

Zacchaeus, Come Down From That Tree
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When I was little I had a favorite tree that I liked to climb in a place called Marquand Park – a huge Park near where we lived that spanned about 15 acres...it had paths and a playground and even a baseball field

It was a little bit like the expansive Memorial Park that you have here in Cupertino – where the men played their first softball game this past Monday night BTW. If you didn't go last Monday night at 7 – come out this Monday night at 9pm and cheer them on! We even have a team Mom who brought everyone orange slices – and if you want to know who the team Mom is...come to the game!

Anyway...I grew up next to a Park like Memorial Park... called Marquand Park

I learned to ride a bike in Marquand Park

I learned how mean kids could be in the sandbox in Marquand Park

And I learned how to climb trees in Marquand Park

And my favorite tree was a big pine tree – 30' tall- with branches separated perfectly going all the way up the trunk – just right for a six year olds legs to reach. It was like a staircase of branches all the way up...

I wasn't really supposed to climb all the way up to the top of this massive tree, but I did anyway

It was too tempting

And the thing that I noticed when I got to the very top of this enormous pine was that I had a birds eye view of everything that was going on in the park.

I could see everyone from a distance, but no one could see me

I was in my own world, separated from everyone, and it was fun

Alone in a leafy paradise...for awhile

Until one day I saw some of my friends playing Frisbee below me

And I called down to them to find out if they had room for one more person to play

“Hey down there! Can I play?” I shouted

I liked Frisbee because I had grown up on a grad school campus – I was a faculty brat – and all the students would play Frisbee on the quad by our home...so I learned really early how to play cause I’d play with students all that time

So when I saw a Frisbee game going on I really always wanted in

But when I called down, my friends couldn’t hear me

I was too high up in the tree...they couldn’t see me either cause of all the leaves

And for the first time in my leafy paradise I felt lonely and excluded – no one can play Frisbee in a tree

That day I came down from the tree really fast, skinning my knee on the way down, because I so wanted to be a part of the Frisbee game – I wanted to be where people could see me, and hear me, and allow me to get in the game.

Zaccheus climbed a tree too.

He heard that Jesus was coming, and he climbed a tree because he was too short to see above the crowd

I think he also climbed a tree to get away from the crowd

I don’t know about you but when I learned about Zaccheus – that he was a wee little man...short...small...and as I sang my little song about how he climbed a tree

I always thought of him as kind of cute, and plump, and endearing

But actually no one in Jesus’ time thought about Z. in this way

Zacchaeus was someone people literally hated

No one invited him to parties, or to dinner

No one if he was alive today would give him free tickets to an event, or have him as a friend on Facebook

Everyone despised him

Why?

He was a chief tax collector – a tax collector to which other tax collectors reported.

This meant that he took people's money – and took a lot of it unfairly
He basically robbed
the poor...

He was the reason people who could barely make ends meet
Went to bed hungry at night
He was the reason people who worked so hard all day...had to work a
double shift at night as well
He was the reason people suffered.
He was “the oppressor” – the dreaded knock on the front door – telling
you in no uncertain terms that if you didn't pay up you and your family
would be out in the street
He was the IRS impersonated, and an illegal scoundrel & crook...

Zaccheus may have been a small little man but he was a feared little
man...and a despised little man who lived in a little world that was all
about him

Being up in a tree, getting the birds eye view, being isolated and
removed from people; watching from a distance and thereby not
needing to feel anyones pain, or be invested in anyone elses life but his
own...

Was pretty much how Z had lived his entire life

The one thing he did that was right...was that when he heard that Jesus
was in town he took some interest
He wanted to see him...
I don't know exactly why he wanted to see him
There must have been some flicker of a longing deep inside of him
That maybe this Jesus, this prophet from Nazareth, would say something
or do something that might be worth watching

So he climbed the Sycamore Tree that day so that he could get the birds
eye view...see what was going on from afar...not get involved...just
observe

That's why the first thing Jesus says to Zaccheus when he sees him
hanging off the branch...Is “Zaccheus, come down from that tree.”

