

Text: Luke 19:10; Mark 10:45

Title: “Invite and Engage”

INTRODUCTION

Before I get started this morning I want to ask you to take note of the new semester of weekday Bible studies that are being offered for men and for women. Two of those will begin this Wednesday night at 6:15.

Also I want to ask you to pray for our team that will be leaving this evening for India. We will dedicate the IBS Training Center that a large contribution from our church a year ago has made possible. We'll conduct the first training event in that facility for 50-60 leaders and pastors from Karnataka. We'll also have our first contact with the Rama Shatriya people group which our church has adopted. So far as we know there is no one preaching the Gospel to this group of people, no one planting churches among them. This is also the 40th anniversary of the BBH and we will participate in their celebration. I ask that you pray for us.

Open your Bibles to Luke 19. We've just come off of a season where we have focused on the great doctrine of the incarnation, the coming of the Christ into this world. This morning I want us to focus on not just what He did, but why He did it. Why did Jesus come into this world? You see if you and I understand that we will understand better why *we* are in this world. Jesus knew why He had been sent by the Father into the world, and He stated it clearly for us. First, I'll ask you to look to Luke 19:10. Read. Now hold your place and turn to Mark 10:45. Read.

There you have it. Jesus clearly stated why He had come into the world. And we have the same mission. Our mission as Christ-followers is really pretty simple, though we often try to make it complicated and unattainable. It is simply to allow Jesus Christ to take absolute and complete control of our lives, repenting of our efforts to rule and run our own lives, trusting completely in His power alone to transform us through His death and resurrection, and then to spend every day of the rest of our lives following Him.

Matthew 10:25a - It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.

Is that the way we see ourselves ... students striving to be like our teacher ... servants striving to be like our Master? This is at the heart of what we call discipleship. A disciple, a Christ-follower is someone who routinely does what Jesus did and taught.

So Jesus marks off the course of our lives and we do not have the freedom to just live any way we want to live. His priorities must be our priorities in life. And it's very easy to get off track.

ILLUSTRATION – I mentioned last Sunday that I was to run a marathon on New Year's Day. And, thanks be to God, I ran the race and finished in a good time, but it would have been a little faster if I had not taken a little detour. The course of this race wound its way through a wooded park, and the course made many turns along the way. The other challenge is that there were many trails that crossed the marathon route. So the race organizers had placed very clear directional signs at each turn or intersection so we would know which way to go. After the race got started the runners spread out and the runners ahead of me were out of my sight because of the many curves in the trail along the course. Suddenly I came to an intersection that was not marked. Should I go straight or turn? So I went straight and found myself at a dead end. It then occurred to me that for the last several hundred yards or so I had been off the race route. Well, I turned around and ran back to the place where I missed the turn. That's the first time I've ever done that in a race. I know better, but I just wasn't paying attention to the directions. I went straight when I should have turned.

And if we're not paying careful attention, as believers and as a church, when the Master tells us to go a particular way, we miss the turn and end up out of His will.

Well, Jesus knew why He had come into the world, and He wanted His disciples to understand that was to be their purpose as well.

So are we doing the things that Jesus would do if he were walking this earth? I'm challenging us a church today to make these priorities in the life of Jesus our main priorities in the coming year ... inviting and engaging. "Inviting" is our priority in the first half of 2013, and "engaging" is the priority of the second half of 2013.

Let's talk first about the priority of...

PRIORITY #1 – INVITING OTHERS TO CHRIST

And this flows out of the very clear, stated purpose of our Master.

Luke 19:10 - For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

ILLUSTRATION –The "Blueprint for Spiritual Formation," that you see displayed in various places and hear us talking about from time to time, is our target. It reminds that we "join God in developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ." Then it goes on to outline what the Bible tells us what a Christ-follower looks like ... seven attributes of a Christ-follower. A few months ago we conducted a survey of the spiritual needs of people in our church based upon the Blueprint. And perhaps the top need indicated by the most of our people is that they need to grow in their ability to share Jesus Christ with others.

