

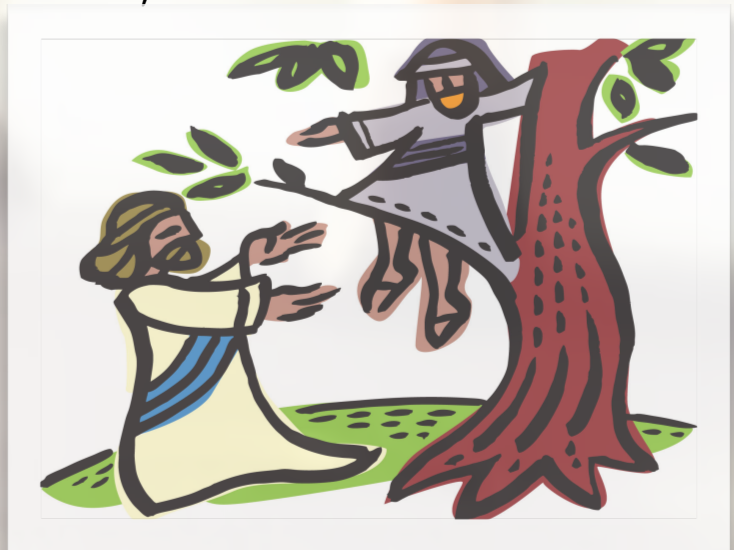
July 27-31, 2026 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 238

Jesus & Zacchaeus

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

July 26, 2026



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that. If hey help you, great. If not, sorry.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

**** Also you can also get these devotionals on Riverside's website (EagleRiverside.com) by going to the resource section and choosing "Reflections Download".

**** Also Jesus is awesome.

Monday Reflection: This week we are talking about Jesus' encounter with a man named Zacchaeus but before we get into Zac's story let's reset things just a bit by going back to- the very beginning (or pretty close to it). The story of Adam & Eve in the Garden. If you're familiar with the subject matter of the Bible then you'll remember that God's great dream was to create a perfect world in which His children would live so that He could love and enjoy us forever and so we could learn to love and enjoy Him forever. But very quickly that dream was shattered. Adam & Eve believed the lie that God didn't have their best at heart and that He was being stingy. They decided they knew better than God what was good and what was right (pretty much the most basic definition of sin I can think of) and so they ate the forbidden fruit and sin entered the world for the first time.

God comes down and pronounces His judgement- the serpent was cursed. But God didn't curse Adam & Eve. I always thought He did but read the story carefully and you'll see that instead of a curse God describes the consequences of Adam & Eve unleashing sin into this world. Every relationship they had would be short circuited and filled with pain. Their relationship with God (this wasn't the only time humans sinned and hurt their Father because we believed the lie that He didn't have our best at heart and was keeping something from us that we truly needed to be happy). Their relationship with each other was short circuited (they immediately started accusing one another of being the problem- an idea that they passed down from generation to generation). Their relationship with themselves was short circuited (mental illness and self injurious behavior entered the world for the first time). And finally their relationship with the Creation was short circuited (thorns, weeds, poison oak, sickness, disease, accidents, natural disasters and many other ways that we humans can now be injured or killed by the Creation entered the world for the first time). God doesn't curse them. Go ahead. Read it and see. I'll wait.

Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."

Genesis 3:17-19 (NLT)

The curse that should have fallen on them was diverted by God. How was this possible? I'm thinking because of the cross. The New Testament teaches that the benefits of the cross flow back into history as well as forward. The people of the Old Testament who were "saved" were saved sort of on credit based on what God knew would one day happen (but that old serpent didn't know about yet). I'm guessing Satan thought he had won the war when he convinced Adam & Eve to reject God's way (and God Himself by the way) and probably left Eden scratching his head wondering how God was able to somehow divert the curse that should have been humanity's downfall. And don't forget about the prophecy- the very first prophecy in the entire Bible:

I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. Your descendants and her descendants will be enemies. One of her descendants will crush your head, and you will bite his heel. Genesis 3:15 (NLT)

