

"HOW CAN WE KNOW IT'S REAL?"

A Sermon By

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INTRODUCTION

Regardless of what you may have read or heard, Frank and Jesse James, two of the most famous outlaws of all time, were cold-blooded murderers. Their father, however, was a Baptist minister and one of the founders of William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri. And their mother was raised in a Catholic convent. Both parents espoused values quite different from those their sons were to hold. Yet, Robert James, their father, deserted his wife and sons while they were still very small so that he could search for gold in California.

But enough for the Baptists. Let me bring it closer to our own heritage. Another of the men who terrorized the West was named John Wesley Hardin. Guess where he got his name? Hardin was the son of a Methodist circuit-rider who also taught school and practiced law. Hardin's father, a fervent Texan, raised his son to hate the North. When Hardin, at the age of 14, shot and killed a man in honest self-defense, his father sent him away, not trusting the justice of the Northern Reconstructionist government in Texas.

Hardin later on killed Federal soldiers on a number of occasions, though the Civil War had ended years earlier. He also spent 17 years in prison for shooting a deputy. Perhaps John Wesley Hardin would have taken a different path in life if his father had not hated the government so much and if his father had not shielded him from facing justice when he shot his first victim. Regardless, it is clear that though the fathers of Frank and Jesse James and of John Wesley Hardin were men of the cloth, they were not the best role models for their growing sons.

DEVELOPMENT

Now...where is all of this leading? To this question...have you ever wondered how to tell if someone has truly committed his or her life to Jesus Christ?

Let's face it. There seem to be so many "phonies" out there now-a-days. So much that goes under the name of religion is exploitive. So many have been misled by religious leaders who did not "walk the talk" in their own lives. How can you tell genuine faith? What guidelines do we use in making judgements of others in the faith. And we enjoy doing! Should we be making those judgements or is the cause better served by leaving the judgement to the Lord?

Time and again Jesus gave us a formula, a hook for us to hang this on. He said, "You shall know a tree by its fruit?" That's it. It's as simple as that. A bad tree cannot bear good fruit and a good tree will not bear bad fruit. And it's not difficult to tell.

ZACCHEUS: A MIRACLE IN HIS OWN LIFE

Consider this little man, Zaccheus, whom we heard about in today's Scripture reading there in Luke's Gospel. In the first place, one senses that Zaccheus was determined that he was going to see a miracle take place in his own life.

A chief tax-collector does not climb trees unless he is desperate. It's hard to maintain your dignity while shimmying up a sycamore. But there was

Zaccheus trying to get a look at Jesus. Small of stature, there was no other way he could behold the Master passing by that day in Jericho. And he was determined that if there was any hope at all for him, he was not going to miss out on this opportunity. Determination is what it's called.

Somehow this Biblical story of Zaccheus reminds me of a story that former Coach John Madden tells about Jim Burt, a professional football player who, up to this year, was with the NY Giants. Anyway, Jim was an All-American at the University of Miami (Florida), but he was ignored in the NFL draft. He had to talk the Giants into signing him. At training camp, he heard that when a rookie was cut by a team, an equipment boy would knock on the door of his room and tell him that the coach wanted to see him.

"You know what Jim did?" Bill Parcells, the Giants' coach, said to John Madden,

"Jim slept on the floor under his bed. He figured if somebody came to his room, but couldn't find him, he wouldn't get cut."

Parcells found out about Burt's strange but determined strategy when he asked him why he looked like he wasn't getting his sleep. Burt told the coach he had been sleeping on the floor the last five nights. Determination.

Zaccheus was determined to see Jesus. It represented his hope for a new life. He climbed a tree to get a good look.

In one of his books, Norman Vincent Peale, tells about a ragged news boy in Chicago years ago who had that same kind of determination. This young boy used to huddle on a sidewalk grating near the Chicago Tribune building because the flow of heat from the presses operating in the basement kept him warm. From that vantage point, the boy could see well-dressed men and women going into a theater across the street where bright lights on the marquee would spell out the evening's attraction.

