

# How to Change the World

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hey everybody, Pastor Anthony here. How are you all doing? I'll admit I'm tired this week. I will also admit that this is going to be a sermon. This is the least prepared I've been for a sermon for a while. So it's going to be me and the Bible and this camera and you all, and we're going to see what's going to happen. Yeah, you know, I think it's okay to admit that 2020. It's a heck of a year and it can take its toll. And I think, you know, there are good days and there are bad days and there are good weeks and there are bad weeks. And there's the fact that I think emotionally, a lot of us are still back in February somewhere, even though physically we just entered July. I saw that on Twitter. And yeah, we're just all in all sorts of different places.

So for those of you that, you know, scale one to 10, you're out of 10, this is the best day of your life. Great. Praise God. I'm genuinely happy for you because I've had some really good days. And for those of you that scale of one to 10, you're out of zero and you are, you are ready to give up and you are ready to, you know, just, just kind of, you don't know why you're here right now. I'm here. I hear you. I know that feeling too. Today's one of those tired days for me. And I'm willing, I'm willing to admit that. So a couple of things before we jump into the word.

Our dear friend, one of our trustees, Ken Holmes, he is off to a new job for the University of New Hampshire, which means that he will no longer be here at the table. And that makes us really sad because Ken is this wise, kind gentleman who is part of my hiring process. It was wonderful to get to know him for just a little bit of time. And it's one of my beliefs that when a church, you know, is, has somebody who is moving, leaving off to do something else, we're sad about that, but we're also joyful because God is a sending God. God continually sends his people out into the world to do amazing things, to change the world. What we've been talking about all month in this series, we want to change the world. And a church I used to be a part of used to talk about the idea of we're all cleverly disguised missionaries. You're not just a lawyer. You are a lawyer who's cleverly disguised a missionary for the gospel, the good news of Jesus. You're not just a teacher or a doctor or a nurse or a pet retail specialist. Like you are that because God has cleverly disguised you to show his love and his kindness and his mercy and his goodness into the world. So we want to pray for Ken and for his new mission, his new assignment, his new job, and that God would use him. So would you pray with me?

[ 2 : 5 1 ] Father, Son, and Spirit, we thank you that you are the sending God. You are the God on a mission, that you are the first mover. You move towards us and then you take us and you love us and you say, now take this love and share it with the world. So God, we pray for Ken.

We thank you for the wisdom, for the discernment, for the experience that he brought to the table. And God, I pray that as he moves to a new place, to a new job, to a new church, that your spirit would go before him, behind him, beside him, above him, below him, within him, that he may show your love to all he comes in contact with. That Christ would be in the mouth of all who speak of Ken. Christ would be in the hearts of all who think of him. God, would you use his ministry in this new position for your good news, your gospel to be shared. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

All right, so like I said, it's me and a Bible and an iPhone and you on the other side of that screen. So if you have a Bible of any sort, power it on, turn it on, open it up, click on the link that Jessica is going to put in the chat. We are in the book of Luke, chapters 18 and 19, chapter 18, verse 35, and going from there. And over the past few weeks, we've been talking about how Jesus has calibrated the concepts of invitation and challenge.

Jesus, God in the flesh, Jesus was this highly invitational person. People love to be around him. People love to eat and dine with him. He was this person that he would gather folks around him because he was so highly invitational. And Jesus was also highly challenging. He would get invited