"One of" her descendants. What an overwhelming understatement of ginormous proportions (some of you probably thought you'd never live to see the word "ginormous" in a Bible reflection- you're welcome). Do you see what God does there? He does NOT come down and tell Adam & Eve, "you guys got this! You've got everything you need inside of you. Just dig down real deep, try real hard and you'll overcome!" What does He say? In essence He says, "you guys have no idea the hole you've just dug for yourselves. It's a hole so big it is going to separate you guys from Me in ways you can't even comprehend right now. You'll never be able to pay the debt you just incurred by Me diverting the curse that you both deserved and so... I'm going to pay it for you. I'll take care of it. I'll send a Rescuer and He will finish off the serpent and save you in the process (or did He save us and finish off the serpent in the process?).

Have you ever heard of such love? Such extravagant, reckless (I know some don't like the word "reckless" to be used when describing God's love but it's fairly accurate when you consider that the love of the Father ends up costing the Son His life) love that God focuses on us humans. Paul put it like this in his letter to the Ephesian church:

Long before He laid down earth's foundations, He had us in mind, and settled on us as the focus of His love, to be made whole and holy by His love. Ephesians 1:4 (MES)

Are you wondering what this has to do with Zacchaeus yet? Hopefully tomorrow as we start talking about this week's story this day's reflection will serve as a foundation and explain why Jesus does the things He does- even for people like Zacchaeus. A man who could never save himself so Jesus came looking for him. And for today maybe let it serve as a foundation to explain why Jesus does the things He does for me. And for you. People who could never save ourselves and so Jesus came looking for us. To rescue us. A plan He had with the Father before the foundations of the earth were laid down. Sound like reckless love to me.

Tuesday Reflection: So with yesterday's foundation of how God feels about me let's look at a case study of this concept- Zacchaeus. If you grew up in Sunday school the song is already running through your head. Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. Here's the story:

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." Luke 19:1-10 (NLT)

Now, let's set up what's going here. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem for what He knows will be His final journey. Up until this point He bounces back and forth between Galilee (in the north of Israel) and Jerusalem/Judea (in the south of the country). When He makes people so mad they want to kill him in one place He packs up and heads to the other end of the country and teaches there while the people in the other place cool off and He stays there until He makes the people there so mad they want to kill Him and He packs up and heads to the other end of the country. He does this for 3 1/2 years but now He is on His way to the south where He will stay until He makes them so mad they want to kill Him (again) only this time He'll stay and let it happen. So He has to be dragging a bit as He nears Jerusalem (Jericho is only about 16 miles from Jerusalem so He's getting VERY close and He knows it). The day when He will fulfill the oldest prophecy in the Bible (crushing the serpent's head as the serpent strikes His heel) is nearing.

Jesus' fame precedes Him. He is still a rockstar and everywhere He goes crowds gather to see Him. Jericho is no exception. As He walks through the city basically as a parade route there's someone who wants to see Him but can't. Zacchaeus as it turns out is short. The word used here for short is the word used to describe little people in the first century. Zacchaeus isn't just kind of short- he's a little person. He can't see over the heads of the crowds and nobody's making room for him- he is after all probably the most hated man in Jericho. Why? Because Zacchaeus is a tax collector. And not just any tax collector- the chief tax collector. Tax collectors were the most hated people in first century Israel because they had become collaborators with the Romans.

The way the Romans collected taxes was that they found somebody from the local area that would collect the taxes Rome had decided to levy (they used a local so people couldn't hide wealth from a foreigner who didn't know how things worked). Rome gave the tax collector (they were actually called "tax farmers" by Rome which gives you an impression of what they actually did) an army to back them up and then let the tax farmer collect as much as he wanted to as long as Rome got what they had decided they had coming to them. Consequently tax collectors were wealthy and hated. So yeah, nobody's making way for him to see Jesus. So what does Zacchaeus do? He runs ahead and climbs a tree so he'll be able to see this guy he's heard so much about. And when Jesus comes near He looks right up at Zacchaeus which is the first thing we learn about how God feels about us in this story- He notices us:

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus... "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." Luke 19:5 (NLT)

Jesus doesn't approach the synagogue leader when He gets to Jericho. He doesn't go to the house of a leading priest (Jericho was known as the city of priests because of how many of them lived there and commuted to Jerusalem when their "shift" at the Temple came around) or any other upstanding citizen. He gravitates straight towards the most hated and the most messed up guy in the city. That's the thing about Jesus. He loves the upstanding folks just as much as the messed up folks but He knows the messed up folks need Him the most. Put Jesus in a room (or a town) anywhere with a bunch of people and pretty soon He'll find His way to the person who is the most messed up that has messed up the most. That's Zacchaeus. Jesus notices Him and don't think for a second it was an accident. Jesus knew exactly where

Zacchaeus would be and it's almost as though He has an appointment that Zacchaeus knows nothing about. Did you see what He said to him? "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." That's a weird way to invite yourself to a party, huh? But Jesus never does what we expect. He is always surprising.

So what's He doing? He's just living out spirit of the prophecy God made WAY back in Genesis chapter 3. You remember (at least you will if you read Monday's reflection), don't you? God essentially said that Adam & Eve couldn't pay the debt they'd incurred so God was going to pay it for them. Now Jesus has found the most wealthy man in town financially speaking but the man who is the most impoverished spiritually speaking and what does He do? He notices him. He notices you too. And me. He knows exactly where we are right now. He knows everywhere we've ever been. Everything we've ever done. Jesus noticed it all. And what does his attention bring about? Judgment? Accusations? Shame? Guilt? Nope. None of that. He just wants to save us from where we've been and what we've done. Do you even remember what Jesus has saved you from? I find it's easy to forget if I'm not careful. Jesus doesn't forget. He just loves you more than your messes.

Wednesday Reflection: The second thing we can learn from this story of Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus is that God doesn't just notice me- He searches for me. This is a strange way of putting it and it almost makes it sound like God doesn't already know where I am. He does. He always knows exactly where I am. So what does it mean that God "searches" for me? It's a metaphor, ok? Don't let it trip you up (at least I think it's a metaphor- I was never good at English and its technical applications- most other students were way gooder at it than I was/am).

As Jesus walked through Jericho He knew exactly where Zacchaeus was even if He was technically "searching" for him. He noticed Zacchaeus and invited Himself over to his house for dinner. It was a scandalous thing for a Jewish Rabbi to do (heck, it would have been scandalous for any ordinary Jew to go eat at Zacchaeus' place- being a Rabbi just made it that much more so). So why did He do it? It was His mission. Jesus eats with him and it changes Zacchaeus. He commits to making restitution to anyone he's robbed and repents of his unethical way of life. When he does Jesus says this in response:

This man is a true son of Abraham! And I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save people like him who were lost. Luke 19:10 (NLT)

Jesus claims Zacchaeus is a "true son of Abraham". That would have really ticked off the religious Jews. How could THIS guy be a "true son of Abraham"? Because when he heard God's call he responded with faith doing his best to follow through on that faith. Later the apostle Paul would write this:

In the same way, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God. Galatians 3: 6-7 (NLT)

The religious Jews didn't like it any better when Paul tells the Galatians that even Gentiles could be the "real children of Abraham". Jesus came to "seek and save" those who felt like they had fallen too far. Over and over we see it in Jesus' interactions. He is constantly drawn

to people who have been told their entire lives that they've gone too far for even God to reach them. Too often those who have been told that believe it. Jesus is going to smash that idea. He does it over and over again in the most shocking of ways and this is just one of them. He came to seek and save people like Zacchaeus who were "lost". This statement comes just 4 chapters after one of the most famous chapters on the gospels- Luke chapter 15. In that chapter Jesus tells 3 parables about three lost things- a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son (the prodigal son). Each story makes the point a bit differently but in all three cases something is found that was lost and in every case the result is much rejoicing and a party. In the first two stories of Luke chapter 15 someone sets out to find and bring home that which was lost. In the last story a broken hearted father allows his son to "lose" himself but waits patiently for the day he would return and be "found" once again. When the son does return the result is the same- much rejoicing and a party for everyone except the self righteous brother (a metaphor for the Pharisees).