He decided one cold Winter's night that someday he would be that attraction himself and to record the birth of his impossible dream he took a rusty nail and scratched his name and the date on the concrete windowsill behind the grating. Years passed and the dream did not die. The day came when the ragged news boy - now attired in white tie and tails - held the crowds that came to that theater spellbound with the most astounding array of magical tricks the stage had ever seen. His name was Howard Thurston, the great magician, and sometimes he would take his friends and show them the name and the date dimly scratched on the concrete windowsill so many years before.

It's difficult to deny someone with that kind of determination. Zaccheus had that kind of determination. Impervious to his pride and his place in the Jericho community, he shimmied up the sycamore so that he could see Jesus. He longed for a change in his life. And he believed that Jesus could bring that kind of change into his life. So he climbed up the tree and waited. His diligence and his determination was soon rewarded.

The Master spotted him there in that sycamore tree and called him to come down.

"Zaccheus make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today..."

What was that? The Master...stay in the house of a despised tax collector. Yes, indeed! Let the crowd murmur. Let the self-righteous squirm. The Master knew that Zaccheus was searching and that he was serious. What more could Jesus look for in a human heart...someone who is determined to make a new start...to experience a new life.

WILLING TO MAKE THE NECESSARY CHANGES

But there is a second thing that needs to be brought out. Zaccheus was willing to make whatever changes were necessary in order to experience this new life he so cared about.

Some people want to experience new life but they want to do it on their terms. They want to do it without making any real changes in their lives. "Next year I'm going to be a changed person!" Charlie Brown says to Lucy. "That's a laugh, Charlie Brown" she says. "I mean it" he replies. "I'm going to be strong and firm!" "Forget it" she says as she walks off. "You'll always be wishy-washy". "Why can't I change just a little bit?" Charlie Brown asks himself. "I'll be wishy one day" he shouts "and washy the next!"

And I think that's the degree of change that many of us desire. Rather than wishy-washy, we'll just be wishy one day and washy the next. We want life to be better, but we want it to happen without any significant action on our part.

A STORY

William L. Stidger in his book, There Are Sermons in Stories, once told about the owner of a small drugstore. For some reason this druggist hated his work...and so he spent his mornings looking for something better and his afternoons at the ball park.

He soon decided it was foolish to leave a business about which he knew something for one about which he knew nothing. So he decided to make the best of what he had. He would build up his business by giving the best service possible.

When a customer who lived near would call in an order on the phone, he would repeat each item being ordered and his assistant would fill the order. And with the order filled, the owner would keep the customer on the line while the delivery boy dashed out the front door. When the boy reached the customer's house, who was still on the telephone with the drugstore owner, she would excuse herself for a moment to answer the door. Coming back to the telephone she would express great surprise at the quickness with which the order had been delivered.

News got around about the drugstore that filled orders so promptly and soon Charles Walgreen, founder of the great Walgreen drugstore empire, had more business than he could handle. Walgreen said his work was easy - like a game - and he soon found great joy in doing what he had once despised.

Walgreen saw that since he could not change his situation, he would change himself. I think that many of us want to try to do it the other way. We want to achieve our dreams without adjusting our needs. What we are

basically searching for is magic. We want to be able to manipulate life without it costing us anything. What Jesus brings us is medicine and not magic. There is something sick within the human heart. There was something sick in Zaccheus, something out of kilter. He could not be the same person he had been if he took the Master's medicine. He surely must have realized that. But he was determined, in the first place, and secondly, he was willing...willing to make those necessary changes in his life.

WILLING TO LIVE OUT THAT TO WHICH HE HAD MADE A COMMITMENT

Finally,
Zaccheus was

willing to live out that to which he had made a verbal commitment.

"Behold, Lord...the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold".

There it is. That was the verbal commitment. That's impressive. Zaccheus saw the kind of change that was needed in his life and he made it. He put his money where his heart was. Jesus - if it's real - has that kind of effect on people. He can make the greedy, generous. He can make the weak, strong. He can make the resentful, kind. His touch can work miracles where people are searching and are willing to change. Give Him the chance. Let's use an analogy.

