

The Risk of Not Risking...Going Out On a Limb!

Luke 19:1-10
July 15, 2018

"Why not go out on a limb? That's where the fruit is!"

I get that statement that has often been credited to Mark Twain. I grew up with orange groves in my back yard and as my playground.

An orange tree can get about twenty feet tall.

The best fruit is to be found out on the edge of a branch.

I can remember many a time climbing to the top of a tree, where no one else risked going to get that big juicy looking orange.

The branches get thinner as you climb out to the end of the limb.

In fact, you could feel the branch starting to bend as you got further out to the end where that big orange was waiting.

The risk was worth it...not only was the fruit delicious but it gave you bragging rights over your buddies about how you risked going out on that limb to get the biggest orange of that day.

"Why not go out on a limb? That's where the fruit is!"

Why not go out on a limb? Some are fearful of the limb breaking and life come crashing down.

Others are not willing to risk going out on the bending limb to get the valued fruit of life.

Today, we take a look at a guy who decided to climb out on a limb not to get some big orange or other kind of fruit. This guy climbed out on a limb to get a better view of who was coming through town.

I am going to go out on a limb today in my preaching style and come at this story line by line. I want to highlight some "fruit" of people and situations of this story we will find as we go out on this limb.

As we go out on a limb to reach for the fruit I trust you will find one that you will relate to in your own "going out on a limb to find life" experience. After all, "Why not go out on a limb...that is where life is to be found!"

We begin our climb out on a limb and find the fruit in the words, **"through Jericho."**

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He did not have on his itinerary a stop over in Jericho. He was just passing through. Jesus had not set an appointment with Zaccheus to have dinner at his home that evening. It was a spontaneous moment. A serendipity experience with Jesus.

Why not go out on a limb? That's where the "surprise moments" with Jesus happen.

Jesus often shows up in life when we least expect him...his passing through moments in life. Jesus went out on a limb to stop and take notice of Zaccheus out on a limb.

Jesus still goes out on a limb and takes notice of those who are willing to go out on a limb in their lives. We never know when we will find Jesus passing through our lives. Are we willing to go out on a limb...to risk the risk of seeing Jesus?

This brings us to the man out on the limb...**Zaccheus!**

We need to go out on a limb and risk getting to know this guy. The risk of risking to get to know Zaccheus will give us hope! Most of us remember singing the song in Sunday School that Zaccheus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he. In other words, Zaccheus was short in stature.

What is more important for us to learn about Zaccheus is that his life stature was morally lost, socially lost, hated for his profession among those in his community. In fact, a tax collector was put out on the same limb of life as murderers, adulterers and other sinners.

As a tax collector for the Roman empire, he had sold out to his own people. He collected the tax Rome required plus more in order to line his own pockets. He was a cheater of his own people. His unethical, immoral actions made him a social outcast.

What is your stature? How tall or short are you spiritually? Have you seen growth?

The hope we can see, the risk we can take to climb out on a limb, is that if Jesus was willing to see Zaccheus, he will certainly take the risk to see you and me.

What we see is that it didn't matter to Zaccheus what others thought of him. He went out on a limb to see Jesus! Why? The why takes us out on the limb to reach for the fruit...**desperate!** Zaccheus was desperate to see Jesus.

Why was he so desperate to take the risk to climb out on a limb to see Jesus?

His life, as he was living it, was not giving him the fulfillment he sought. There was an emptiness in him that he so desperately wanted to fill.

He had heard that Jesus actually called one of his fellow tax-collectors to be one of his 12 disciples...Levi or Matthew. This Jesus must be some kind of man, worth taking the risk to go out on a limb to see. After all, anyone who could convince Matthew to leave his lifestyle, to give it all up, to follow Jesus, must be someone special.

How desperate are we to risk our lifestyles, positions in life, to go out on a limb for Jesus? Is there an emptiness in our lives that creates that desperate desire to want to see Jesus in our lives? Are we so desperate that we will risk going out on a limb?

So here is this 5 foot 5 inch tall desperate, despised member of the community, running ahead hoping to see Jesus. But then he ran into an obstacle that blocked him from him from taking the risk of climbing out on a limb to see Jesus...**the crowd!**

There was no crowd control security. It was every person for themselves. The tall crowd pushed and shoved their way to the front to where Zaccheus could not see over them. Initially, it was the crowd that was keeping Zaccheus from seeing Jesus. Zaccheus sought Jesus with no regard to the crowd. He was not going to let the crowd keep him from taking the risk of going out on a limb to see Jesus.

