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**Where is Your Identity?
Pastor David Pranga, Brewster Baptist Church**

Luke 19:1-10

Good morning and welcome to Brewster Baptist Church. My name is David Pranga and I am one of the pastors on staff. Pastor Doug and Jill are away for the weekend. They are celebrating Mother's Day with Jill's family. As was mentioned earlier, I want to wish all moms a Happy Mother's Day! You are amazing people! I am very thankful for all of you.

This is my plug for Mother's Day: I want to encourage each of you to do something special for your mom. Your mother is someone special. I want to challenge you to do something nice for your mother. If you have not done anything yet for your mom, these are just some helpful suggestions I want to offer:

- Give your mom a call and tell her how much you appreciate her.
- It's not too late to send her a Mother's Day card. Everybody likes getting mail. Please write something personal inside the card, just don't sign your name.
- If you can, visit with your mom in person. Go for a walk with her and tell her how much you love and appreciate her.

I want to encourage every one of you to do something nice for your mom on Mother's Day! Remember that God has blessed you with a wonderful mom.

I would like to start this morning by asking a question. **"How many of you struggle with your identity?"** This may be as simple as how you view yourself. When you look over your life right now, are you truly happy about the life you are living and how you are doing?

For some of us we struggle with our identity because we don't measure up to what people think we should be doing. Or when we were young, we made mistakes and people have never forgiven us. We continue to struggle with our identity because we worry too much about what people think of us. I think if we are truly honest in this room, each of us struggles at one time or another with our identity. In a room this size, there are many, many people here that struggle with their identity. You are not alone here. I have struggled with my identity.

When we think of our identity, we often focus on things that matter to us the most. For some, we begin by sharing about our family; we begin by saying if we are single or married, then sometimes we base our identity on our children and grandchildren. For others our identity is wrapped around our occupation, what we have done in the workplace or by our job title and the responsibilities we have or had. Our identity can also be based on talents, abilities and hobbies. In some cases, we take on the identity that other people place upon us. They may say we are good at something and it becomes what we are known for. It can work the opposite way as well, if we have done something in our past—something we did that was terrible—that can stay with us as well.

I want to share with you this morning that God looks at our identity in a far different way than we do. In God's eyes, our identity is not based upon our work, what we accomplished or even

our job title. Our identity is not found in our family, the success of our marriage, or our children and grandchildren. Our identity is not found in the talents, hobbies and abilities that we have. It's not in how other people view us. Our identity is not how you see yourself or how other people may view you. Our identity should be on how God sees you. I believe God sees you in a much different light than you may see yourself. I believe it can be different than the way the world looks at you.

This morning, we are going to be looking at a famous Sunday School story about a man named Zacchaeus. There is a song that goes along with this story that you might remember from your Sunday School days. "Zacchaeus was a wee little man; a wee little man was he." This is a well-known story in the Bible, but I want you to look at this story with fresh eyes, as if it was your first time reading this story.

If you have your Bible, please turn to *Luke 19: 1-10*. If you don't have a bible or the bible app on your phone, please feel free to follow along on the screen behind me.

"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. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.' But Zacchaeus stood up and said 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.' Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'" *Luke 19:1-10*

The story is about a man named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus like many of us struggled with his identity. Zacchaeus worked for the Roman government as a tax collector. A tax collector as you can imagine, collected taxes from the Jewish citizens for the Roman government. Zacchaeus was Jewish and was considered a traitor collecting taxes from his own people. Zacchaeus wasn't just a tax collector; he was a chief tax collector. Being the chief tax collector meant that you supervised a lot of other tax collectors. What we do know about Zacchaeus is that he was very good at his job. He had become very wealthy. He collected more taxes than were required for his own personal gain. Some of the Jewish people would say correctly, Zacchaeus is extorting money for personal gain. That is the reason why he was so wealthy. As you can assume this role did not win Zacchaeus many friends. The Jewish people despised him. He was an outcast in society. He may have been rich, but he was also lonely.

