

Today we are finishing series on "High Yield Investments," talking about the friends that we need to have in our lives, with maybe the strangest of all. The question for today is "Who is your Zacchaeus? You need a reject!" We know who the rejects are, the drug addicts and prostitutes, drug pushers and street urchins, the ex-cons and social outcasts. Zacchaeus would have felt right at home with this group. The tax collectors and sinners were the outcast of his time. But Zacchaeus was no ordinary tax collector. He was a chief tax collector, the king of the rejects. He got rich by collecting taxes from the people and giving it to the Romans. He had no place in Israel's society.

My guess is that we've all been rejected at some time or another. Maybe you've been the last one chosen to be on a team in the playground or cut from the team you tried out for. Maybe you've been given a part in a play or denied admission by the college you really wanted to attend. You may have been turned down for a job or fired. Maybe your spouse left you or your family has disowned you. Regardless of why, we've all felt the pain of rejection.

The Good News this morning is that God loves the rejects of the world. When Jesus was passing through Jericho, Zacchaeus ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree to see Jesus. It would have been easy for Jesus to ignore him. Some people may have made fun of the small little tax collector up a tree. Jesus didn't. Instead he said, "*Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.*" (Luke 19:5)

Jesus welcomed "Tax collectors and sinners." Do we? Sometimes we give other people the impression that they have to become like us before they can become one us. But that shouldn't be true. Jesus came as the Savior of all. When He commands us to go search for the Lost, a world full of Zacchaeus', of rejects are included on that list.

So who are these "Zacchaeus" people? The first thing we know about them is that they are often up a tree. These people are misplaced, disgraced, isolated and ashamed. The tree they are up may be social, mental, physical, or economical. They are round pegs in a square hole. They are messed up people. But so are we. Our lives have been messed up by sin. We're all guilty of breaking God's command, of not living according to His plan for life. Yet Jesus still loves us. Immediately after leaving Zacchaeus, Jesus climbed the hill from Jericho to Jerusalem and entered the city on Palm Sunday. Later that week he was nailed to a different "tree" we call a cross. He did that for all of the rejects in the world. He died to pay the price for our sin and rose from the dead to open the gates to eternal life.

Another thing that we know is that a Zacchaeus is a one of a kind. They are the people who don't conform, who don't go along with the crowd, who don't fit in. Instead of being copycats, they are their own unique person. They remind us that God made us that way. Just as each of us has

our own unique fingerprint, so we also have our own unique personality and gifts. No two people are exactly alike. The Zacchaeus friend is the person who reminds us that as Christians we are not to be conformist; we should not blend into society. Romans 12:2 tells us, *“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”*

Zacchaeus is also “out there.” Don’t expect to find your Zacchaeus in the chair next to you today because they know that they have a hard time fitting into the church culture. They are the people who are “up a tree,” sitting at the bar or in the gutter. One of the dangers for “good church people” is that we tend to only hang out with other “good church people.” When we do that we can’t reach the world for Christ. That is why we need to take our faith with us “out there” into the world. We need to be out there in love, in service, in relationships, in compassion. We shouldn’t just be living in faith; we need to be living out our faith. We need to be welcoming and bringing the rejects, the outcast, the nonconformist into God’s family.

The doors of the Lord’s church are open to anyone and everyone. It doesn’t make any difference who the person is, what he or she has done, or even what they think or believe, everyone should be welcomed and invited to hear about God’s love for them. I hope that you will invite someone to come to church with you next weekend.

The Zacchaeus person may also be trouble. Not only do they cause trouble, they can also rub us the wrong way. In the process they may help give us a different perspective on our faith. Watch this video clip from the movie, [“What Are Christians Known For?”](#) ... We need those Zacchaeus people out there who remind us that the church shouldn’t snub people and shouldn’t be known for politics. We should welcome people and be known for the Gospel. But remember this; we also need to make sure that we don’t put ourselves in a place where we allow the world to be a negative influence on us, allowing those who have gone the wrong way to lead us down the wrong path. It is important to be united to Christ and with other Christians as we reach out in love to the people around us.

One of the fascinating things about Jesus is that He could always find room for people. He found room for Zacchaeus on His final journey to Jerusalem. He found time for the leper and the blind, for the tax collectors and sinners. There is one thing that we can never forget. God loves the rejects. Listen to this paraphrase of the famous words of Jesus recorded in John 3:16-17. *“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.”* (The Message) Amen.