Zaccheus, stop watching me work from afar
Stop keeping yourself safe by staying distant; I know you are despised
and you feel unworthy, and you know you have done wrong

But get your courage up, climb down here and start living for me
And by the way, I want you to get down from that tree so badly that I am
inviting myself over to your house today, Zaccheus
It might be impolite but guess what...
I am coming over to be with you cause I want you to get in the game

Come down here in the thick of it all...and lets have a meal together
Let's do life together...get involved, get invested, get saved from yourself
and your preoccupation
And start living my way

Anyone who ever had the chance to have Jesus come to their house
always gets transformed
And you know what?
Jesus doesn't tell Z. to do anything in scripture...
The very fact that Zaccheus has the courage to climb down from that
tree...get into the thick of things....get into the game...have Jesus to his
house...was enough...
Z. exclaims on his own after he has been with Jesus...with no coaxing
and nor moral lesson...he exclaims
*Lord I am going to give it all back! All that I have stolen and wrongly
taken, I am going to give it back four times over*

Can you imagine the people, the majority of whom at that time lived
below the poverty line....their reactions as Zaccheus went around
knocking on doors after that – giving everyone bonus checks?
Can you imagine the IRS coming to you and giving you back your tax
money – 4X the amount....? WOW!
And the one who had been the despised Scrooge of the middle east...
now becomes a hero...a benevolent merciful man who though he is still
small of stature has the heart of Christ....

Some of you are up in the tree today, watching what goes on here from a
birds eye view – not fully involved
We did this story of Zaccheus at our All Church Retreat this past May

And the question was asked, “How many of you feel like you are up in the tree” and way more people than I thought answered “I do”
I’ve been watching from a distance
I’ve been noticing some really good things happening at this church...
And I’ve also been noticing some things that need improvement
But I’m up in a tree...not really involved

There’s a lot of reasons why people stay up in the tree...and don’t come down
There’s a lot of reasons why people keep God at arms length...I get that...
There are a lot of reasons why people stay up in the tree
Why people prefer not to get too involved in church
I understand

Maybe you’ve been hurt by the church in the past...

But that’s not a reason to stay in the tree...we are a human institution and people are imperfect anywhere you go. Climb down from the tree and help make WVPC a better place to be...get in the game and recognize that although it’s a risk – anytime you love or your invest in anything it’s a risk – Rather than staying safe and alone...find out how being a part of the things of God is more rewarding than you can ever imagine.

Maybe you are up in the tree today because you just don’t have time to do one more thing or your energy is at a low ebb. I understand.

And there are seasons when time is more scarce than others. But even if it’s making a snack for our CRASH ZONE kids one day, or manning the phones in the office for a few hours once a week...or setting aside an hour for going deeper in Scripture by signing up for small group...when we give even a small amount to the Lord out of our lack...he multiplies it. Do what you can, give whatever you can...even if its just a tiny bit...and God will bless you and multiply it for his purposes.

Maybe you are up in the tree today because, like Z., you feel unworthy or not spiritual enough

None of us is worthy. None of us is spiritual enough. Those of us who are involved more here are not involved because we are better, or because we know more, or because we have somehow reached some

spiritual height. We are broken, we are sinful, we are all saved by God's amazing grace. As Z. was forgiven and accepted by Christ, so are you!

Maybe you are up in the tree because you don't know how to get involved

You can't use that excuse today. Visit our Welcome Center...if you are here for the first time...get your free gift...but also explore over there and ask people about all the ways you can serve and nurture your faith. This is a Sunday where it should be very clear to everyone all the options there are to get connected.

Whatever the reason you are in the tree today...I would like to encourage you...on this KICK OFF Sunday... to come down from the tree And get connected

Make a commitment to not just watch and enjoy what's going on here But actually step out and do something for you own faith development – deepen your relationship with Jesus, or find a way that you can use your gifts to serve.

As I always say, God uses the jobs to get the people done

He calls to you today...Come down from the tree. Get in the game...let me come to your house...open the doors for me to enter in...and your life will expand and become transformed...

See the piece of the puzzle that is missing in this picture? **(IMAGE)** Just like this picture is not complete....this place the church of Jesus Christ, will not ever be complete until everyone, is using their unique gifts and following God's call to come down from the tree and becomes invested in the work of the Kingdom of God. Let us pray