

Sermon #1537  
Title: His High Calling  
Text: Luke 19:1-10

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Series: All Eyes on Jesus

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Welcome to The Creek → Franklin Road/Shelby Street/on-line guests.

### Series Introduction

It's that time of year that happens to be a favorite of many. We're caught up in March Madness with the NCAA *Final Four* soon to be played. Millions upon millions of people watch the series on television, while still others *spend* millions and millions of dollars to travel to and attend some of the championship games. The *Final Four* captures our attention.

For me, today begins what I've been thinking and praying about—and that happens to be my *final four* messages as a member of our staff team, here at The Creek. And, I don't want to score a few points so much as *make some important points* from looking at a specific time in the life of Jesus.

Knowing that this season was approaching, I've been praying and thinking for months as to what to preach these last few times. The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy is a collection of three sermons from Moses before he handed leadership of God's people over to Joshua. Paul wrote his final thoughts, much like sermon notes, in a letter to Timothy, his "son in the faith." Yet, I believe there are powerful challenges for us from the final weeks in the life of Jesus.

These four weeks are called **All Eyes On Jesus** because that is how you and I need to live from day-to-day and even moment-to-moment. We read in **Luke 9:51** "As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." The phrase "to be taken up to heaven" refers to the ascension of Jesus, and for that to happen, He had to first die on a cross, be buried in a tomb, and be raised from the dead. Luke 9:51 is the beginning of the end of the earthly life of Jesus. The chapters that follow are not about His coming, but about His going. The word "resolutely" means immovable, unshakable, having an unwavering resolve to go to Jerusalem and get to the cross where He would die.

With **All Eyes On Jesus** during His final walk to Jerusalem, FOUR powerful insights stand out to us. In these final four weeks, we can't help but see His **high calling**, His **heart**, His **humility**, and His **hope**. High calling. Heart. Humility. Hope.

### Sermon Introduction

By God's grace, I've been in a few places in recent weeks. One such place was Alaska. It was my privilege to work with a couple of churches, coaching their elder and staff teams - one in Kenai and the other in Fairbanks. While there, I experienced some things that I had not on previous trips to Alaska – like the Northern Lights, like sub-zero temperatures, and very deep snow—snow that will probably not melt away until early June. Though I had seen moose in Alaska before, I had not seen moose like this (insert pictures). And the wildlife didn't end there.

I saw eagles – probably 300-500 bald eagles in Kenai, Alaska (insert picture). I could not get all of the trees in front of me in the picture, and what was so powerful was that the limbs of the trees were full of eagles! Eagles and more eagles were out on the limbs of the trees. I will not forget that sight. Today, we will be in a passage where some one goes out on a limb - not an eagle, but some one.

A preacher and a couple of his buddies from church went deer hunting. They were hunting on the same farm and they shot the same deer! A single slug brought the 10-point buck down. The three guys went running up to the deer and each claimed, “I shot it! It’s mine!” The argument became so heated that they had to call the game warden. He walked up to the deer, took one look at it and said, “The preacher shot it.” His friends began throwing a fit, “How could you tell by look at the deer for a few seconds that the preacher shot it?” “Simple,” the game warden replied, “look where the slug went. The preacher shot the buck. The slug went in one ear and out the other!” *This moment in the life of Jesus can and will speak powerfully into our lives and we can’t let it go in one ear and out the other.*

While walking step by step to His date with death on a cross, Jesus happened to stop in Jericho and there He had a few powerful encounters with people. One of them is recorded in Luke 19.

#### **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 and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see Him, since Jesus was coming that way. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” 6 So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly. 7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’” 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.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

Matthew, Mark and John did not include this story in their Gospels. Only Luke wrote of this moment during the final journey of Jesus to Jerusalem, and Luke—being a physician—included some great details that have the potential of speaking into our lives, *if we will not let it go in one ear and out the other.*

#### **Verse 1**

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

Jericho was an incredible city in the days of Jesus. Just six miles west from the Jordan River and six miles north of the Dead Sea, the city was located in a great place where crops grew and trade flourished. People poured into the city from many directions, and Jesus was one of them.

He, along with untold numbers of others, were passing through on their way to Jerusalem where they would observe Passover—the most beloved holiday among the Jewish people.