Now here we are four short chapters later and Jesus reinforces the lessons of the parables from chapter 15 with a real life example- a chief tax collector. I imagine there were at least a couple of His disciples that thought, "you were serious about that?" I mean that sounded great when it was me that was being "found" but this guy? Seriously Lord? Yes, seriously. Nobody is too far from God and He has come to "seek and save" anyone who would be "found". I'll leave you with this scripture and let you think about what God could do through the most "lost" people you've ever known- even if that person happens to be in the mirror. There are no lengths He wouldn't go through- even if meant the cross.

The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. 2 Chronicles 16:9 (NLT)

Thursday Reflection: Another lesson we can learn from this story about Zacchaeus & Jesus is that Jesus actually wants me and you. I know that may seem obvious from the previous two takeaways that we discussed over the last couple of days (Jesus notices and searches for me) but I feel like we need to talk about it at least a bit. It is the main theme of the entire Bible- God cares about and wants you. He cares about and wants me. He cares about and wants every single human being that has ever lived and ever will live. Jesus talked about his constantly. Throughout the gospels when someone would question why He was doing what He was doing (which seemed so mystifying to just about everyone He encountered whether they were "good" people or "bad" people- both groups truly believed God only cared about the good) He would reiterate that He came for the sick. That He came for everyone- not just the spiritually healthy.

In John chapter 3 Jesus is having a discussion with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Nicodemus wasn't jumping to any conclusions about Jesus (like the majority of the religious elite) and so he comes to see Jesus to try to understand why He's doing what He's doing in the way He's doing and for the kind of people He's doing it for. Jesus is pretty vague with Nicodemus. He does that a lot. People ask a question and when they don't understand and ask clarifying questions He just gets even more nebulous in His response. Nicodemus starts out admitting that Jesus MUST be from God because nobody could do what He's doing without God's help/ approval. But Nicodemus wants to understand why Jesus is doing what He's doing the way

and for the people He's doing it for. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be "born again" and Nicodemus is confused and asks how a grown man could enter into the womb a second time? What does Jesus do? Does He explain that this is a metaphor? Nope. He says this:

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit." John 3:5-8 (NLT)

How's that Nicodemus? All clear? Sure Jesus, clear as mud. Water, Spirit, wind. What is He talking about? Jesus is often difficult to understand. He doesn't seem too bothered by us having brain cramps as we try to understand the things of the spiritual world. But there's one thing He is VERY clear about with Nicodemus and anyone else that will ask- who He has come to save:

Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. John 3:10-15 (NLT)

How's that for clearing things up? Still pretty confusing until He gets to the end of his discussion with Nicodemus- I must be lifted up (we know what that means now, don't we? Even if Nicodemus would have still be struggling to understand) so that EVERYONE who believes in me will have eternal life. Ok- that's pretty clear. But the apostle John (who is recording this conversation so you and I will know it took place) wants to make sure we all understand the main point of this discussion. John does this a lot in his gospel- he makes a sort of parenthetical insert in the middle of his account of Jesus' life to kind of narrate and drive home what he considers to be pretty important bullet points. He does that in the very next verse and in so doing writes out what would become one of the most famous verses in all of scripture:

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17 (NLT)

Michael Card gives us a wonderful way of picturing this- at moments like this when John makes one of his parenthetical inserts narrating particularly important themes you can almost picture him leaning in and with his hand to our ears whispers these observations that he doesn't want us to miss. This is one of those that John finds so important he's going to reiterate it so we don't miss it. God so loved the world. How does it feel to be included? The world has always done its best to separate and divide us. Even today we are dividing by our test scores, our popularity, our looks, our financial level, our success level. We know what it is to be excluded. But not with Jesus. He might be unclear about a lot of weird stuff that still

leaves us scratching out collective heads almost 2,000 years later but one thing is very clear. He came for all of us. The good, the bad and the ugly.