Zacchaeus hears news of this man named Jesus. This man Jesus is known for eating with sinners and tax collectors. Zacchaeus was intrigued by this man. This man named Jesus was a different type of person. Jesus was not just a teacher or rabbi, Jesus accepted people. This was a guy Zacchaeus wanted to meet. As we continue reading the story, Zacchaeus is

searching for Jesus. He found him. The problem was that Zacchaeus encountered a very large crowd around Jesus. The crowd was made up of many people. There were teachers of the law and common people all surrounding Jesus. Zacchaeus being small and short knew that he had no chance to see Jesus. Being a smart businessman Zacchaeus figures out quickly that he won't be able to meet or even see Jesus. What does Zacchaeus do? He decides to run ahead of the crowd. He climbs a sycamore tree, which is not very big, but tall enough to see over the crowd of people. He just wanted to get a glimpse of this man named Jesus. Jesus and the crowd of people are getting closer to the tree. Zacchaeus is getting more excited to see Jesus. Jesus reaches the spot under the tree so that Zacchaeus could see him. Jesus then stops talking to the crowd. Jesus looks up. He sees Zacchaeus in the tree. What does Jesus say, to the amazement of everyone there in verses 5-7?

“When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”

Imagine what all the people must have been thinking to themselves as Jesus stops everything he is doing and gives his full attention to Zacchaeus. Can you imagine how Zacchaeus must have felt when Jesus calls up to him? Then Jesus tells Zacchaeus to come down from the tree and that Jesus wanted to go to his house. By Jesus asking to go to Zacchaeus's house, he is showing love, friendship and acceptance. Jesus cared about Zacchaeus. He wanted to spend time with him. Jesus did not care about Zacchaeus's reputation.

The crowd could not believe what they were hearing. They muttered to themselves. Why would Jesus want to hang out with sinners and tax collectors? Why would Jesus pick of all people Zacchaeus? He was a tax collector, a cheater and a liar, a social outcast. Verse 7 sums it up perfectly, “He has gone to be the guest of sinners.”

Jesus did not care about the reputation of people. It did not matter to Jesus about their identity. How people view you them or even how they viewed themselves. Jesus wants to spend time with people who need him the most. Those that are searching for him. Those that desire a relationship with him the most. Jesus made time for the people most people overlooked.

Jesus saw something different in Zacchaeus. While his neighbors and so-called friends saw only a short, wealthy tax collector who only cared about himself. **What Jesus saw was a man who was looking for love and acceptance. Zacchaeus was looking for a friend.**

Which leads me to **point #1. We are loved by God!**

I believe that Zacchaeus was looking for love and acceptance. Everyone in his life thought he was a terrible person. He was a tax collector. He was greedy and self-centered. He took advantage of other people. Yet, God still loved Zacchaeus. In times of struggles and hard

times, Zacchaeus found Jesus. At the same time, Jesus was searching for Zacchaeus. Jesus saw value in Zacchaeus.

I believe today; when God looks at you. God sees value in each of us. We are all loved by God. We need to believe this. We are loved by God. God sees us differently than we often see ourselves. God sees us differently than how other people may view us. God sees you in an incredible loving way. Just as Jesus saw Zacchaeus and wanted to be with him, God wants to be with you as well. God loves you. God has loved you since the beginning of time.

I think back to *Psalms 139:1-2, 13-14*. "You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I love *Psalms 139* because it reminds me that God knitted me together in my mother's womb. God loved me!

From those first few days to this present day, God loves you. God wants a relationship with you. God has a plan for your life. God created good things that you will do in your life. When you think of your identity, it starts first with God. In God's eyes, you are loved. You are precious. You mean the world to God. God would do anything for you. We know this because he sent his Son Jesus to this world. Jesus had to die for our sins. He took our place on the cross, so that we can have life and a relationship with Him. Jesus died for sinful people. We are all sinful people here like the tax collector. Every one of us make mistakes. Each of us are sinful in the eyes of God. We all lose our temper, we all lie, we all cheat, we all gossip, we all put ourselves first over other people. I could go on and on. We are all terrible in the eyes of God. Yet, God still loves you. God loves each person here today.

When you accept Jesus into your life. You are a new creation. Your identity is aligned with him. We are called his children. We have a relationship with Him that starts when we accept Him and lasts for eternity. We will one day share his inheritance. One day we will join him in paradise.

I believe God is still at work today. Drawing people like Zacchaeus to Himself. Zacchaeus was searching for something. Money was not going to fill the emptiness. Zacchaeus was looking for something more and he found it in Jesus.

Life here on earth may be difficult for many of us here. Each of us face hardships and times of struggles. I can tell you this, God will always love you! God will always care for you! God will always be there for you. No matter what struggles you are going through. No matter how low life gets for you, no matter what sins you have committed, God will love you.

Just as Zacchaeus let Jesus into his house and into his life, God wants to be invited into your house and into your heart. It starts with you. You need to open your heart to Jesus. You must invite him in. You need to let him lead your life.

