bible, you can turn to Luke 19. We're going to start with the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus, but then we're going to compare and contrast that to another wealthy individual that did not receive the invitations of Jesus. And then we're going to end by looking at the church and how a wealthy church can actually stiff-arm Jesus.

We're going to start with Zacchaeus and this invitation that is offered. Really, there are three ways – you see it with stores, you see it with restaurants, and you see it with churches – that you are welcomed.

The first welcome maybe you've received in the last year and even before COVID is the store or the restaurant or the church that says, "**We don't want you here.**" Has anybody been in that store? You walk in and you're immediately met by the staff with, "Ughhh." That feeling, right? It's also the place that has signs everywhere. There are signs on the doors, on the windows, on the cash register. You know the signs were placed there after some bad encounter with a customer. The owner or the manager went to the back and printed out a sign on their inkjet printer and put it up. You see signs all the time. Attitude signs. Like if you have an attitude... I was even at a restaurant that had a sign that said, "Any vulgarity given toward our staff and you're out of here." I'm thinking, *How many times have you been cussed at that you had to make a sign?*

We're used to "No shoes, no shirt, no mask, no service." Then you have the "No cell phone zone." I've even been to restaurants that say, "You will not plug in and charge your phone in our restaurant." We've all seen the signs that say, "Restrooms for customers only." Why do we need so many signs? It puts off this vibe that you don't want me here. I just want you to know that you are welcome to use the restrooms at Woodland Hills Family Church and you can even use them on a Saturday if we're open. Just feel free to come in here and go potty if you have to. I just have never understood the stiff-arming of customers... or how about this: potential customers.

Then there is the second welcoming that you get and that's people who **want you there, but they aren't ready for you.** You've been in the family-owned restaurants where the dining room is more like a storage room. You know what I'm talking about? Where you walk in and it's just cluttered everywhere?

I walked into a pizza joint this weekend in the New England states and as I walked in, it said, "Dine in," so I was going to grab a personal pan, eat really quick, and go. "At this table there was an accountant for the restaurant doing bookkeeping. And then the guy back there was assembling pizza boxes. And, no lie, right next to the register, the guy at this table was mixing chemicals. I have no idea what was going on there. "Is this your storage room? Can I eat here? Do you want me in here? Do I need to eat with the accountant? How does this work?"

But then the third one. This is hopefully what the family of Woodland Hills is all about. **We want you here and we're ready for you.** We want you here, we welcome you, we're glad you're here, and the church family is ready to receive you. We always want to be a place where you can invite your friends, family, and neighbors to be a part and you won't be embarrassed. I may say some things that upset your Catholic grandmother, but just give me some grace on that a little bit. But long before we get to the sermon, you're already making decisions, and we want this to be a place where people are welcomed, encouraged to invite others.

We're going to see today that **invitations require decisions.** So, I hope that all of us will make a decision today off of the invitation that Jesus gives us.

Let's jump into this great story of Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19: 1-10. **Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector...** The reason the word chief is in front of that is because he probably had others that went out and collected the taxes for him, but this is the key because we're going to see this in all three illustrations this morning. **...and was wealthy.** And we are going to see how wealth can become a stumbling block to faith because we are told to command those who are rich to not put their hope in their wealth. A lot of times, when people end up getting money... Again, hear me: money is not evil; it is the love of money. Money is not evil, but when people begin to trust and put their hope in that bank account, they can move away from Jesus. We're going to see with Zacchaeus that he was a wealthy man.

**3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was (a wee little man) short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead...** And just for those of you who learned about a ladder in Sunday school. **...and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him...** He didn't have a ladder. You think Zacchaeus just

walked around with a ladder everywhere that he went? Anyway... it makes for good motions on the song, though, I get it. ...**since Jesus was coming that way.**

Now, here's the first thing we want to learn about Jesus moving into the neighborhood this morning. **5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up...** Jesus noticed people. Jesus could read a room. And, follower of Jesus, let us be that aware of the people who are around us. Travis Brawner told me after the first service, "One of the problems with wealth is that wealthy people can quickly become detached from a community, especially if the community is dealing with poverty."

We can quickly forget what those who are impoverished need and how we can best minister to them. But Jesus was well aware of this. Jesus noticed people. Jesus looked up and didn't keep walking. ...**and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."** So, here is the invitation and I want you to see how decisive Zacchaeus is. **6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.** What we learn about extending invitations and receiving invitations is that all invitations require decisions. You have to make a decision. When someone invites you to a party, it's yes or no.