And in this story that we are looking at today we see the extremes that are included in the "world" that Jesus came not to condemn but to save- a chief tax collector named Zacchaeus that would have seemed like the person-least-likely-to-be-saved-by-God if you took a poll the day before Jesus came to town. But now? Now we see that Jesus doesn't really care what we think about the people He came to seek and save. He'll save anyone. That may be infuriating and mystifying when we look at others but never forget that there will always be those who can't believe Jesus came to seek and save someone like you! How could He do that? Doesn't He know what's really going on beneath the surface there? I'll leave you with this poem that was a favorite of Judy's grandpa Dick (some of you probably remember him- he and his wife "grandma Dene" were fixtures at Riverside in the early days and while he was far from perfect I don't know of anyone who put more thought into their faith and relationship with Jesus):

*I dreamt death came the other night and Heaven's gate swung wide.
An angel with a halo bright ushered me inside.
And there to my astonishment stood folks I'd judged and labeled
As "quite unfit", "of little worth", and "spiritually disabled".
Indignant words rose to my lips but never were set free,
For every face showed stunned surprise —
Not one expected me!*

Actually that poem is incorrect. There will always be at least one in Heaven that did expect me- Jesus. And probably the apostle John whose account of Jesus' life made sure to point out over and over who it was that Jesus came to seek and save. And probably Grandpa Dick who even though he had a tough time understanding why other people didn't see things the same way he did knew enough to recognize that there would be lots of people "saved" by Jesus that he just didn't expect to see. ;o)

Friday Reflection: So far this week we've looked at three things we can learn from the story of Jesus & Zacchaeus about how God feels about me. Today I want to very quickly go back over the story but from a different perspective- how should I respond to how God feels about me? What was Zacchaeus' part in his "salvation"? I don't mean what did Zacchaeus do to "earn" his salvation but I think we can learn a lot from what Zacchaeus does as Jesus notices him while searching for him and obviously wanting him.

First Zacchaeus climbs a tree. That means if you and I are going to respond to Jesus then we are all going to have to also climb a tree. Well, figuratively speaking. See, when Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus he does something that will invite ridicule. He looks ridiculous. Remember, this is a traditional and formal culture that Zacchaeus lives in. Even though he is a hated tax collector he still has his pride. Everybody in that culture had their pride. Climbing a tree was something children did- not adults and certainly not the most important tax collector in that part of the world. Add to that the fact that he was wearing a robe and you get an even more ridiculous picture. But Zacchaeus did it. Why? Because "seeing" Jesus was more important than whatever dignity he thought he had left.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. Luke 19:4 (NLT)

For a person in modern day America to “see” Jesus they first have to swallow their pride. They have to climb up a tree or go out on a limb figuratively speaking. Why? Because our culture ridicules the idea of giving ones life over to Jesus. Even in many churches the idea of actually doing what Jesus asks us to do with ones whole heart leaves others within those churches saying, “calm down, don’t take it so literally or seriously. You’re making the rest of us uncomfortable...” Our culture outside of the church looks on with scorn at anyone who would dare to actually consider Jesus’ way as a way of life. You’ve got to be kidding me? How could you believe that? Don’t you know fairy tales are only for children?

We are told that once we’ve “grown up” we have to leave fairy tales behind. But do we? The popularity of Harry Potter and the Twilight movies show Americans love our fairy tales. Even the Narnia series and the Lord Of The Rings which were based on the story of God in the Bible were embraced. But adopt them as a lifestyle? Only a child would consider such a thing. Jesus agrees. One day as His disciples were arguing over who was more important (again) he picked up a little child and said this:

Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:3 (NIV)

