

# Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **Luke 19:1-10** **“Deep Conversion”**

September 21, 2014  
(15<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646  
Church Office: 864-229-7551  
Church Website: [www.msumc1.org](http://www.msumc1.org)

## **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

LUKE 19:1-10 "DEEP CONVERSION"

Quest Conversion?

2<sup>nd</sup> Paradigm Of Conversion: // 18:18-30, 35-43 (L Only)

1) v.19 THE COMING OF JESUS TO JERICH0. THE PATH OF CONVERSION:

PREVENIENT (PREPARATORY) GRACE (1)

1 He (i.e. Jesus) entered Jericho and was passing through. //v.4b, Significant Import Post, On Way To Jerusalem/Cross  
2 Structures: 1) 8:2 Concentric (a-b-c-d//d'-c'-b'-a'), 2) Quest (2 Panels)

2) v.2 ZACCHAEUS CHARACTERIZED NEGATIVELY (NAME, OCCUPATION, MONEY).

Despised On Three Accounts: Margins Of Respectability

2 a) And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus; Name = clean/innocent  
II Maccabees 10:19 (Traitor)  
b) he was a chief tax collector, 5:27-32, (Mt.), Occupation (Despised): 7:29, 15:1-2, 18:11, m. Tohoroth 7:7  
Supervisor: Got A Cut From His Underlings  
c) and rich. Oppressor/ Extortion, Riches (-): 6:24, 12:16-21, 14:12, 16:1-13, 18:25, 21:1-4

3) vv.3-4 ZACCHAEUS CLIMBS A TREE TO SEE THE LORD.

7:34 Friend of tax collectors.... Seeking Jesus; Finds Jesus Seeking Him

a) Desire to see Jesus  
3 a) And he was seeking to see who Jesus is, //v.10., CURIOSITY/DRAWING OF THE SPIRIT(2)  
b) Opposition b) but could not, on account of the crowd, No One Moves Aside For Zacchaeus  
b' because he was small of stature (mikros = "a little one"). Problem: Small in spirit  
4 a') So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, Short Trunk/Wide Branches  
c) Overcome //v.1, Highly Undignified, Overcomes Opposition  
Large Leaves + Low Branches. Remain Unseen?

4) vv.5-6 ZACCHAEUS' JOYFUL RESPONSE TO JESUS' INVITATION.

PERSONAL ADDRESS: COMMAND/PROMISE (3)

d) Jesus Speaks  
5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Jesus Intrudes, Surprise!  
a) "Zacchaeus, make haste Jn. 1:47-48, Spirit's Word Of Knowledge (Jesus Seeks Him Out!)  
b) and come down; Jesus' Mission, Must = dei (Divine Necessity)  
a') Zacchaeus as host c) for I must stay (remain) at your house today." Purity Boundary, Rev. 3:20  
6 a') So he made haste EXPLICIT OBEDIENCE (4)  
b') and came down, Obedience → Joy → Generosity → Restitution  
c') and received him JOYFULLY. 15:5-7, 9-10, Sign INITIAL JOY (5)  
With Jesus Come New Possibilities From Grace/Acceptance

4') v.7 CROWD'S MURMURING RESPONSE TO JESUS' INVITATION.

Isolated, Partner In Crime, Jesus Goes Against Social Norms

b') Opposition  
7 And when they saw it they all GRUMBLED, //18:36, EXTERNAL RESISTANCE (6)  
"He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!" 7:34, True Assessment  
//15:1-2, 18:25-26, Jesus Brings Forgiveness

3') v.8a ZACCHAEUS STANDS UP TO SPEAK TO THE LORD.

Faith Brings Transformation

c') Overcomes  
8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, Sees/Speaks To Him, Zacchaeus means righteous/pure  
Grace Accepted Releases Power To Do Good Works

2') vv.8b-9 ZACCHAEUS CHARACTERIZED POSITIVELY (REVERSE ORDER)

2 Groups, Present Resolve DEEP REPENTANCE/ LORDSHIP(7)

d') Jesus Speaks  
c') "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; 3:11, Heart Effect Wallet! Riches (Generosity)  
18:27, Extortion/Fraud, 3:8-14  
b') and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." Restitution, Occupation (Love)  
(Rustlers) Lev. 6:5, Num. 5:7, Ex. 22:1, 3b-4, 2 Sam. 12:6  
9 a') And Jesus said to (of) him, Family? Present Dimension, Changed Life + Jesus' Testimony  
"Today salvation has come to this house, 2:11, 4:21, 5: 26, 23:43 SALVATION ANNOUNCED (8a)  
Reason 1 since he also is a son of Abraham. 13:16, Larger Circle! A Restored Jew, NEW IDENTITY (8b)  
// 1 Jn. 5:13 = Evidence Of Transformed Life + Inner Witness

1') v.10 THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN.