over for dinner. Pastor Angela talked about this last week. Invited over for dinner and he would say, hey, let me tell you all the ways you guys suck. And he would do that in the context of relationship. He wasn't standing on a street corner yelling about how you suck. He was saying, like, this is the way that you are hurting people and abusing people. And I'm going to talk to you about it because I care for you because I love you. I want you to know this is the way that you are hurting people around you and your society. He's bringing challenge. I believe that the best kind of relationships are ones that have both invitation and challenge. Invitation says, I love you. I'm concerned about you. I will accept you no matter where you're at. And challenge says, like, I love you too much to not, like, call out your crap, to challenge you towards growth. And those are the best kinds of friendships. Friends who don't just, like, you know, say lies to our face and say, like, everything you're doing is wonderful when we're, like, you know, skinning cats for fun. No. Imitation and challenge says, I love you. And let's grow together. The relationships, a phrase I think I coined of consensual correction. Like, sometimes you get corrected by somebody. You know, somebody flips you off while you're driving. That's not consensual correction. Like, you didn't ask to be corrected by a stranger. And it never feels great. It's rarely appropriate. Sometimes appropriate, but rarely.

[ 6 : 01 ] Relationships of consensual correction say, we're in a relationship together. And I'm giving you permission to call out my crap, to point out when I'm wrong, to say, hey, are you sure that's the best course of action, the best way to say that, the best way to phrase that. Relationships of consensual correction. I will, can I call out your crap? Will you call out mine? Or is the ability to grow, to grow intentionally, on purpose, to say, I recognize that I am deeply loved and accepted, and I can move forward. And I need people in my life, friendships in my life, to move forward.

So that's what we've been exploring. We're going to take a look at the book of Luke, the story of Jesus in the city of Jericho, and see the ways that Jesus is calibrating both invitation and challenge all the time, and how Jesus is changing the world as he does it. So I'm just going to go through this like verse by verse. I don't have slides. I don't have like any pretty graphics or funny jokes.

I just want to tell you the story of Jesus. Luke 18, verse 35. As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside, begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. And they told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. Jesus is well into his public ministry now. Jesus has a reputation of being a healer, a rabbi, confronting the authorities of his day. And we also know that Jesus is making his way up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. And he has confided with his followers that this will be the last time he does this, because the Messiah, Jesus, is going to be killed. So he's got this crowd of people following him, not really understanding what he's saying, because messiahs aren't supposed to die. So that's weird.

And if he knows he's going to be killed, then why is he going to Jerusalem with no army, no sword, no supplies. And he goes to Jericho, and there's this blind man who hears that Jesus of Nazareth, the famous rabbi, is passing by. So he calls out, Jesus, son of David, this messianic term. Jesus, son of David, this kingly term. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And those who led the way rebuked him, the blind man, told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, son of David, have mercy on me.

So Jesus is making his way through the city. There's a blind beggar, and the crowd says, shut up. Now, if you're a beggar in first century Palestine or Judea, this is how you made your living. You would go out to the city gates. You would be a beggar for a variety of reasons, usually because society said that there was something wrong with your body. Society said that your lack of ability to see or to hear or to walk made you an outcast to society, and you are going to beg. Society also said that beggars were an important part of society because it gave you the ability to offer alms to beggars. Beggars offered this important role that people, you know, who were not considered outcasts could show how wonderful and generous and kind they were by giving money to beggars. So they kept the beggars nearby for the sake of their own, you know, desire to be seen to look good. So this beggar is about to get in the way of Jesus, the famous rabbi and teacher, and they say, get out of the way.

[ 9 : 36 ] We want to see Jesus. Verse 40, Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. Now, this is, this is great invitation and challenge happening at the same time. Jesus invites this man who begs for a living to come to him. Invitation. And he's also rebuking the crowd that told the blind man to stay away. The very people who say, hey, you're not allowed to be with Jesus. Jesus says, hey, can you, can you, can you bring him here? Can you bring him to me, please? The very people who rejected, who shunted aside, who, who, who said, get out of here, shut up, get out

of the way. Those very people Jesus orders, commands to, to bring that person to him. Like what a, what a fascinating example of like rebuke and challenge. I know, I am certain that many of you looking at this screen, you have experienced this very thing that because of some reason the society has decided outside of scripture, outside of God's will, society has decided, hey, you don't belong in the church. Hey, you don't belong within the, the, the reach of God's love. And Jesus is like, um, actually, no, that's not how this works.