Now, my wife she absolutely loves this online service. Can anybody tell me what this is? It's called *Punchbowl*. You'll get an email with this. If my wife is planning the staff Christmas party or replenish retreat that we do in the fall.... She loves being prepared for whatever party she's throwing. She buys stuff online that has your name monogrammed on it. She has to know how many meals to purchase, so she'll send this out and her favorite people in life are the ones who respond immediately. Now, here's what's cool. She doesn't care if the answer is yes or no. Obviously, she wants you to come, but she wants your yes to be yes and your no to be no. She just wants a decision. She wants to know what to plan on. We get that during COVID... Our church is usually three or four months out in planning, but during COVID, we were like a week out in planning because we didn't know what was going on. School schedules, church schedules, community schedules made planning very difficult for people.

But this invitation goes out and it has this phrase that my generation and younger generations didn't get really good at. It's RSVP. Do I have any French speaking people here today that can yell out what RSVP stands for? Before I say this, just remember French is not my first language. It is *Répondez, s'il vous plaît!* That's as good as you're going to get from a pastor in the Ozarks. But in English, when you get an RSVP, it simply means respond please. The bride and groom are paying forty bucks a plate; they need to know if they can count on you. I know some of you are like, "If I get pushed for an answer, the answer is no." There are more than these first two, but obviously, in responding there is the yes, and this is what we've been praying today, that you will say yes to Jesus. To the believer whose been sitting on the fence, to the believer who is lukewarm, to the believer whose been giving half-hearted following of Jesus, that you would decide and that you would give a yes to Jesus, not on your terms, on his terms.

But there is also the no. We know plenty of people who will say no. Boy, how many zoom invitations can you get in a year and it's given us more options than just yes or no, accept or decline. If you get a zoom invitation to accept or decline and then in the middle it says maybe. Do you know what maybe is? Maybe is, "No, but I don't want to hurt your feelings." That's what maybe is. How many of you have ever given maybe and it turned into a yes? How many of you have given a maybe and you knew it was a no when you gave the maybe? That's for all our passive aggressive people.

And then an event hits your social media and it's not maybe, but you get this one: I'm interested. I'm interested in Branson Market Days. I'm interested in the Craft Fair. Why do we delay. Somebody told me after the first service, "One of the reasons we delay in making a decision for Christ is because we know it comes with risk." Decisions come with risk. Invitations require decisions and decisions come with risk.

**We delay on responding to invitations because we live in a day and age where we want to keep our options open.** Something better could come along. And if I decide right now and I commit to you for something a few weeks away and something better comes along... I do events and most people don't buy tickets for events from churches until the Friday of the event because they're hoping someone better shows up in town. That's the reality. We can't commit to something a week or two out. What do we call this? Somebody tell me what FOMO means. Fear Of Missing Out. So, Jesus gives this invitation and Zacchaeus comes down at once and decides. And what we're going to see is the fruit of his salvation, not the source of his salvation. But before we get to that, let's see how others responded to Jesus and his invitation to Zacchaeus. It's one verse, Verse 7.

**7 All the people saw this and began to mutter...** that's a great word for religious people – muttering. It's one of the reasons pastors leave the ministry is because of muttering. The people muttered what? **"He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."** That is what got Jesus into so much. It's what got Jesus accused of being a drunkard and a glutton – because he spent time with lost people.

Pat Kershaw... It's no mistake. She's watching right now. You know she's one of my favorite members. I can't say my favorite member anymore because it offended some people. Pat is 86 and she's watching church at home right now. But Pat usually leaves the service at 8:30, but before she gets out of the parking lot, I get a text. It's usually a grade of some sort on the sermon that took place. But here's what I love, and I hope if the Lord let's me live to 86, I will have the same teachable spirit that Pat has. There is really nothing more in the Bible that I can teach her, but she is constantly wanting to learn.

After the first part of this series where we talked about Jesus and how he spent time and how we're taking it through this whole series of Jesus moving into the neighborhood, Pat sent me this text. She didn't know I was going to quote her, but I'm quoting her. *"Be like Jesus. Spend enough time with sinners to ruin your reputation with religious people."* I just want you to know, we welcome them here on Sundays. Not only do we welcome you, we are ready for you. Why? Because we want you to receive this invitation to life in Jesus Christ. That's the bottom line. But religious people have a really hard time with this. You've seen it. Some of you may have experienced this in a church.

**Religious people want sinners to behave before they welcome them.** Jesus didn't; he welcomed them, and he gave the invitation. But we want them to... "Listen, I'm going to need you to dress this way. Gonna need you to clean up your language."