I want you to remember point #1 – We are loved by God!

Point #2: **Our faith in Jesus should transform us—a changed life!**

In the story of Zacchaeus, we see that Jesus comes to Zacchaeus's house. Jesus and Zacchaeus spend time together. We don't know what was said during their conversation together. We can only speculate. It is through their conversation together that Zacchaeus becomes a new man. Zacchaeus finds a friend in Jesus. He finds a love and acceptance, that he has never had before. He has a new hope and peace in his life. Zacchaeus loves Jesus and wants to live life differently. Zacchaeus's life changed after meeting with Jesus. He becomes a man of faith. We see that Zacchaeus wants to show his love towards God and other people. Zacchaeus did not remain silent about his faith. He did not just whisper a prayer. He went out from meeting with Jesus with a new perspective on life. He wanted to show others that his faith meant something.

Let me read *verse 8*: "But Zacchaeus stood up and said 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.'"

Zacchaeus did two things right away. He gave half of his possessions to the poor. The other half of his money was to make restitution for how he treated people. Zacchaeus knew that he stole money from people. He wanted to make things right. Zacchaeus, because he loved Jesus, wanted to make amends for his wrongdoing and to show others how much he loved God.

If there was ever any doubt that Zacchaeus meant it, his pocketbook spoke volumes. Can you image what people thought about Zacchaeus when he gave back money to the people he took advantage of? Can you image when people heard that he gave half of all his money to poor, what they must have thought? I can only imagine the crowd (religious people and his neighbors) thinking to themselves, what has gotten into Zacchaeus. Ever since he met with Jesus, he became a new person. Zacchaeus's faith meant more to him than being greedy and taking advantage of people. Zacchaeus gave to the poor and made restitution to people he took advantage of, because he loved God and loved his neighbors.

What Zacchaeus knows, what I know and what many of you know is that when Jesus touches your life and fills you with love, joy and hope, your life will be forever changed. You realize how selfish you are. You want to give back in love. You want to show Jesus that you love Him. You do it by the way you treat people. When we put our faith in Jesus our life should be transformed. We begin to see life differently. Our faith should influence us. Our faith should influence our values and the decisions we make. Our faith should influence how we spend our money and how we spend our time. When we put our faith in Jesus our lives will change.

Lastly, I leave you with Jesus' theme verse in this passage. "Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'" *Luke 19:9-10*

Jesus' mission in life is captured by these final two verses. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Jesus came to bring salvation for those who believe in his name and want to follow him. This still speaks to us today. Jesus wants us to be light to other people, to share God's love and help spiritually lost people. It was through his relationship with Jesus and the love of God that changed Zacchaeus. It's that same love of God that can change our heart as well. When we have Jesus in our life, when we want to follow with our whole heart, our attitude changes. Our values will change to be more like Jesus.

You may be asking yourself; how do I know if I met Jesus? Have you seen your life change? Has your attitude changed towards people? I believe you will become more loving, more generous, more caring, and more patient with people. You start thinking about other people's needs. You go out and help them. You begin to realize how much you've been given by God, and you want to give back to people. Your heart wants to show the love God has for you to other people. When Jesus touches you, you start thinking about what you can do to help other people.

When you think of your identity, think of your relationship with Jesus Christ. We are loved by God. God takes us as we are. He just simply loves us. As our faith increases with Jesus, our life should be transformed and changed. We will begin to think and care about the things of Jesus more and about our own life less. Let us pray.

Questions for Discussion & Reflection:

1. There were three characters in the scriptural passage: Zacchaeus, Jesus and the crowd. What do we learn about all three characters? Why is this so important?
2. Why do you think Jesus singled out Zacchaeus, and invited himself to Zacchaeus' house? What does this say about Jesus?
3. The crowd begins to mutter and gossip to themselves. How did the crowd view Zacchaeus and Jesus?
4. Where did Jesus first find you? Up a tree? Out on a limb? Somewhere else?
5. What do the actions of Zacchaeus reveal about the power of God to change hearts? Why do you think Zacchaeus volunteered to make restitution to those who he cheated and took from? How have your priorities and life changed since meeting Jesus?
6. *Luke 19:9-10* are key verses. What was Jesus saying to Zacchaeus and to the crowd?
7. After reading the story and hearing the sermon, what is God calling you to do? (e.g. Do you need to accept Jesus' invitation to know him better? Celebrate God's acceptance into your life and be thankful? Make restitution for a wrongdoing?)