

group Bible Study – November 8, 2006

Read Luke chapters 19-21

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This week in group we will hear from the Dearborns about “the empowering hospitality of God” – and that’s exactly what we find in Luke chapters 19-21.

In Luke 19 we meet Zacchaeus, a rich man, a government worker. But this is no ordinary rich man – he’s interested. He’s heard of Jesus, he’s probably heard about this “kingdom of God,” and he wants to see for himself. He climbs a tree to get a good look. And that’s when all hell breaks loose. Once again, in an in-your-face kind of gesture to all the religious leaders, Jesus takes a “sinner” and calls him friend. Of course, the Jews hated people like Zacchaeus – traitors who went to work for the Romans just to make a little money, at the expense of their own people.

Jesus calls Zacchaeus down from the tree and invites himself to dinner at this sinner’s house. The result is predictable. The leaders begin to grumble: “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Because, everyone knows that the sinners are supposed to be shunned, excluded. Not embraced. There’s a certain way to deal with people like this, and it involves pushing them out of the circle. But here is Jesus, welcoming him in.

What’s the result? Immediately after receiving this hospitality from Jesus, Zacchaeus repents and gives half of what he owns to the poor. It’s a complete 180 in this life. Almost in an instant, he’s transformed into a new kind of person. And Jesus says, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

Do you want to grow the kingdom of God? You’ve got to do it Jesus’ way. And that means welcoming people in with a supernatural hospitality. Even the enemies. Embrace. Embrace.

What would have happened if Jesus had followed the conventional wisdom and had shunned Zacchaeus? Nothing. Nothing would have happened. Zacchaeus would have remained unchanged, and the kingdom of God would have failed in that life.

But that’s not the way of God. God empowers even the sinners by welcoming them in. Jesus treated Zacchaeus like a friend, and in so doing Zacchaeus *became* a friend.

It’s kind of backwards. But that’s how God is.

Study Questions (for individuals or groups):

- What kind of risk is God asking you to make? Who is the Spirit leading you to welcome today?