Jesus is, is the kind of God who sees those who are rejected, pushed aside, told they don't belong, and takes the very people who, who are the rejecters, the pusher-asiders, tells those very people, actually, if you can do me a favor and, and bring the rejected people to me.

Great example of invitation and challenge. Jesus stopped, ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, what do you want me to do for you? There's a, there's so much packed into this, this phrase that Jesus asks. Number one, don't ever presume to be the expert authority on someone else's pain. Don't do it. Don't ever assume to be the expert authority on someone else's pain or lived experience. Jesus, God in the flesh, has a blind man brought to him by this wicked crowd. And Jesus doesn't assume that he's the authority on what this person wants. He doesn't assume that he's the authority on what this person needs. He is going to learn, Jesus is going to learn from this person, described as a blind beggar. What is it that you want? Now, another piece going on in this.

If you had been a beggar in first century Judea all your life, and you hear that Jesus the healer is coming to town, you would have to stop and take account of what it is that you want. You have had one predictable life for years. You go out to the outskirts of the city, you beg, you receive money, that's how you live. And you have the opportunity brought to you to radically alter that life. But remember, because of how society has treated you, you didn't get to go to school. You didn't get to be taught any trade or skills. You were removed from the oikos, the family, the household, as quickly as possible so you could beg, and that's how you would bring money in.

[13:10] And so if you are going to go from not being able to see to being able to see, then there's the chance that you will now even struggle more in society because of how society has treated you, raised you, rejected you. Are you sure that you want this? I also think this text gets a little bit, a tiny bit into like ableism of Jesus doesn't assume that just because this person can't see, that they want to cast aside that kind of lifestyle. I don't know if you've ever met a blind person or a deaf person, but like you would not do well to say that their, you know, inability to see or to hear in the ways that seeing and hearing people describe it, like, is a detriment to them.

Don't do that. Not a great idea. So Jesus has this person brought to them and then, again, doesn't assume that he's the expert on this person's experience, says, what is it that you want me to do for you? And then the person speaks for themselves. Lord, I want to see. They're given autonomy. They're given agency, the ability to speak for themselves. What is it that you want?

This is what I want. And Jesus said to him, receive your sight, your faith, your belief has healed you. And immediately he received a sight and followed Jesus, praising God. And then this is the part that just cracks me up. When all the people saw it, they also praised God. Like this fickle crowd that was holding back the person, person receives a miracle. And now the crowd's like, well, that was great. This was our idea the whole time. It's just, just dumb. Yeah. There's so many things I can think about this of like, oh, I was reading on Twitter today. Like there's a, there's a college professor who always takes a survey of his class of if you lived in, you know, 17, 18th, 19th century, would you have been an abolitionist? And miracle of miracles, every single student says, well, yes, of course, like, okay, you're saying that you would be willing to have an opinion different from the majority. You would be willing to be publicly shamed because of that contrary opinion.

You would be willing to speak up and fight on the behalf of those who have been oppressed. You would be willing, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot. And like, you have to say you're not only willing, but you have a track record of doing that. You have a track record of standing up for those who have been oppressed or marginalized of being publicly ridiculed because of your, you know, so-called progressive beliefs that all people should be treated equal. Like, that's what you're saying.

Every single person in this classroom would have been an abolitionist? I don't know. And like, I think about this crowd that's thrilled to see the miracle, thrilled that Jesus has, you know, done their little parlor trick for them when they're the very crowd that was preventing it from happening it in the first place. I love this passage. There's Jesus just has so much going on.

[ 16 : 18 ] Don't, what am I trying to say? Don't follow the crowd. Don't be an advocate for like your own sake.

Jesus, you know what Jesus could have done? Jesus could have given the beggar money. And in Middle Eastern culture, if a beggar receives money, the expectation is that the beggar is meant to shout and declare as loud as they could about the excellence of the person who has given the money.