Last year we focused on understanding and identifying your relational circle, the people whom God has brought into your life who need to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. And specifically this year we want you to develop the ability to invite them to Jesus Christ.

Matthew 4:19 (NIV) - "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Has it occurred to you, follower of Jesus, that Jesus just wants to climb inside your body and do His work through you every day. He is living in you by His Spirit, and He intends to make Himself at home in your body and to help Himself to your life today to accomplish His purposes.

Now let's just drill down into this story here in Luke 19 to see exactly how Jesus lived out this priority in His life and ministry.

JESUS NOTICED PEOPLE THAT OTHERS IGNORED.

Luke 19:1-2 (NIV) - 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.

So we're introduced to a man who worked for the RRS (Rome Revenue Service). He was a tax collector by the name of Zacchaeus. His name means "pure" or "righteous." But when we first meet him he was anything but pure and righteous. And Jesus has other plans for him.

Tax collectors were among the most hated people in the Jewish society. The country was under the domination of the Roman Empire, who taxed the nation and used the money to pay and supply the army that occupied the land. And tax collectors helped the Romans do this ... and they became very wealthy as they did. So tax collectors were considered traitors ... sort of like we view people who help fund terrorist organizations in other lands.

But there's something else going on in Zacchaeus' life:

Luke 19:3-4 (NIV) - 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.

So Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. Was it merely curiosity? Perhaps. Maybe he was as lonely as he was wealthy ... rich in money, but poor in friends. He had heard that this Jesus had gained a reputation as a friend to sinners and tax collectors.

Whatever the case I can just imagine Zacchaeus trying to squeeze his way through the crowd to get to a place where he could see Jesus. And Jesus notices the people that others ignore. And notice what Jesus does. Three essential skills:

- **Jesus saw the man.**

Luke 19:5 (NIV) - When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him,

Jesus noticed Zacchaeus. He *knows* Zacchaeus. Jesus notices people that others ignore. He spots people in the crowd. That's the way God is. He looks down and doesn't see a crowd ... He sees a person. He sees you and He sees me. When you feel alone you need to know that God knows and loves you.

And if we are to be involved with Jesus as He seeks and saves those who are lost, He will cause us to notice people. Just think about the people we pass every day at work, at school, in stores, at the gym. Let's learn to see people through the eyes of Jesus as He brings them into our circle.

JESUS ENGAGED PEOPLE THAT OTHERS REJECTED.

- **Jesus spoke to the man.**

Luke 19:5 (NIV) - When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

Jesus doesn't just notice Zacchaeus, He engages him. And before they are introduced, Jesus knew Zacchaeus' name and everything about him.

It's so easy for us to get so absorbed in our "to do" list that we just don't see the people God is bringing across our paths every day. Let's just lift our heads up, get outside of ourselves and take seriously our belief that God so orders our steps to put us in the path of people He intends to engage through us. A simple, effective skill is just learning to speak to people. A conversation has to start somewhere.

- **Jesus summoned the man.**

Here's where the invitation comes in. Jesus actually invited himself to the Zacchaeus' house.

Luke 19:5b (NIV) - "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

Notice the wording carefully. "Come down immediately. I *must* stay at your house today." That little word "must" signals to us that Jesus was on a mission, not just into this man's house, but into his heart.

Luke 19:6 (NIV) - So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

Of course he would! People like this listened to and responded to Jesus because they knew He loved them unconditionally. And if this is to work in our lives we're going to have to shed our layer of self-righteousness and be real with lost people.

Jesus noticed people that others ignored. He engaged people that others rejected. And...

JESUS TRANSFORMED PEOPLE THAT OTHERS GAVE UP ON.

And as a result of this encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus' life was transformed. He repents of his sins, and Jesus announced that salvation came to that house that day. And then Jesus reminds them:

Luke 19:10 (NIV) - For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

Jesus uses this episode to teach and remind us why He came, and why we are still here in the world. Jesus would say, “See this? This is what it is all about as far as I am concerned.”