Sometimes a person only blossoms out, only shows his hidden strengths, his hidden gifts, after another individual has invested a little love...a little time...a little caring - and except for that investment of love, the virtues and the talents of many gifted individuals would be unknown to the world. Such was the case with Snow Man, except that Snow Man wasn't a person. Snow Man was a horse. And it seemed fitting for me to tell you about him especially since we lost Secretariat on Wednesday of this past week.

Snow Man was a nameless, gray-white gelding that Harry DeLeyer picked up rather cheaply at a horse auction. The only other bid for the horse came from a glue factory. Harry trained Snow Man and the horse served well at the Girl's School where Harry was the riding master. However, when the school closed for the Summer, a neighbor made a generous offer for Snow Man and Harry could not afford to refuse it. So Snow Man had a new home!

The only trouble was that Snow Man liked his old home better. Time and time again he jumped the neighbor's high fences and returned to Harry. Finally, Harry bought his horse back. In that series of events, however, there was a clue to Snow Man's real greatness. Snow Man was a natural jumper and the horse that once jumped high fences to return to his loving, precious master later jumped at Madison Square Garden for two national titles! All Snow Man needed was the love and the attention of his master.

I think we could say that that was what Zaccheus needed as well. Zaccheus knew that there was something more in life and he was determined to experience it. He was willing to make whatever changes were necessary in life to see his dream come true. After he had felt the touch of the Master's hand, he was willing to live up to his new commitment by no longer being shady or downright dishonest in his work by making restitution for the wrongs he had done in the past and by sharing what he had with the needy. Quite a story, really.

CLOSING One wonders...was his conversion real? I would like to think it was! And would that all of us could experience that kind of a conversion.

How can we tell if it's for real? Said Jesus, "You know a tree by its fruit". What kind of fruit are you bearing? Have you experienced the touch of the Master's hand? Have you experienced new life in Christ? If you really want it...want it enough to change, it can be yours. All the Master wants is to bring out the best that is within you. He did it for Zaccheus. I believe He can do the same for you and for me.

PRAYER "We are grateful, O God, for this story of Zaccheus and how he climbed a tree and saw the Lord passing by...and was touched...and changed...and went on to bear good fruit. So may it be with each of us. In the spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen"

INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION FOR A FOLLOW-UP LETTER:

4. IT Mr. Glenn Rye: no address for him.

Information picked up at door by Sharon...From Little Rock. Knows Missy and Leslie Darwin. Missy to be here next Sunday. (Make note, PC). Knows Kevin Wilcox, too. 30 ish. Slim. Grey suit. Pleasant and easy to talk to at door.

5. IT Miss Karen Gough:

Brown hair. 5'3" tall according to Sharon. Greeted by PC. No other information on Karen.

BACK AGAIN LIST

1. Howard Bamsey and daughters: Allison and Catherine.
2. Isaac Newton: he sure resembles Jim Perkins...looks like a brother.
3. Beth Osborne: North Carolina
4. Steve Spicer: returned to help PC at parsonage.
5. Sandra Jung and Jerry
6. Walter Schmidt
7. Wade Giddens
8. Kim Connor: 3rd in a row.
9. Bill Beene: returned to work at parsonage.
10. Wellington Newcomb and Nancy Dickson Newcomb. Married here on October 1st, 1965 by PC. Came back to celebrate their 24th wedding anniversary.
11. Priscille Kotey
12. Marilyn McKeown and son, Andrew. Len's away with daughter.
13. O. L. Locke
14. Maria Allain
15. Al Thomas
16. Gigi Harris
17. Wendy Bowen

NOTES

Wendy Larrabee isn't moving...will continue to be around here with us.

VISITORS: Sunday, October 1, 1989

Weather: Gorgeous! In the low seventies.

Attendance: 124 adults and 26 children. Total: 150

1988: 189	1982: 196	1976: 147
1987: 160	1981: 170	1975: 160
1986: 172	1980: 194	1974: 160
1985: 178	1979: 140	1973: 144
1984: 150	1978: 176	1972: 131
1983: 181	1977: 126	1971: 146

1. IT Mr. Lawrence (Larry) Graham: 333 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022
Telephone: 832 -2948

Pink card. Letter. Came with girl friend, Pamela Thomas. Very attractive and out-going black couple recently graduated from Harvard Law School. Both are young lawyers...starting out, I assume. He is from White Plains, NY...Memorial UM Church. He's a Princeton graduate and Pamela is both Harvard undergraduate and grad school. Seemed interested. Coffee hour. PG will follow along.