In today's language, we talk about like performative activism, that I am posting this thing on social media just to show like how woke I am. And we're all trying to outwoke each other. And Jesus could have done that. But he doesn't make his advocacy and his fight against the oppressor and his fight for the oppressed about himself. He doesn't put the money in the beggar's hand and expect the beggar to shout about how great Jesus is. And if you read through the gospels, like Jesus says constantly to the people that he heals and redeems and removes from oppression, he says like, don't, don't tell anybody about it.

Okay. Okay. We're going to keep going. So keep going. Chapter 19. This is a great example of how like the chapter breaks in scripture often don't make sense and don't help our reading because Jesus is still in Jericho. Verse 35, he approaches Jericho. Verse 19, he enters Jericho and is passing through. The passing through thing shouldn't be ignored because Jesus would have been expected to accept the hospitality of the city, this crowd that's gathered to see how great Jesus is and pushes blind people aside to do it. Jesus is going to pass through. So he's kind of like shaking the dust off of his Jews of like, I'm not going to stay here. You guys are a bunch of jerks. And a man there, 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 because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. And actually the translation, the Greek actually says he wanted to see Jesus, but he was short and because of the crowd could not see. And I think that distinction is important because he's, it's saying like he couldn't see because of his short stature, which five foot four, I get. And the crowd is like actively preventing Zacchaeus from, from seeing

Jesus. They've prevented the blind man, the oppressed, and now they're preventing the tax collector, the oppressor. That's the kind of crowd we're dealing with. Zacchaeus, he's a tax collector. He would have been a Jewish man seen as a co-conspirator with the Roman empire because the tax collectors were given a certain percentage that they needed to collect from their village and hand off to the Romans. But that percentage was kept secret. And so the tax collector could say, hey, I need to get 25% of your, you know, proceeds from your fishing expertise and trade. In reality, the Romans only asked for 20%, but he's getting an extra 5% on the side. So tax collectors were hated. They were seen as collaborators with the enemy and just kind of selfish pricks, getting rich off of other people's oppression and like a traitor to their own culture and race and ethnicity. So the crowd is actively preventing Zacchaeus from seeing

[ 19 : 38 ] Jesus. So verse 4, Zacchaeus ran. Big deal that phrase. Wealthy people, wealthy oppressors don't run.

Remember the story of the prodigal son? The son demands his inheritance, runs, spends it all, realizes that he should go back to his father. He'd be better off treated as a servant, excuse me, a servant in his father's home than, you know, eating pig slop. So he starts walking towards his father's home. And while he's still a long ways off, the father sees the son and starts running towards him. I look ridiculous in this screen. Like that is a huge moment in scripture because wealthy land-owning men in Middle Eastern culture don't run for nothing. And so Zacchaeus, there's something going on in his heart. He's so badly wants to see Jesus. He's being rejected by his people and he is oppressing his people at the same time. And yet he is willing to be shamed publicly even more than he already has to run and to see Jesus. So he runs and he climbs a sycamore tree. Another big deal. Rich, wealthy people in no cultures ever just climb trees for the heck of it. There's another kind of weird thing going on here. So in rabbinical thought, if a ceremonially unclean person stands underneath or near a tree, and that tree has like branches that, you know, hang over, anybody else who's also underneath the shade of that tree would also be seen as ceremonially unclean. And so Zacchaeus has this thought. Zacchaeus runs to the tree, climbs into it. He's trying to hide. But he's also like, if anybody sees me in the tree, they won't come near because they'll become unclean too. Zacchaeus would have been seen religiously as an unclean person to be around because of the oppression that he was doing to his people. He would have been seen as unclean to be around. And so no one's going to come underneath that tree and

