

What Happens When Boys Climb Trees

Luke 19:1-10

Good morning men, and good morning, ladies. It is so nice to have you with us this morning for this special Valentine's Day edition of Man in the Mirror men's Bible study.

We are going to do a shout out to some men this morning who are also doing the Man in the Mirror Bible study. Ladies, what we do is video this Bible study and make it available on iTunes, and online. We have thousands and thousands of men doing the Bible study. This morning we will do a shout out to one of those groups. It is the Saturday Morning Men's Bible study. 12-17 guys who have been meeting for twelve years on the first and third Saturdays at 7:30AM at the Sioux City Youth for Christ Headquarters in Iowa. Thank you to Bob Henderson for alerting us to this. Why don't you join me in a warm rousing Man in the Mirror shout out to the Saturday Morning Men's Bible Study now. Hoorah! Welcome guys, we are glad to have you with us.

We are in a Bible study series called "Hanging Out with Jesus." We are going through the stories in the four gospels in chronological order, one at a time. This is a men's Bible study. What we are trying to do is help men understand the Bible as how it applies to the real problems they are facing today. We look at the Bible and we try to contextualize it for a man's experience. What we do is each week – it is very simple – we take a few verses of the Bible, we explain what they mean and we talk about how they apply to our lives.

Today, the title of the message is "What Happens When Boys Climb Trees." I thought that would be an appropriate title to help you, women, have a better understanding of what we men do.

Larry Walters went down to an army/navy surplus store. He bought 45 surplus weather balloons and several tanks of helium. He went home and fastened the balloons to a sturdy lawn chair which he then tethered with a rope to the bumper of his Jeep. After he inflated all of the balloons, he put together some sandwiches, a pellet gun so he could shoot some of the balloons when he was ready to descend, a CB radio and a six pack of beer.

Larry's plan was to lift off his girlfriend's backyard in San Pedro, California and sort of lazily drift at about 30 feet in her backyard for a few hours and then come down. Larry was in for a big surprise. He had grossly underestimated how much helium had been put into how many balloons and when he reached over and severed the line that had tethered him to the bumper of his Jeep, he shot up into the air like a cannon and ended up at 16,000 feet.

It is cold up there. He was up there for fourteen hours. The LA News were all over it. All of the different stations were recording this. Finally, he ended up drifting into the official approach corridor for LAX airport. He was spotted by a couple of airline pilots. "Control, this is Delta 3701. May I have a word with you?" "This is the tower, go ahead Delta 3701." "We just passed by a guy in a lawn chair with a gun. No. Really." So Delta 3701 Captain, please report for a sobriety test as soon as you land."

He started to drift out to sea. They got a rescue helicopter. They dropped the line that he got a hold of. They dragged him back to shore and he got tied up in some power lines and there was a power outage. Way to go, Larry.

Can you picture a woman doing this? Probably not. That is a guy thing. This morning we are going to look at a story about a man doing a guy thing. By the way, this is an actual picture of Larry Walters in his lawn chair on the left and with the balloons on the right. It's a legendary story.

THE STORY OF ZACCHAEUS

We are going to meet a guy today, a little like Larry. He is not quite as crazy, and the title of the talk is "What Happens to Boys Climb Trees." We are going to look at the story of Zacchaeus. We are in Luke 19. We will start at Verse 1. We will read these ten verses and talk about what they mean and how they apply. Verse 1.

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. 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.

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.'"

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."

God's Word. What is going on here? In Verse 1 it says that Jesus was passing through. But whenever Jesus is passing through, He is not just really passing through. Because we know from Verse 10 that what He is really doing is seeking lost people that He can save. Whenever Jesus is just passing through, He is not just really passing through. By the way, when you were waling around you are not passing through either. You are passing through with Christ, and you really have the same opportunity to do what Jesus does every day, and that is to help seek and save the lost.

We see in Verse 2, that there was a man who wanted to see Jesus. His name was Zacchaeus. He wanted to see Jesus and why did he want to see Jesus Christ? Because of the man's reputation. Jesus loves to love the people others love to hate. Did you get that? Jesus loves to love the people others love to hate. He had this incredible reputation as a lover of people; somebody who would accept a man like Zacchaeus, who was despised, who was a wealthy man, but he was

a sinner. The tax collectors of those days were corrupt. We don't know if they all were corrupt but the text says they were all corrupt. He alludes to that because he says, if I cheated anybody, I will pay them back four times as much. Jesus loves to love people that others love to hate.

