

**Martin White. 12<sup>th</sup> October 2008.**

## **Hospitality and honour - Zacchaeus**

### **Luke 19:2-10**

Over the last few weeks I have been preaching about the very important subject in the Bible of hospitality.

I have said that there is no separation in the Bible between “holy” activities, like praying or fasting, and the rest of life. All of our lives belong to God, and should be lived to glorify Jesus; and, according to the Bible hospitality is every bit as important to us as Christians as reading the Bible.

And the way the Early Church lived reflected this belief, with the importance they put on being together and eating together.

And it was the same with Jesus, who lived His life openly with people, and showed the power of sharing hospitality.

I want to look at a story in the New Testament that shows this.

There are 2 famous books by John Wimber called “Power Healing” and “Power Evangelism”, which talk about how Jesus healed the sick and performed miracles, and that these are tools we can use in sharing His Good News; I think we could call this preach “Power Hospitality.”

Setting the scene:

- Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, heading towards His death.
- He meets a blind beggar at the gates of Jericho (Bartimaeus).
- Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, who then heals him:

**Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."  
Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God. (Luke 18:42-43)**

Try to imagine what this scene looks like – the crowd pressing in; Bartimaeus’ life being changed right in front of everyone; the crowd trying to get their minds around what has just happened.

Imagine the noise and the joy and the excitement! This is a nation of people who are very free in expressing their emotion!

As Jesus and this crowd enter the town, you can imagine other people coming out of houses and joining this crowd and pressing in to find out what has been happening.

I want to pick up the story here and read from Luke 19.

**Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. (v 1-2)**

Nowadays, working in a tax office might not win you lots of friends, but really it sounds like a Civil Service job that's a bit dull, but respectable and safe. But people hearing this story at the time would have understood something very different by this.

A tax collector – and especially a chief tax collector, would have been as hated as anyone else in the whole town.

He was someone who worked for the Romans – the Superpower that had invaded and were oppressing the nation.

Think about a French person collaborating with the Nazis in WWII or an Iraqi informant, working for the Americans.

His job was to get his countrymen to pay tax to the invaders. He would have used his knowledge of his neighbours to get more money out of them. (If he pleasantly asked you how your business was going, you would be very careful how you answered him!)

And he was a *Chief* tax collector, so he trained others to do the same.

People would have seen him as a traitor; he was betraying his nation; he was working with Gentiles - people from outside of the Jewish faith, to oppress Jews, and he was helping to fund an oppression that was sometimes horrifically brutal.

And he wouldn't have hidden his position; he would have had a tax booth, probably in the main street, and would have brazenly used his position and power to exploit, intimidate and control people.

And through his 'work' he had become 'wealthy' – almost certainly through dishonesty – in effect, robbing the people he had grown up with.

The way he lived was sinful and shameful; and because of the closeness of family ties at the time, his family would have been tainted and shamed by him. His mother would have been known as the mother of a traitor; people would have turned their backs on them because of him.

But despite (or maybe because of) his shame, he wanted to see Jesus. I guess he had overheard the crowd shouting about what He had done, and maybe he had met or seen Jesus before. Possibly he had also heard about what Jesus had done with other tax collectors. Matthew – one of Jesus' closest group of followers had previously been a tax collector, so maybe there was some hope for him too.

**He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. (v 3-4)**

Louise spoke on this passage earlier in the year and described Zacchaeus as probably looking something like Danny DeVito!

Try to imagine how Zacchaeus must have been feeling; he didn't need any reminding about his shame and the shame he had brought on his family, and with this former fellow-outcast – Bartimaeus, now healed and restored and rejoicing, the contrast couldn't be any clearer.

So Zacchaeus is caught between wanting to know more – desperately longing to be rid of his shame, but equally feeling unworthy, just about beyond hope, and physically separated by his height and the crowd.

So he climbs up a tree.

This is an undignified thing for a man in his position to do, but desperation makes him do it – possibly as the biggest step he is capable of making towards Jesus.

And then something amazing happens:

**When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.**

**All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a `sinner.'" (v 5-7)**

Notice how 'spiritual' Jesus is – He doesn't preach or challenge Zacchaeus' life or sin; He doesn't call him to repent; He doesn't hold up the Bible to measure Zacchaeus' life against.

He simply invites Himself (quite forcefully) to his house.

Zacchaeus (and his whole family) had probably had hundreds of people over the years quoting the Bible at him; pointing out his shame; reminding him that he was a cheating, compromising, greedy, disloyal sinner.

And because no-one likes living under shame, he must have desperately longed for a way to change.

But this was probably the first time ever in his life he was given a way for the shame to be wiped away from him.

I don't know if you can think of a time when you have felt shame in your life, or brought shame on your family?

Sadly I can think of many.

The worst time in my life (as I have talked about before) was when I had a car accident where a man stepped out in front of me as I was driving home from work...and died.

After it happened, I thought and felt:

"How can anyone like me again? How can anyone even look at me again? How can I still lead a church and be respected?"

And then someone came up to me and told me "Just to warn you, your name is in the paper." And I found that there were lots of details about the accident, and about me personally, and the parents of the children I taught asked questions. And I knew that people were talking about me.

And even though I knew people were supportive of me, and I believed that there was nothing I could have done, still, I felt that I had a stain on my life that would never go away and that would put a shadow over the rest of my life.

To cut a long story short, I believe that God has completely wiped that stain away from me and has taken its shadow off of my life.

For me, that was a truly life-changing and overwhelming thing. And I guess that in that moment, that's how Zacchaeus felt too.

This was better than he deserved and better than he could have ever hoped for or imagined.

And Zacchaeus' heart and life were changed:

**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."**

**Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (v 8-10)**

Often people preach about the amazing Good news of the Gospel – that although we have all sinned and made a mess of our lives, Jesus came and died on the Cross – spilling His Blood to pay the debt we owe and carry the punishment we deserve.

More than this though, He can also take away our shame, permanently, completely.

However stained we are;

Whether through things we have done on purpose or through tragic accidents  
With stains that are glaringly public, or with secret, hidden shame that we have kept hidden from everyone – even our closest families in case even they rejected us.

And the offer He gave Zacchaeus and gives us today is this:

He doesn't want to be a remote God who sits on high – unapproachably, judging us – although He is certainly our Judge, who declares us "Not Guilty", but nothing more.

He doesn't even just want receive our worship – although deserves to be worshipped with every breath we breathe.

But He wants more than this; He wants to enjoy fellowship with us – to break bread with us; for us to know Him and enjoy His Presence. A two-way relationship!

And He wants to identify Himself with us – to call us His friends and to utterly lift off our shame.

Jesus is the ‘fellowshipping God’

Here is the offer He gives us in Revelation:

**Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20)**

If Jesus honours us with His Presence, what does it matter what anyone else thinks of us?

If we are accepted by Him – Jesus, the King, all other opinions matter less.

There is no shame if He doesn’t see us as shameful

**If God is for us, who can be against us? ...Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? (Romans 8:31-34)**

So why should we offer and receive hospitality? Why should we devote ourselves to fellowship and breaking bread together?

Because that’s what Jesus does.

And this city is full of people as stained by shame as Zacchaeus was; and as we unite and fellowship with them – and with one another as we need it too, then we will see people knowing the Fellowship of Jesus and see their shame being broken off too.

Simply being in one another’s homes, sharing fellowship and hospitality and breaking bread together are powerful tools to build Jesus’ Church and extend His Kingdom.

**Zacchaeus:**

1. What effect did Jesus sharing hospitality have on Zacchaeus?
2. How does giving and receiving hospitality affect our relationships? How does this tie into evangelism?