I used to think when He said this what He was getting at was that unless I became like a little child He wouldn’t let me enter the kingdom of heaven. Now I think what He’s saying is if I don’t become like a little child I won’t choose to enter the kingdom of heaven. Children don’t care what other people think about them until they hit a certain age and start to be told that what other people think matters. It matters a lot. And suddenly the childlike way that we first looked at life is repressed and we “grow up”. CS Lewis credits this rite-of-passage as the reason he rejected faith for so long. He was told to put those childish things away and grow up. And he did. Until he saw that his friend Ronald Tolkien (JRR Tolkien actually but Lewis called him Ronald) held fast to the child like faith that Lewis was so afraid of. Slowly Lewis decided to climb-a-tree and restore his faith in the childlike wonder that Jesus invites us to view this world with. And it changed him forever. If you and I are ever going to respond to Jesus and the life He invites us into we are going to have to become like little children and be willing to look ridiculous to other people who won’t understand what we’re doing.

Next Zacchaeus teaches us that not only do we have to climb-a-tree to respond to Jesus, we also have to look-beyond-the-crowd. Zacchaeus couldn’t see over the heads of the crowd that was separating him from Jesus so he climbed a tree in order to look past the crowd. When we read the story we might be tempted to believe that’s what made it possible for Jesus to see him but I am pretty sure Jesus already knew where Zacchaeus was- rather than allowing Jesus to see him I think this allowed Zacchaeus to see Jesus and be ready to respond to His call. Jesus looks up and sees him in that tree and says this to him:

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. Luke 19:5-6 (NLT)

Zacchaeus is thrilled to jump down and take Jesus home with him. But the crowd is not too pleased. They grumble over Jesus' decision to hang out with the most hated man in Jericho. And who is the crowd Zacchaeus has to look beyond? It's a different crowd than we talked about a minute ago. That crowd that ridicules us for considering Jesus are the doubters. They don't believe in God and will look down on you if you do. This crowd is different- this crowd are believers. They believe in God but they also believe in the requirements to be acceptable to this God as they see them. Violate those rules in any way and the crowd gets restless and angry.

For some of us one of the greatest barriers to following Jesus is not our unbelieving friends and family but the crowd of believers as we have always perceived them. We don't want to be associated with "those people". Those-people have always turned some of us off and we can't imagine becoming part of their crowd. The problem most people I've talked to who are hesitant to consider Jesus have is not Jesus Himself but rather Jesus' people who claim to speak for Him. I know that was a BIG problem for me. I didn't want to become one of those-people. I was afraid that if I got really serious about actually following Jesus and trying my best to do what He asks me to do I'd become this caricature of a religious automaton that always wore short sleeved shirts with a tie and slicked back hair and spoke with a southern accent and somehow managed to be able to say the word Jesus with more than two syllables. I did not want that.

But when I looked past that crowd and saw Jesus for who He Is I realized that Jesus in me was going to look different than Jesus in you. Or Jesus in anyone for that matter. I also noticed as I read the Bible for myself for the first time that when Jesus encountered a notorious sinner like Zacchaeus (just example of how Jesus responds to those who are as far away from God as you can get but at least they know how far they away they are) He was incredibly gentle. The only people Jesus got testy with were Peter (who could blame Him, am I right? Sorry Peter- I know it would have been me if I had been there with you guys) and the Pharisees (for totally different reasons than his testiness at Peter). With the Pharisees Jesus would let them have it big time. I started to realize that much of Jesus' energy was aimed at the crowd of the religious elites and that He has a bigger problem with self righteous, holier than thou holy rollers than I do:

The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses. So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden. Matthew 23:2-4 (NLT)

So if I'm going to respond to Jesus' call in my life I'm going to have to climb a tree (be willing to look foolish or childish), look beyond the crowd and then I'm going to have to welcome Jesus into my life. But we'll finish this up tomorrow on Saturday because this one turned out to be so stinking long I just couldn't leave it as a one day reflection even if that was my intention when I started out.