But the problem was it says, he wanted to see Him but he couldn't because he was short. But there is another reason; because the crowd was in the way. In other words, the people that were closest to Jesus were keeping the man who wanted to see Jesus from being able to. How often do you see that? How often do you see people who are Christians blocking the view of someone who really wants to see Him?

I heard a story about a young guy about 24 years old. When he was a teenager he bought a used automobile from a deacon in his church. It turns out the car was completely rusted out. He had trusted the guy so he went to the deacon and confronted him. He said, "If you don't make this right, I am going to tell the leadership of the church." He said, "Don't you dare do that. This has nothing to do with Christianity." Sometimes, the crowd is keeping people from seeing Jesus that actually want to see him. What did he do? Verse 4. The man ran ahead and climbed a tree because Jesus was coming that way.

Watch this. Sometimes you have to do something you have never done, in order to get what you always wanted. Watch this. He was willing to go out on a limb to see Jesus. There are people on every street, in every neighborhood, and in every place of work, and even in every church in this city, and in every other city around the world where people might see or hear about this video, and where they want, who are willing to climb out on a limb to see Jesus, but they can't see him right now because of the crowd. But they are willing to go out on a limb to see Jesus.

What did Jesus do? Verse 5. When Jesus reached the spot He looked up and said Zacchaeus, come on down. I see you trying to see me. I must stay at your house today. He invited Himself for dinner. It is very interesting. Whenever a person is ready for Jesus, Jesus will find a way for that person to see Him as he is.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say Zacchaeus, I see you up in that tree, you wicked sinner – you terrible tax collector. You are on your way to hell. You must repent now. He doesn't do that.

Have you ever had anybody do that to you? What does Jesus do? He takes an intermediate step. He invites the man to dinner. Actually, He invites Himself to dinner at the man's house. He takes the step to establish some rapport. How did the people react to this? All the people saw this and began to mutter, mumble and grumble, because they didn't like the idea of this sinner being invited to spend time with Jesus Christ.

What happened because this man was willing to go out on a limb? A man got saved that day. Look at Verse 9: "Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation...'" This is the Greek word from which we get soteriology, the study of how people receive salvation. "...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." The son of man is come to seek and save lost men just like this, willing to go out on a limb to see me.

What was the man's response? You can see that if you back up to Verse 8. But Zacchaeus stood up and said, "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."

What he is doing here is faith that has prompted deeds. You have heard the saying that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). In Acts 26:20 Paul says, "I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." This is a man who is giving evidence of his faith. It is the fruit of repentance that he has done this. He has already given his heart to Jesus and now he gives Him his wallet too. Outstanding. All because he was willing to go out on a limb to see Jesus. How exciting is that? I am just here to tell you today that this is the big idea: **Nothing is more rewarding than to go out on a limb for Jesus.** Nothing. Whether you are the believer or the non-believer. **Nothing is more rewarding than to go out on a limb for Jesus.**

HOW CAN YOU HELP JESUS COMPLETE HIS MISSION?

That is what the text means. Let's talk a little bit about how it applies. How can you help Jesus complete His mission? Let's say you are a believer and you are willing to go out on a limb for Christ. How can you help Him complete His mission?

I used to be involved with CRU. On many occasions I either asked a question or heard Dr. Bill Bright, the deceased founder, about what was Jesus' purpose or why did He come or what was His mission – different ways of wording the same questions. He always referred to Luke 19:10. Why did Jesus come? To seek and to save the lost. What was Jesus' purpose? To seek and to save the lost. What was His mission? To seek and to save the lost. That is the mission of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, what is your mission? I came to establish institutional churches that would have big budgets, beautiful buildings, and lots of committees. Important – absolutely. The mission? N. They are strategies. They are structures, they are structures and they are means, but the mission is not to perpetuate the institution it is to seek and to save the lost. Because people are willing to go out on a limb to see Jesus, but we can't let our institutional selves become the crowd that keeps people from being able to see Jesus.