get unclean too. And if you're ceremonially unclean, it's a hard word, you're not going to be, no one's going to come over for dinner. Everyone's going to keep like a wide distance away from you as much as possible. And anybody who enters into your home also becomes rejected, unclean. So Jesus reaches the spot. He looks up. He sees this wealthy dude hanging out in a tree. And Jesus says, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. This is what makes Jesus such a fascinating, enigmatic figure. Verses before, invitation and challenge. He invites the oppressed person to come near, chastises the oppressor crowd to, you know, get over yourself. And then sees the oppressor, Zacchaeus, tax collector Zacchaeus, and says, I'm going to have dinner at your place. This is what makes Jesus, quite frankly, difficult to follow. Because depending on where you are on the wokeness scale, it is relatively easy, relatively, to like, you know, call out oppression, to call out oppressors. It is much harder to do that and also build relationships with the people that are, you know, causing problems in our society, with the people who are propagating systems of oppression. It is much harder to both call it out, build relationships, to use our privilege and our voice and our, and whatever possibility, possible ways we can to, like, help society get better and help people who have been marginalized get out of those situations.

And to also build relationships with the people, with the systems that have oppressed for the sake of undoing that oppression. This is what makes Jesus so fascinating. He will talk about, Jesus talks about, like, going and find the lost sheep, the shepherd that leaves the 99 and goes and finds the lost sheep, the reckless love of God. And Jesus is also willing to meet with, like, Pharisees and Sadducees in their homes and in the cover of night, so they can, like, ask Jesus some hard questions.

Now, not everybody can do that, and not all of us should do that. Like, I'm not, this is not a sermon about how you need to build a relationship with your abuser or your oppressor or, you know, with the people who have repeatedly hurt you. There's something going on with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus seems to be a person of peace for Jesus, because when, when Jesus says, I'm going to stay at your house today, Zacchaeus comes down at once and welcomes Jesus gladly. And so, like, Zacchaeus is showing the willingness, the openness to have the conversation, the willingness and the openness to maybe be confronted by Jesus, because Jesus has a reputation, as we saw last week, of, like, saying, hey, cut the crap, woe to you, Pharisees and scribes. Like, Zacchaeus knows what Jesus is capable of, and Zacchaeus is still having, willing to have that relationship and that conversation with Jesus. So this is not a sermon about, you know, being really nice to the people who hurt you.

[ 25 : 12 ] It's not what I'm saying. But we do bear some responsibility, if we're going to be people who follow the way of Jesus, we do bear some responsibility for not just cutting off every relationship that makes us, like, angry. We bear some responsibility to confront ourselves with the words of Jesus, and to maintain relationship with those who are still actively hurting, oppressing, harming, abusing others, so that we can see change if they show themselves open and willing to change.

Verse 7, all the people saw this and began to mutter. He has gone to be the guest. The Greek literally says he's gone to spend the night at the house of a sinner. And so the crowd pushes the blind beggar aside, now sees Jesus going over to dinner to the collaborator, the co-conspirator with the Roman emperor's house. And they're just as upset about this. Jesus is making himself ceremonially unclean.

He's giving himself a bad reputation so he can have dinner with a co-conspirator for the Roman Empire. Verse 8, there's a scene change. We're now inside Zacchaeus's home. They, uh, when you eat in a first century home, you, you, you do it reclining, kind of leaning on your side, a table called a triclidium.

Um, and then the, the guest, the person of honor, the homeowner, Zacchaeus, stands up and he says 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. Now, we read that, we start doing the math, and we think that's not possible. You'll lose all your money. You can't, you can't possibly do that. Again, first century expectation. If you make a measured, a calculated, you know, promise, I'm going to pay back everyone precisely, you know, this amount, this much interest, people won't take you seriously. But if you say it with hyperbole, then all of a sudden people's ears perk up and they know that what you're saying is going to have some force of truth behind it. And so

what Zacchaeus is saying, even though mathematically doesn't make sense, it's the first century Jewish way of saying, this is really what I'm going to do. The hyperbole actually speaks to the truth of what Zacchaeus is saying, not the opposite. Okay? So I'm going to give half of my possessions to the poor. I'm going to pay back four times the amount of anybody that I've cheated.