Saturday Reflection: That's exactly what Zacchaeus does. Having Jesus over for dinner wasn't Zacchaeus' idea- it was Jesus'. But when Zacchaeus realizes Jesus is willing to eat with him he jumps at the chance:

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy.
Luke 19:6 (NLT)

What does that have to do with me, you ask? Everything. Jesus has noticed you (He never lost track of you but going with the points from earlier in the week...), He has been searching for you and He genuinely wants you to invite Him into your life. Look at what He says here:

I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me. Revelation 3:20 (NCV)

Jesus is knocking. Do you hear it yet? Maybe you heard it a long time ago and you invited Him into your life and now the lesson for you is to not become part of the crowd that keeps others from opening the door to Him. I always used to wonder why Jesus said here that if I open up He'll come in and eat with me. Well, as the crowd knew- who you eat with says a lot about you. A good religious Jew would NEVER dream of eating with a "sinner". It would kill their reputation. Eating with someone is staking your reputation on that person.

And Jesus is willing to eat with the likes of you. He's willing to eat with the likes of me! He's willing to stake His reputation on relationships with each one of us. Have you ever been embarrassed because a friend or family member did something, well, embarrassing? Imagine how Jesus must feel. And yet He invites everyone and anyone to "eat with Him". Mind. Blown.

But if I do then Jesus will not only come into our lives- He will guide us down a path of great mystery and wonder:

God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 1 Corinthians 1:25-27 (NIV)

The mystery of the ages was this- Christ-in-you-the-hope-of-glory. Is that crazy to anyone else? Christ in Ed? Christ in Julie? Christ in Alice? Christ in Ralph? Christ in Hank? (I didn't choose those names for any particular reason so if you're named here don't think it's because I'm blown away that He is willing to indwell your life. Or let me rephrase- I'm not anymore blown away that He'd choose to be associated with you and indwell your life than that He's willing to live in me or any other human I've ever met).

The mystery of the ages is that God would one day dwell not just with His people but within His people. And when we are willing to climb a tree (look foolish or childish) and look beyond the crowd (the ones who might judge that you are not worthy of God) and invite Jesus into your life then He will not just eat with you- He will guide your life down a path that is more mysterious and miraculous and yes, even magical- not in the way our culture sees magic (as illusion or demonic) but in the realest sense of the word. The sense of the word as we see it used in Tolkien's Lord Of The Rings or Lewis' Narnia series or even as it's used in Harry Potter (yes... Harry Potter. A book where the sacrificial self-sacrificing love of Harry's mom saves him from the dark magic of He-who-shall-not-be-named and then as he grows up and learns of the legacy left behind by his parents he chooses the light and life giving magical world and rejects the dark arts until through his own self sacrifice and imperfect attempts at always choosing love and friendship he somehow defeats the powers

of darkness once and for all and restores the world to harmony, peace and joy. Sounds vaguely like a lot of other stories attempting to tell the age old story of God in a way that modern readers can grasp it). With Jesus you will live a mysterious and magical life where God proves Himself to you over and over and yet you won't be able to prove it to anyone else except by the way He shines in and out of your life.

Don't ever let anyone tell you fairy tales are for children. The testimony of the Bible is that a dark wizard has cast his spell over this world and yet the ultimate champion of light (Light Himself/Itself the apostle John would say) entered into our world taking on our form and flesh and living the life we should have lived but couldn't and dying the death we were destined for but don't have to experience now simply because the Rescuer shared His reward that rightfully belongs only to Him but He extravagantly and graciously and mercifully showers upon anyone who will invite Him into their lives.

The Bible is a fairy tale (used in the least fictional way I can think of- this isn't fiction it's reality on a level we will never fully understand this side of eternity). It is THE fairy tale. It is a fairy tale that tells the story of how we can live lives of mystery and magic and miracles through the power of the Rescuer. It is the story of how we can discover the meaning of life- not the generic meaning-of-life most of us seek but the personal what-on-earth-am-I-doing-here question all of us long to understand whether we've ever truly voiced it or not. It unlocks the answer to the question why-did-God-make-me-the-way-I-am-and-put-me-in-this-place-I-find-myself?

Zacchaeus was surprised and delighted to learn that was the reality of why Jesus came to this earth. Are you? Am I?