Let me give you four applications. News you can use. The first one is be willing to change your plans. Remember when Jesus is passing through He is never just passing through. Whenever you come in contact with a person if you are a believer, whenever you come in contact with a person, Jesus is passing through. He was always willing to alter His plans. That doesn't mean that if you are on your way to work and you would get fired if you were late, that you need to stop and do something. Use a little common sense.

I have a friend. His name is John. He practices what he calls the ministry of availability. He has been the CEO of one of the big companies here in town. But he has made it his ministry for at least 15 years to make himself available to people. Because he understands that there are people in our community willing to go out on a limb to see Jesus. That is the first application. Be willing to change your plans.

Second, don't block the view. Every human is a potential Christian. We are not the engineering department – we are publicity. We are trying to make Him known. We are trying to create publicity about Jesus.

I read an article in Christianity Today, in the current issue, about a leftist gay lesbian professor. Once she was tenured, she began to write very radically and vigorously out of her leftist position, calling on Nietzsche and Marx and others. In 1997 she wrote a critique of the Promise Keepers movement when it was at its peak. She received an avalanche of correspondence. She said she took two empty Xerox boxes and put one at the left of her desk, and one on the right. She put all the hate mail in one on the left, and the fan mail in the box on the right.

But she said there was this one letter that she didn't know what to do with from a pastor whose name is Ken Smith from Syracuse New York. Instead of poring out venom and vitriol and hatred, he spoke to her with dignity and respect. But he challenged her presuppositions and encouraged her to investigate the truth behind the claims that she was making. He even invited her to go to dinner if she wanted to discuss it. She didn't know what to do with the letter so it was just laying there in the middle of the desk.

Finally, she took it, and crumpled it up, and threw it in the trash can. Then she went to bed. She got up out of bed, got the letter, smoothed it out and didn't know what to do. She eventually connected with Ken Smith and his wife. They went out to dinner and much to her disappointment she really liked Ken. She really became good friends with Ken's wife. Ken never pestered her to come to church, and because that never happened, because he took this intermediate step, she began to build this friendship, and they had these discussions.

Ken didn't ask her to come to church; he took the church to her. He challenged her to read the Bible, the book that she was saying was the sum of all problems and the cause of all suffering and troubles in the world, that if she really believed that maybe she ought to read the book herself and see what it says, instead of giving these second hand critiques. So she started to read the Bible. She found herself with a voracious appetite sucked into the Bible. She is an intellectual and she read it several times in the first year in several different translations.

She and her gay partner were hosting a dinner party one night and one of her transgendered friends said this reading of the Bible is starting to change you. She said, "It might be, but what if it is true? What if we really are in trouble?" Her transgendered friend said, "I was a Presbyterian minister for 15 years. Let me pray for you, and don't worry about this."

God had a hold of her and because this man was not blocking the view, she became a follower of Jesus Christ. She has had a complete and miraculous transformation. She said, I kicked and screamed the whole way. I resisted this. I did not want this. I liked my life. It was great. I had a great partner. We had a great life. We were involved in great charities. Contrary to what people think, we were leading a normal and productive life and I hated the idea of becoming a Christian but I had no choice because there was a man who was willing to alter his plans a little bit, and then not block the view.

Third application is to offer them some kind of an intermediate step. Kind of like what Ken has done here. If you meet somebody, if you want to help Jesus complete His mission and you meet

somebody who seems like they want to see Jesus, who might be willing to go out on a limb. Don't say something like this. I can see you are interested in Christ. At our church we are starting a three-year study of the book of Revelation in the original Greek language and we are beginning with a 40 day fast, would you like to come?

Say something such as, would you like to go to lunch? Let's go fishing, or let's go out to a ball game together, or we have a softball league at our church.

David Delk was telling me about one of the churches that uses Man in the Mirror models, has an incredible softball team and they are a winning team. One of the reasons they are winning is because of the giant athletic young guys were not Christians on the team but one by one they have all been wooed into the kingdom because of this intermediate step.

Be willing to change your plans. That is number one. What is number two? Don't block the view. What is number three? Offer an intermediate step.