### **Verse 2**

A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

This is one of many stories in Luke about tax collectors, but this one is about a *chief* tax collector named Zacchaeus. Tax collectors had to pay an enormous fee to Rome in order to purchase the privilege of collecting taxes, similar to purchasing a franchise. In Israel, Rome had three regional tax centers: Capernaum in the north (a city on the Sea of Galilee); Caesarea in the central west (a city along the Mediterranean Sea); and Jericho in the south. Because business flourished in Jericho, people paid taxes on what they sold, what they bought, on the land they owned and even on the animals that walked on that land. People even paid a toll tax for walking through a city, much like paying a toll to drive on a road or cross over a bridge today. Yet, Zacchaeus was the *chief* tax collector, meaning that he was at the top of the proverbial food chain, and the tax collectors gave to him a cut of all the taxes they collected. As a result, Ole Zac was rolling in the dough! Because greed easily grew in this kind of setting, tax collectors became profoundly rich and personally hated. Zacchaeus would have been rejected and reviled by his countrymen. They viewed him as a traitor. If he was married and a father, his wife and children would be shunned and rejected as well. The entire family would feel the hate of the entire community.

### **Verses 3-4**

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.

Zacchaeus was interested in Jesus, wanting to see Him. The crowd was too large and Zacchaeus was too short. Even though he risked being in a crowd where he could have been abused by people who hated him, Zacchaeus ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree. Zacchaeus was willing to go out on a limb in order to see Jesus.

### **Verses 5-7**

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.’”

What happened next could have caused Zacchaeus to fall off that limb! Not only did Jesus stop and look at him, but Jesus called him by name! Zacchaeus would have thought, “How did this guy know my name?” And not only did Jesus look up directly at him and call him by name, but He invited himself over to his house! That was off the chart – and why? In Bible days, people practiced what was called table fellowship. You never invited people to your table with whom

you were at odds. So, when Jesus invited Himself over to Zacchaeus' home, He was declaring to Zacchaeus that He had nothing against him. Yet, the rest of the Jews in Jericho did not think the same way. They would NEVER eat with tax collectors, so it's no wonder that they "murmured and muttered" among themselves, complaining that Jesus was going into the home of Zacchaeus, the top traitor in their town. This radical compassion of Jesus was yet another reason why the Jews rejected Him as Messiah, because in their thinking, the Messiah would never do something so scandalous!

### **Verse 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."

His words, "here and now" indicate that Zacchaeus instantly went from being an extortionist to being a philanthropist. Immediately, he went from taking to giving. His decision to become a follower of Jesus was immediate; it was "here and now." His repentance and surrender was not gradual. Zacchaeus called Jesus "Lord," as he decided to submit his life to Jesus. He did not put off until tomorrow what Jesus expected him to do today. Notice his generosity in that he gave 50% of all that he had to the poor, AND he made restitution of what he had wrongly taken at an incredible rate. The Old Testament (see Lev. 6:5, Num. 5:7) required that when making restitution, the original amount had to be returned plus one-fifth of the amount as a penalty. But Zacchaeus was returning FOUR times the amount, meaning 400%! This is evidence of a changed life.

### **Verses 9-10**

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

It is obvious that Zacchaeus became a Christ-follower that day. Not only did he call Jesus, "Lord," but Jesus Himself declared, "Today salvation has come to this house." Not only did Zacchaeus come to Christ, but everyone in his house did! It was commonplace that when the leader of a home and family came to Christ, the rest of the family—and those who lived there (i.e., servants)—came to Christ, as well. What an incredible day it was in that home. Zacchaeus would be able to declare what Joshua did centuries before in that "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" (Joshua 24:15).

The entire message of the Bible can be summed up in this one single statement of Jesus: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." There's no doubt that Jesus was a Master Teacher and a Master Physician; but those were secondary purposes in His life. His one singular, primary purpose; the mission and high-calling of Jesus was to seek and to save the lost! The word "seek" means to pursue. The word "save" means to rescue from harm, to deliver from danger, saving from judgment and wrath. The word "lost" means to be ruined, condemned and destroyed. Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem, keeping the cross ever before Him. He allowed nothing to distract Him, no one to prevent Him from dying on the

cross. He alone rescues all who trust in Him, keeping them from the judgment and wrath of God.

## SEGUE

There is something more to this story than meets the eye. I think this story isn't so much about Zacchaeus as it's a story about God; and to help us unpack this God-story, let's ask three simple, helpful questions.

### **Are we confused?**

This is a simple question that needs to be answered. Are we confused about what *really* matters in life? Zacchaeus wasn't just up in a tree; he was *out on a limb spiritually*. He needed Jesus Christ in his life – and that is what matters most in life. Over twenty years ago, an advertising campaign swept the country and it achieved 90% recognition throughout America. If you saw a picture like this [INSERT PICTURE], you would ask “Got milk?” A far more important question to ask is “Got Jesus?” And not only should we ask that question of ourselves, but we should ask that question of those people in our lives for whom we care. After all, like Zacchaeus, there are a lot of people for whom we care who are *out on a limb spiritually!* Their eternity hangs in the balance, and that is of far greater importance than our jobs, our homes, our money, our health, our hobbies, our travel and more. Someone's eternal destiny is more important than what's happening in the world of sports, politics and social media.