I sat at a breakfast bar yesterday, eating breakfast in Boston, Massachusetts. These five guys... I felt like they were the cast of Wicked Tuna. They were foul-mouthed fishermen sitting up there at the bar. I'm sitting there and I'm just listening to them. There were a couple of times they caught me. They would say something and I would kind of chuckle under my breath. I was being so entertained. They sat me

down one seat over and they asked this guy, "Hey, is this too close for you?" and the guy looked at the waitress and goes, "He can sit on my lap if he wants." I'm like, *No thank you; I'm good.*

In those moments, I start praying, "Lord, give me an opportunity, give me an opportunity. Let me work into this conversation somehow." But they were talking, and I don't use the "F" word so I didn't know if I was going to have anything to offer the conversation. They were trying to figure out what to do with the rest of the day; this was like 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning. He goes, "You can come over to my house until 4:00." And then the guy sitting right next to me said these words, "The witch doesn't get home until 4:00." I'm in town to do a marriage conference and I'm sitting there praying, "Lord, right now..." I paused in the middle of eating my lobster benedict or whatever it was. I'm praying, "Lord, please get them to ask me what brings me to town, please get them to ask me what brings me to town. I so wanted to tell them, "I'm here to do a marriage conference; do you want to learn some of the content that you can take back to your wives?"

It's just interesting to me; we talked about this in the first week – how so many people would be so appalled by their language that they wouldn't want to spend time with them. Would we be believers that when we hear that, we're like, "Lord, give me an opportunity to share. Give me an opportunity to make the invitation."

But beyond that even. We don't just want them to behave, **we want people to believe like we believe before we welcome them.** I grew up in a church – independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James only Baptist church. It was on our sign. We put that on our sign. And I'm telling you that 99 out of 100 people that would drive by our church didn't have a clue. We didn't have Google back in the 80s and 90s. You couldn't look up pre-millennial to see what it means. I'm just wondering not what we believe, I'm just wondering how many people did not come into our church when I was growing up because of our sign. Because we want them to not just know where we... I'm just convinced of it. "If you're going to fit into this group, you have to believe this way. Now that's the church, but it's not for lost people."

We want to invite the lost to find life in Christ and then it's through our essential beliefs that we find unity as a church. But there are many here today... I had someone come up to me after the first service and I always love this. "Ted, I don't agree with you on everything." I laughed and said, "Neither does my wife." He said, "But I have found a home here at this church." That's because we both love Jesus. I just want to make sure, believers in Christ, when we think about eating with sinners... Remember, it wasn't because Jesus winked at sin, it wasn't because he diminished sin; he did it to give them this invitation to life in him.

And may we quit expecting lost people to act like believers. How many of you know believers who don't act like believers? That's why we got the New Testament epistles, Paul's writings back to the church saying, "Knock it off! That's not how you act in Christ." But we start by welcoming, and we start by inviting people to life in Christ, and then let Jesus change their lives, let Jesus change their behaviors, let's teach them what the Bible teaches.

**8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and 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."**

You read this and somebody would be like, "Well, that's what it takes to have salvation." No. This is the overflow of salvation. This isn't the requirement of salvation. Please hear that. This is a proof that Zacchaeus got saved. And the Lord says it in Verse 9.

**9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house..."** Who is salvation? There is power, there's healing in the name of Jesus. It's by faith alone in Christ alone. And now with Zacchaeus, this is just the overflow of his life. **"...because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."** And he is still seeking and saving the lost. And when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, when you receive this invitation with a decisive, immediate YES...

Following Jesus doesn't have this "What can I get away with" attitude. I read an author this week who was writing on 1 Corinthians 7. It was the weirdest thing I'd read because she was trying to explain what was going on in Corinth in such a way as to say, "We don't have to follow this passage or here's what it really means." Listen, if you're reading the Bible to justify sin rather than convict you of sin, you're reading it the wrong way. Don't read it to find out what you can get away with. To me, that is one of the biggest issues with progressive Christianity. "I want to read to figure out that's what it meant to them at that time, but there's really nothing for me in that text in 1 Corinthians 7." You're reading the Bible the wrong way. This is God's word to you.

This is what we know too. It's not what can I get away with? When you say yes to Jesus, there's no fence sitting with Jesus. But we see it all the time with believers. "I say yes to Jesus, but I still want to live how I want to live." "I love Jesus and I want heaven to be my home. I want to be saved. I want eternal security in Christ Jesus. However, I will pick and choose the stuff out of the Bible that I like. I will pick and choose the stuff out of the Bible that works for me. I will pick and choose the stuff out of the Bible that culture likes."

Listen, follower of Jesus, you think cancel culture is ramped up right now? It's just getting started. And Jesus said, "If the world hates you, just understand it hated me first." You say yes to Jesus you follow his ways and his words no matter what. When you say yes to Jesus and want to live your own way, you're leaving your options open is what you're doing.