Modern day terms, this is reparations. This is the, the collaborator, the co-conspirator with the Roman Empire who has taken money from his people saying like, well, that was wrong. Let's make this right in an economic way.

[ 28 : 05 ] There are actual repercussions for what Zacchaeus is going to do. And Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham. The son of man came to seek and to save the lost. And this speaks to the idea of like what salvation is.

Repentance, the idea of, you know, giving our lives to Jesus, of, of, of getting saved, being born again, all of those phrases. It's not merely something that happens internally. It's not merely something that happens within our hearts. It has practical, physical, economical, relational, emotional consequences that this is the way that we were behaving. This is the way that we were acting. And now we're going to try something different in an effort to follow the way of God. And so like our, our faith, our following of Jesus, it's not just like a touchy-feely heart thing. It needs to have practical consequences. If we believe that God is a God of love, if God is a person, God who loves everyone, like that, well, that has some practical repercussions for how we set up our church. If we believe that God is a God who cares about the marginalized and the oppressed and those who have been systematically hurt and abused and harmed, well, that may have some practical repercussions for how the church is going to respond to that harm. And we see that here, the story of Zacchaeus. It's not until Zacchaeus says, this is what I'm going to undo the harm I've caused that Jesus says, today salvation has come.

It wasn't a sinner's prayer. It wasn't like a nice diary entry. It was, this is the action I'm going to take. This is how we don't be a jerk. We need to confront. We need to say to those who marginalize and oppress and hurt and harm, hey, stop that. In fact, I would rather you be an usher, a servant to those you have harmed, rather than keep doing it. That's the challenge piece of Jesus. And then there's the invitational piece of Jesus that says, hey, have you been hurt, harmed, abused, wrecked in your life?

Let's, let's have dinner. Let's talk. I'm not the expert on your pain. You are. Can we, can, can we talk about it? Can I, can I submit my, it's myself to learning from you? And then there's the invitational piece of Jesus that we grow maybe a little bit more uncomfortable with. Hey, person who is hurt, harmed, abused, wrecked, set up systems of harm and abuse. Hey, can I have dinner at your place?

Grace in itself is transformative. The grace that Jesus shows Zacchaeus, co-conspirator with the Roman Empire, changes him. And again, don't hear me wrong. I'm not telling you to be nice to your abusers. I'm not telling you to be nice to the people who have made your lives a living hell at some point. But I'm saying not every single one of us can abscond, can, can remove ourselves of the responsibility of maintaining relationship with those who are in some way hurting or harming others. Some of us, most of us, if we're going to follow the way of Jesus, maybe don't need to be, you know, buddy-buddy with our own hurt people who hurt us. But we need to be willing to have relationships and conversations with those who are hurting others so that we can work towards a more just, a more loving society on earth as it is in heaven. Thy kingdom come. So that's my, that's my tired and unprepared sermon. Like I said, there are no bullet points. I've got no pretty slides. But I think when we follow the way of Jesus, when we, when we refuse to re to abscond from the responsibility of being both invitational and challenging, of loving all well and loving them and building relationships of consensual correction, hey, can you, can you point out the messed up stuff in my life? If we can do that, I believe that we can change the world for the better.

[ 32 : 39 ] Would you pray with me? Jesus, I thank you for the example that you set. I'll admit, Jesus, it's hard. It's a hard example. I don't regularly heal people on the side of the road and I don't regularly invite myself over to the homes of those that I vehemently disagree with. And yeah, I see your example, Jesus, and I want to be transformed into the kind of person who can do both of those things. And so I ask that your spirit living within me would change me, change my heart to be both more invitational, more loving, more capable of seeing the good in others, and also more challenging, more willing to speak out and to speak up the sake of those who have been oppressed, harmed, abused, marginalized.

Jesus, I trust your goodness and I trust that you are already up to something good. I don't just wonder what Jesus would do. I'm wondering what you're doing right now because I want to join you there. So help me, help me God. I pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.