Number four. Love like Jesus. Jesus had this reputation. Love like Jesus. In other words, be willing to love the people that other people love to hate. If you do that, you will be a magnet. You will be a magnet to people who have honest legitimate doubts and concerns about Christianity who need more than a bumper sticker cliché, either for or against. Trust God and everything will turn out alright. How is that going for you? It is a little harder than that. Or repent for the fires of hell are going to consume you if you don't. Get a little bit more involved than that and love people the way Jesus loves them.

Those are four applications for you if you want to help Him complete His mission. Nothing is more rewarding than going out on a limb like this for Jesus.

ARE YOU READY TO GO OUT ON A LIMB?

Finally, are you ready to go out on a limb? What if you are not yet a follower of Jesus? What if you are Zacchaeus? Or what if you are a Christian and you have gone back toward being a Zacchaeus, and you have gone back toward being a worldly person? Are you willing to go out on a limb, or back out on a limb to see Him? If you are, look at Verse 10 one more time. "For the son of man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Jesus even right now, today, Jesus is passing through this room. If you want you can like Zacchaeus, you can see Jesus today. He wants to seek you and He wants to save you. Or if He has done this in the past and you've gone astray, He wants to bring you back to Him. There is no reason why you can't do that today, because He is actively looking for you. You can receive Him into your home.

John 1:12, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." You can receive Him into your home. You can do what Zacchaeus did too. You can prove your repentance by your deeds. You can do the right thing. You can do that if there is some moral decision that you are pondering which way to go. Whether it is cheating on taxes, cheating on your spouse, cheating at work, cheating a customer, whatever it is. There is a moral decision that you are pondering. If you want to, with the power of Jesus Christ, you can

prove your repentance by your deeds by doing the right thing, through the power of Jesus Christ in you.

Andrew Carnegie once said something that is one of my very favorite thoughts. If you have been here any length of time you have heard me talk about this before. Andrew Carnegie said, "The older I get the less I listen to what people say. I just watch what they do." What are you doing? If I could watch you, or it does not need to be me because Jesus is watching you and He knows what you are doing. What would He say?

The question is right now are you willing to go out on a limb for Jesus? Because Jesus went up on a limb for you. We are going to close now and if you have never received Jesus into your life, by faith and you would like to do that this morning, I'd like to offer you an opportunity to do so.

We are not going to have anybody stand. We are not going to have anybody raise hands. We are not going to have any outward display. This is completely between you and your God. What I would like to do in a moment is close in prayer and I'd like to pray a prayer out loud that is called the sinner's prayer. If you have never received Jesus before and would like to do that this morning, you can pray this prayer silently to yourself after me a phrase at a time, and invite Jesus by faith to come into your life to forgive your sins and to give you eternal life and begin the great adventure for which you were created.

Then also if you have been out on a limb for Jesus before but you crawled back to the tree, and you say I really want to affirm my faith this morning, and my willingness to live out on a limb for Jesus Christ, I will have a second prayer as well. I will invite you to join me for that. Let's pray together. First, if you have never received Jesus by faith and you would like to, pray this prayer, silently to yourself and He will come into you.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I want to see You. Here I am, out on a limb. I hear You this morning. Inviting me to have You come inside me; into my home. By faith, I acknowledge to you that I too am a sinner and I need a Savior. By faith I invite You to come in and I receive You as Savior and Lord. I thank You for giving me eternal life and forgiving my sins. I now invite You to make me into the kind of person You want me to be.

If you just prayed this prayer, congratulations. Welcome to the family.

Secondly, if you have climbed back to the tree and want to go out on a limb and hang out with Jesus, and you want to be all in again. Pray this prayer. Lord Jesus, I need You in my life right now more than I ever have. I confess that I have stopped taking risks. I confess that I haven't been changing my plans for other people. I confess I haven't been taking these intermediate steps with people. I confess that I have not been loving like You love. I confess that I have been blocking the view in some cases and I don't like this. Jesus, I am reaffirming my faith in You today, and asking You to forgive my being so lukewarm. I pray that you would make me hot again. Lord, I am back out on a limb for You today. I pray this, and everybody together says, Amen.