And I just want to go back to this one thought. Leave your options open for the craft fair and for the Branson Market Days, but not for following Jesus. That's why we sang growing up not just Zacchaeus was a wee little man, but I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus. But we give these yeses in many different ways.

**How about the person that has a yes with no follow through?** I think is the person that said yes to Jesus and there was intention to follow Jesus, but then they drifted in their faith. They allowed a family member or a friend... They allowed sin to creep into their life, and they began to drift.

But there is also **the person that says yes, and they say yes. They want heaven as their home; they want to be saved, but there's no intention of following Jesus.** There is no intention of following his ways and his words.

Then I've also met **the Christian that said yes to following Jesus until something better comes along.** I have to tell you that the reason I'm not a progressive Christian or a progressive pastor, and I'll never be a progressive Christian or progressive pastor. I'm not an emergent pastor or an emergent Christian either. And you're like, "Well, you're a fuddy-duddy." Well, maybe so, but I'm not looking for something better to come along; I've pretty much settled on Jesus. I'm good with Jesus. I don't need a new version, a new shiny this or shiny that. I can say yes to Jesus and I can stick with Jesus because there is power in the name of Jesus, there's healing in the name of Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and I'm sticking with it.

But there was another invitation that was given in Luke 18: 18-25 to another rich person who had the opposite response of Zacchaeus. **18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher (Jesus), what must I do to inherit eternal life?"** What must I do to be saved?

**19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 20 You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"**

And this is the pat on the back this rich guy gives himself. **21 "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.**

**22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor..."** Again, please hear me. This is not Jesus adding a new requirement to salvation. He is testing this young man's heart. **"...and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."**

**23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"** In other words, that wealth becomes a stumbling block, and we begin to put our hope in it. And this is why we command those who are rich not to put their hope in wealth. But put their hope in Christ Jesus. **25 "Indeed..."** Jesus uses hyperbole here **...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a (sewing) needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."** The opposite response of Zacchaeus.

But now, there is an invitation given to the church. When you read Revelation 3: 20, it's a verse that's been quoted often with evangelism. But it's really a verse about fellowship because this passage isn't Jesus... I'm not picturing Jesus in this text or this context standing at the heart of lost man or woman, boy or girl, knocking on the door, asking to be invited into this lost person's heart. This is Jesus standing at the door of the church, wanting to be invited into His own church to have renewed fellowship with believers. Why? Because wealth has moved them away from their love of Jesus.

This is the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3. **15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.** You're on the fence. Here we are again. "I want to follow Jesus, but I also want to do this." "I want to

follow Jesus, but I want to trust what I'm able to provide or what I'm able to give to my family." "I want my trust and hope in that." And we're back and forth on this fence, neither hot nor cold.

***I wish you were either one or the other!*** (Jesus said) **16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.** Jesus is saying, "I want to vomit because I'm not looking for halfhearted commitments. I'm not looking for halfhearted decisions. I'm not looking for someone who just shows up on Sunday and puts on the good game face and then goes and lives his life however he wants. I'm looking for someone that says, 'I'm following Jesus and that's more important to me than defending my rights. That's more important to me than a lot of the political stuff that I want to fight. I want to follow Jesus, his ways and his words.' I'm not looking for the person that goes back and forth. I'm looking for the person that says, yes to me and takes up his cross and follows me."

**17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'** This is what wealth can do. Again, if you have wealth, it's not money that's the problem, it's not wealth that's the problem. It's your love of money, it's your hope in money, it's your trust in money, that's it. **But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.** And if that is you today, follower of Jesus, there is hope. Don't just stop right there. Too many churches end their message right here. **18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich... (in Jesus); and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.** Again, halfhearted Christian, it's time to find true life in Jesus and make your decision yes with follow through.

**19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.** Every parent in here that disciplines a child it's because you love them. Children, I know you don't feel it all the time, but every time your parents discipline you, it's because they love you. **So be earnest and repent.** If you are on the fence, if you pick and choose out of scripture what you like and what you don't like, how you're going to live and how you don't want to live, and you're going to cherry-pick the best verses, and you're going to buy the coffee mugs that make you feel good, I just want to encourage you. Make the yes today and it starts with repentance. Repentance is not just for lost people; it's for believers too. **20 Here I am!** (Jesus says) **I stand at the door and knock.** I want renewed fellowship with you. **If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.** And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, in the name of Jesus, for the one who has never placed faith in Christ, that today would be the day of their salvation that they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead. For the believer who is halfhearted, who is drifting in their faith, who church attendance for them is just a check on a list each week, that today would be a wholehearted decision for you. That they would give a yes with every intention to follow through and then the strength to follow through.

May we give clear yeses to you this week as we read your word and as we walk with you. And it's in the name of Jesus that we pray it, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.