So we’re going to focus this year on inviting others to Christ. We have planned men’s events and women’s events, and Easter services and a tremendous marriage conference ... all as opportunities to invite others who need to know Jesus.

But the second priority for this year is also rooted in Jesus’ reason for coming into this world:

PRIORITY #2 – ENGAGING IN MEANINGFUL ACTS OF SERVICE

Now I’ll only just mention this today, but I want to get into our heads and our hearts. Again, this flows out of the very clear purpose of our Master. Let’s just turn to that passage again.

Mark 10:45 - For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Now this purpose statement of Jesus flows out of an embarrassing episode in the lives of His disciples. In Mark 10:32-34 Jesus pulls His 12 disciples aside on their way to Jerusalem, and He says, “Men, you need to know what is ahead for me. He told them that He, the Son of Man, was going to be betrayed, condemned to death, crucified, but on the third day He would rise again.

But then something bizarre happens. Two of Jesus’ disciples, brothers James and John, make a strange request of Jesus. They’ve fixated on the statement that Jesus had made about his rising again. They understood this much about the Messiah, and they wanted to benefit from that position of glory. They said, “Jesus, when you come into your glory, will you let us share in it? Let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left hand.” In essence, they were calling shotgun. Jesus, we want to sit in the front seat with you.

You see, they wanted the glory of the resurrection without the pain of the crucifixion. And Jesus rebukes them. “You don’t know what you’re asking. The only way you can experience my glory is to experience my suffering.

And Jesus lays before them two essential attitudes that are at the root of this priority:

- **A willingness to sacrifice**

Mark 10:38 - “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

This life of serving others will be marked by sacrifice. Jesus described it as a cup that is to be consumed and an immersion (baptism) into a suffering that is beyond description. In other words ... sacrifice.

Now look at the first words of Mark 10:39 ... “we can.” That’s just pure, self-confident pride. And Jesus said, “Oh, you will. Yes, you will suffer and die for me later, but only my Father in heaven can determine who will sit in these places of honor.”

In our sinfulness we want the easy place, the comfortable place, the entertaining place. Jesus said, “To come after me, you have to be willing to deny yourself, take up your cross of suffering and sacrifice, and follow me.”

Well, the other disciples are miffed because James and John just called shotgun with Jesus. So Jesus calls them all together and teaches them to true essence of greatness is not measured by how many people serve us, but how many people we serve.

And with that another important attitude:

- **A willingness to be hidden**

One of the basic human needs is to be noticed. And so often we do all kinds of things to be noticed. We brag, or we dress a particular way, or we may even act out ... all so that others will notice us and think more highly of us.

And Jesus talks about people who are great because of the number of people who serve them.

Mark 10:42 - "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

But Christ-followers will not be known by the number of people who serve them, but by how many people they serve.

Mark 10:43-44 - Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

Are you willing to be buried in a life of service to God and to others that may never be noticed or applauded by others? The only way that the Kingdom of God will go forward in this world is through the lives of Christ-followers who are willing to sacrifice and be buried in a life of selfless service to others.

Our church is like so many other churches and organizations ... 20% of the people doing 80% of the work. I want to see that turned around. I envision the day when 80% of the people I might stop in the hallway ... 8 out of 10 people ... who, if I asked them what their ministry is, could tell me.

I volunteer at a pregnancy center.

I make coffee on Sunday mornings.

I help people in the parking lots.

I teach a Bible study for non-believers at the gym where I work out.

I mentor a boy or a girl at George C. Clarke.

I volunteer to care for preschoolers during worship services.

I sing in the Sanctuary or Celebration Choir.

I envision the day that I could take a row of ten people, and at least eight out of ten of you could tell me your area where you are engaged in meaningful acts of service to God and others.

In a couple of weeks we will have a ministry fair where you can learn more about ways to plunge into a life engaging in acts of meaningful service to God and to others.

CONCLUSION

Loved ones, I'm not talking about getting fired up and going out in the human strength to do these things. I'm talking about understanding and envisioning the life Christ had in mind for you when He saved you ... a life that is just His life lived out through you.