Include Pamela with the "Dear Larry and Pamela"...

2. IT Mr. Brian Jefferson: 242 East 87th Street, Apt. 3J
New York, New York 10128
Telephone:

Pink card. Letter. Came with girl friend, Rachel Williams. He is 6'4" tall, I'd say. 26 ish. Black couple. Rachel is He wore glasses. Both are United Methodists, I believe, out of Milwaukee. Again, in writing him...include her in your greeting. "Dear Brian and Rachel".

3. IT Miss Catherine Peters: 201 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
Telephone: 348 -2746

Pink card. Letter. Duke University graduate. Recently. About 5' 7" tall....gold loop earrings. IN public relations work she said. Greeted at door by PC.

(over)

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday / October 8, 1989

I. GREETING TO THE VISITORS

- A. A word of welcome to the visitors in today's congregation. We're pleased you're here....and hope that we shall have opportunity to greet you in a more personal way...
- B. Be free in the sharing....sign a visitor card or guest book. Join us downstairs for refreshments. Worship with us again... Work with us, too, in the various programs of service.
- C. Our roots as a church are deep in the soil of this part of the city...doing the Lord's work here since 1837. A neighborhood Church...open and inclusive of people from all walks of life. We minister in the name of Christ...

II. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns listed in the bulletin as well as in the monthly news sheet. Be sure to pick up a copy of it...
- B. Note the various meetings scheduled for this week, and study and growth opportunities lifted up as well as the Adult Fellowship Retreat.
- C. Our Charge Conference is "in the works" for a week from Tuesday evening. I'm hopeful of a good turnout for this, the biggest meeting of the Fall Season of our Church. Last year we had close to 100 members come and share in it and let's do as well again this year.
- D. Fall Rummage Sale. Saturday, October 28th. Also, remember to sign up for the Fellowship Supper a week from Sunday evening.
- E. A lot will be happening in these coming weeks of October and November and December. Pressures build. Share where you can. Participate. Don't just be a spectator.

III. OFFERING

- A. During October we always receive a special appeal for the Fellowship of Suffering and Service. Envelopes in the bulletin. We usually receive about \$300 for this appeal. 1/4th of the way..
- B. "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit, let us worship God...

PASTORAL PRAYER: October 8, 1989

O LORD, OUR GOD...we are those who would march to the beat of a different drummer. We are those whose feet are led to the sanctuary where we seek guidance for our lives and where we would now pray for the strength to follow.

HERE WE SEEK to fashion our lives after the example of Christ, who was servant to the poor in spirit and who was friend to all who stood for the things of God.

TODAY, O GOD, we search for You in the deep places of our lives.

- the painful times of loss and uncertainty.
- the anxious times of waiting in hope and in fear.

WE SOUND the hollow caverns of our existence, daring to believe that finally there is a solid rock on which to stand.

SUCH IS our faith...and in this hour of worship we ask that our faith be renewed and made strong.

PERHAPS THERE is one present this hour who prays like the Psalmist of old, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation."

- another comes with a contrite heart, burdened with a sense of failure and of sin.
- still another comes with a heart like our Lord, a heart that weeps over the city whose streets have become a home for many poor and hungry and homeless.
- and still others come weeping over the city of earth for its tendency to go the way of death and destruction.

SOME OF US ARE so preoccupied with petty things that we cannot settle down and center in on our worship.

- our confidence at this moment is that you know our needs and hear our prayers.
- though they be formal or informal, eloquent or halting in their expression, we believe you hear our prayers and stand by us in our needs.

YOU ARE BUSY, O God, with every one of us...believing in each of us more fully than we dare to believe in ourselves. Grant us what we need to be more like Jesus -

A quiet mind...a forgiving spirit...indifference to wealth and status...a readiness to pray...a clear vision of Your purpose...courage to stand for what is right.

FOR WE ASK THIS in the name of Him in whom so many see life's highest hope and its deepest meaning. In His name we lift our hearts in prayer.