Maybe we are not pursuing what is of the greatest importance to God, and that being the Great Commission. What mattered most to Jesus was “seeking and saving the lost.” Everything else was secondary to the eternity of people. Can we say the same or are we confused about this?

If we just take a look at some statistics, it appears that the Church in America has lost her direction, her sense of mission. It appears that the American Church (i.e., Christians) are more concerned about programs than people. A study came out last fall (Pew Research) indicating half of all Christians do NOT know what the Great Commission is, and if they don't know what it is, how can they pursue it?

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

The Great Commission says to “go and make,” but it looks like we are content to “sit and take.” Friends, we must make His last command our first priority! An estimated 95% of Christians do not bring anyone to Christ outside of their children—that's more than nine out of ten Christians not sharing their faith with others – and remember, eternity hangs in the balance!

Lifeway Press (per Bob Russell) reported that there are roughly 400,000 churches in the United States and 57% of them are less than 100 in size. Outreach Magazine reports that church attendance is about 17% of the American population, and as the United States becomes increasingly secular in thought and behavior, the Church and Christianity become a greater threat to many people, even to the point of being called a “hate group” by some. Compare that to other countries. More people worship Jesus in China today than in America, as there are some 100 million Christians in the underground church. Over the last century, over 500 million people have come to Christ on the continent of Africa. More Muslims have come to Christ in the last fifteen years than in the last fifteen centuries. (Denison Forum) The largest church in the world is Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea with over 800,000 members! Could it be that Christians in churches around the world – but not across our country—are reaching out to their friends and family who are *out on a limb spiritually*?

### **Are we conformed?**

Whether we care to admit it or not, our culture is rapidly changing. Increasing numbers of people say there is no such thing as absolute, unchanging truth, and that all paths lead to God. Since all paths lead to God, many people are not sharing their faith with others. People have stopped inviting people to church. Of Millennials who are Christian, 47% say that it is actually wrong to evangelize. Three out of ten Christians (30%) of all ages say they have no non-Christian friends. More than half of all Christians (56%) report having two or fewer conversations about faith in the past year. Too many Christians are conforming to our culture, rather than make the culture conform to Christ. It is an alarming trend when half of all Christian millennials say that it is wrong to evangelize even friends and family who are *out on a limb spiritually* – and their eternity is at risk! If the days, weeks, months and years continue to pass and we continue to have little or no concern for those who are not Christian, the Church in America will be in serious trouble. Our first response is not to be politically correct but true to God. We cannot be silent. Like the Apostle Paul we must declare:

#### **Romans 1:16**

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Think with me. Ambassadors represent their nations in a land not their own. The United States has 294 embassies and diplomatic missions around the world. Our ambassadors are citizens of the United States, but they live in another country. Moreover, while they are living in foreign countries, they are to make and keep peace on our behalf with that foreign country. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, the Apostle Paul called us ambassadors for Christ. We are citizens of heaven and we live here—in foreign land, and while here, we are to help make peace between God and those for whom we care. After all, Jesus said, “Blessed are the peace-makers for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

### **Are we concerned?**

Jesus went looking for lost people, and He certainly found a spiritually lost person in Zacchaeus. Why did Jesus come to seek and save the lost? Why did Jesus look for Zacchaeus up in the tree

and *out on a limb*? Because God has been seeking us from the very beginning of measured time. In Genesis 3:8-9, God walked in the Garden of Eden, and was looking for Adam, the man God created. God, who does not change, *still* looks for us and pursues us. It's His nature.

### **2 Chronicles 16:9**

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth looking to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.

Knowing that this story is more about God than it is about Zacchaeus, think about being *out on a limb*. Do you know anyone – maybe at work, at school, in the neighborhood or even in the family – who like Zacchaeus is *out on a limb spiritually*? Who, in our circle of friends and family—in our sphere of influence—is *out on a limb spiritually*?

Let's remember that only two things are eternal: The Word of God and people. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matthew 24:35), which means every person has an existence beyond this life, beyond death's door. That existence is either with or without God, in a place of either indescribable pleasure or indescribable pain.

What separates every person from God is sin, and "all (of us) have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Romans 3:10 states, "There is no one righteous, not even one..." Sin has devastated all of our lives, including the life of the one for whom we care and who is *out on the limb spiritually*. Every person needs to be rescued from the wrath and judgment of God. After all, every man and woman will stand before the judgment seat of God.