What is "the crowd" in your life that is keeping you from seeing Jesus? Are you allowing "that crowd" in your life to keep you from taking the risk of going out on a limb to see Jesus? What obstacles are keeping you from the risk of not risking going out on a limb?

Zaccheus was not going to let the crowd win? He took the risk and went out on a limb ...a limb of **a sycamore tree!** A sycamore tree is not like some mighty oak tree. That sycamore tree that Zaccheus climbed that day was a "sycamore-fig mulberry tree." It was a tree of little or no value. The fruit it did produce was not worth going out on a limb for unless you had pigs to feed. It was humiliating for someone to climb a sycamore tree.

Zaccheus was willing to risk his pride and climb out on a limb of a sycamore tree to see Jesus. He was willing to risk his self-image to see Jesus.

Are we willing to take the risk and climb out on a limb of a "sycamore tree" in our lives? Are we willing to humble ourselves, swallow our pride, whatever it takes, to climb out on a limb and see Jesus?

Jesus did. He found himself on a tree of humiliation...the cross of crucifixion. He would challenge his disciples to deny themselves, take up the cross and follow him. (Luke 9:23). Jesus calls us to be willing to climb the "sycamore tree" of denying our self and living for Jesus. Have you climbed any "sycamore trees" lately?

Jesus walked passed the sycamore tree Zaccheus had risked climbing up on a limb and noticed Zaccheus. Jesus stopped, looked up at him and said, "Hey crazy man, you up in this no good tree. Get down before you embarrass yourself any more than you already have!"

Jesus took the risk and went out on a limb and called the crazy man by name...**Zaccheus!**

Jesus knew Zaccheus by name! He knew the life Zaccheus lived. Jesus notices the nobodies, the unloved and calls them by name. (Romans 9:25-28) We are told not to fear what the crowds may say or think because Jesus knows us and he redeems those who take the risk and climb out on a limb of humility. He loves us and calls us by name and tells us we are his. (Isaiah 43:1)

The risk of not risking to climb out on a limb of humility is to miss Jesus calling you by name. Jesus called Zaccheus to come down out of the tree because he wanted to go to Zaccheus' house for dinner. I don't want to even think about that idea of going out on a limb and having Jesus come to your house, unannounced for dinner. You didn't make the bed, the dirty laundry hamper is overflowing, the dishes from last night's dinner are still in the sink, you didn't get to the store for any nice dinner food.

That reaction is not as much a concern as the reaction **the crowd** gave when they witnessed Jesus calling Zaccheus by name to come down and take him to his house as his dinner guest. The crowd was in shock! How in the world could Jesus even think of having dinner with such a crook...with that kind of a person?

This was not Jesus' first time hearing such a reaction. He got it when he ate with the other tax collector Matthew. He told the crowd, the group of grumblers, that he came to save the lost. (Luke 5:27-31)

Jesus chose to spend time with the Zaccheus' of life and not the religious self-righteous. Those who wrap themselves in themselves are more vulnerable in falling out of the tree.

Jesus notices those who take the risk to climb out on a limb to see Him. He still seeks the lost. (Luke 15:1-7) Jesus sees the image of His father in each person. He seeks to restore the risk takers, the limb climbers to the image of their Creator. What kind of reaction do you have when you see one of those "Zaccheus" people being helped?

Before Jesus even sat down in Zaccheus' house we saw **a change** in Zaccheus. He told Jesus he would give half of his income to the poor and pay four times the amount back to anyone he may have cheated. That is a huge change in lifestyle. The risk Zaccheus took in climbing out to see Jesus ended up saving his life. He turned his lifestyle 180 degrees. Zaccheus' values had been compromised before he climbed out on a limb.

He had defrauded so many people before the limb climbing crisis. He had sacrificed so many relationships with people.

We don't know what life Zaccheus lived after he risked the climbing out on a limb.

I would believe that his values lined up with Jesus.

I would imagine he paid back those he had cheated.

I would imagine he asked many people to forgive him.

Salvation had come to Zaccheus. He was no longer the old Zaccheus. He was a new person in Christ. The risk he took to climb out on that limb that day brought to him a life of the best fruit one can find...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-discipline. (Galatians 5:22-23)

How has your life changed since you went out on a limb for Jesus? Have you changed your morals and values of life? Have you sought to reconcile some relationships in your life that went sour? Are you following Jesus' will instead of your own in your daily walk?

Why do we have this story of Zaccheus' risk of climbing out on a limb? Jesus summed it up when he said, "**For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost.**"

The risk of not taking a risk to climb out on a limb to see Jesus is to be lost and not restored.

Why not climb out on a limb? That's where a restored life in Christ is to be found!