### **Romans 14:10, 12**

"For we will all stand before God's judgment seat...each of us will give an account of himself to God."

Jesus has come to seek and to save us, rescue us from God's judgment and wrath. The Apostle Peter wrote that Jesus was "chosen before the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:19-20) to be our Savior. The angel of God appeared to Joseph and told him to give his Son the name Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sin" (Matt. 1:21). The Apostle Paul declared: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst." (1 Timothy 1:15)

The person for whom we care and who happens to be *out on a limb spiritually* needs to know that there is both a **heaven** and a **hell**, and only Jesus Christ is the only Savior of all humankind, for even He declared: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). And THAT is a picture of **heaven** – being WITH God, our Creator, our Father. If we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ, trusting in His death on the cross for the payment of our sins, then when we die, we experience what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:8; "To be absent from the body is to be home with the Lord." Our last breath here becomes our first breath there. We are with the Lord Almighty, our Father. Then,

**Revelation 21:1**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

And at the second coming of Jesus, the earth and heavens (i.e., sky and space) are destroyed and God creates both a new earth and a new sky and space. It will be a “home of righteousness” where sin will never occur nor exist. And the fullness of heaven is His presence.

**Revelation 21:3-4**

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Yet, on the other hand, those for whom we care and who are *out on a limb spiritually* must also know of **hell**.

**Luke 12:4-5**

“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him, who after the killing the body, has the power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him.”

Jesus spoke this to “a crowd of many thousands” (see verse 1), and He declared that there is something more beyond death’s door and that God is the One with complete “power” (i.e., not *dunamis* but *exousia* = authority) or authority over that realm. The great suffering of hell is the absence of God.

**2 Thessalonians 1:8-10**

“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power on the day that He comes to be glorified in His holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

The “punishment of everlasting destruction,” being “shut out” means the utter and complete rejection by God. God no longer values the one who has not surrendered to and trusted in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. God “demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8), and if we reject His Son, God rejects us. We cannot be silent about this. Jesus wasn’t. He actually said more about hell than anyone else in the Scriptures. After all, He gave up His life to keep people from suffering eternally in hell.

Dr. Ben Carson, who currently serves on the President’s Cabinet as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, was invited to speak for the National Prayer Breakfast a few years ago, back in the day when he was the Chief of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins. I’ve listened to the speech he delivered and I remember him telling a story of a grown man who



loved his mom and for Mother’s Day, he bought her a couple of birds that could talk and entertain his aging mom. Knowing that his mom would love them, the guy paid several hundreds of dollars for the birds and had them shipped to her. Come Mother’s Day, the guy called his mom and asked her if she enjoyed her birds. She said, “Mmm! They *was* good!” The guy said, “What do you mean, mom, that ‘they *were* good’? Tell me you didn’t eat them. Did you, mom?” “Sure did—and they *was* good!” The son said, “Mom, I paid hundreds of dollars for those birds because those birds could talk. Those birds could listen to you and talk to you, Mom!” “Well, son, I guess they should have said something!”

Friends, for those of us who are followers of Jesus, all of us know someone who is *out on a limb spiritually*. The tree is probably full of them! Just like the picture of the trees in Kenai, Alaska that were full of eagles sitting out on limbs, I am confident that we know many people whose eternity is at risk!

Are we confused, conformed or even concerned? Remember, how we think determines how we live. If we think that the person for whom we care has an eternity hanging in the balance, we are more inclined to climb out on the limb! WE need to go *out on a limb* to meet that person for whom we care! But it looks intimidating, even threatening, to try and go *out on a limb* to meet that person where he or she happens to be. When we think about our responsibility to speak to those for whom we care and who are *spiritually out on a limb*, it may be that we are intimidated by the thought of how and when do we speak to them about Jesus. It may be that we feel unprepared, incapable of sharing Jesus Christ with them, that we are not only out of our league, and we don’t want to go *out on a limb*!

SAR—search and rescue—teams are made up of courageous, competent people. Men and women are trained in the US Coast Guard and other branches of the military to search for and rescue people from perilous places. Members of the US Department of Forestry are often deployed to do the same. Search and rescue teams try to save people from certain death when lost at sea, in mountain heights, canyon depths, or in deep forests. They are determined to rescue people who are lost, stranded, injured and facing certain death. These brave, selfless people live by the motto: “We do this so others may live.”

Jesus did this so that others may live. The question is: *will we go out on a limb for those who are out on that limb?* Nothing matters more.

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