5:32, 7:34, 9:56, 12:49, 18:8, Mission: I Came Formula

Reason 2  
10 For the Son of man came (down) v.1 //5:32, 9:55, Pronouncement: (3<sup>rd</sup> Person), PERSONAL TESTIMONY TO JESUS (9)  
to seek and v.3-6, Ezek. 34:16, seek // v. 3a, Luke's Testimony/ Zacchaeus' Testimony/ Your Testimony?  
to save v.9b, Lord Opens Heart To Zacchaeus; Zacchaeus Opens Heart To Poor  
the lost." v.9c, Backslidden Jew, Change Of Heart →→ Change Of Life, Zacchaeus = Rich, Lost Sinner!

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 19:1-10

Children’s Bible story books typically include the story of Zacchaeus, the short man who was *up a tree* when Jesus called him. It’s a brilliant example of Luke’s art and stands in sharp contrast to the rich ruler of 18:18-30 who walks away from Jesus’ demand to dispose of wealth and become a disciple. The surface structure is an 8:2 concentric pattern (a-b-c-**d** // **d**’-c’-b’-a’) with an sharp emotional contrast at the center between Zacchaeus’ *joyful* response (d. v.6) and the crowd’s *grumbling* response (d’ v.7). The inner frames (3. vv.3-4 // 3’ v.8a) work on a vertical axis with Zacchaeus *up* a tree (v.4) and standing *up* (v.8) to address Jesus. In the next layer (2. v.2 // 2’ vv.8b-9) each is introduced with *behold*. The three characterizations of v.2 (name, occupation, riches) are in reversed in vv.8b-9 (riches are disposed, abuse of office rectified, he is renamed *a son of Abraham*) forming a secondary chiasm (a-b-c // c’-b’-a’) within the larger pattern. In the outer frames (1. v.1 // 1’ v.10) Jesus is presented as passing through Jericho (v.1) on the way to Jerusalem and passing through life (*I came*) on a mission (v.10) *to seek and save the lost*. Stitch words include *passing/pass* (vv.1, 4b), *seeking/seek* (vv. 3a, 10), *Zacchaeus* (vv.2a, 8a), *see* (vv.3a, 4a), *salvation/save* (vv.9b, 10), *house* (vv.5c, 9b), *today* (vv.5d, 9b), *Lord* (vv.8a, 8b).

A second complementary structure presents Zacchaeus *on a quest*<sup>1</sup> and falls into two sections, each with five parts: 1) desire to see Jesus (vv.1-3a), 2) opposition (v.3b), 3) opposition overcome (v.4), 4) Jesus speaks (v.5), 5) the quest is initially fulfilled in obedience and joy (v.6). This is parallel in the second half to 1) Zacchaeus as Jesus’ host (v.6), 2) fresh opposition (v.7), 3) opposition overcome (v.8c), 4) Jesus speaks (vv.8d), 5) the quest fulfilled for both Zacchaeus and Jesus (v.10). The prevenient grace of God that stirred Zacchaeus interest is fulfilled as he responds to Jesus’ engagement. His initial eager obedience (v.6) is completed in testimony to Jesus as *Lord* (v.8a), deep repentance (vv. 8b-9), and Jesus’ confirmation of his new status (v.9) within the circle of God’s people. The community is now under a call to accept a changed man. It is not uncommon for multiple structures and genres to be interwoven. Luke’s written retelling bears the marks of oral storytelling. Curiosity is an early sign of God’s wooing grace that in time may lead to a *divine appointment* and new life. God knows where the receptive are; Jesus is a master angler; the Holy Spirit is the invisible influence in all such stories. A Trinitarian reading is best.

That Jesus was *passing through* means opportunity is near. Word is out on the streets and so Zacchaeus, the most despised Jew in Jericho because of his occupation, is curious about Jesus. The citizenry will not give him a glimpse of the parade; he is an isolated man. That he is short, runs in an undignified manner, and hides in the spring foliage up a tree adds detail, color, and sympathy. I take Jesus personal naming and command, “*Zacchaeus, make haste,*” as a word of prophetic revelation (i.e. a word of knowledge). Jesus commands a stranger to offer him hospitality, and he responds with great joy. No one likes it that Jesus shows care for a man they despise (v.7). It is at the meal and in conversation (presumed and so left implicit), that Zacchaeus suddenly rises from his couch and responds to Jesus’ love in radical repentance. Life has a new center demonstrated in compassion for the poor (v.8b) and fresh integrity (v.8c). To this testimony Jesus adds one of his own (v.9). This is what salvation looks like, and it is *today*. Jesus’ mission to seek and save the lost among God’s people is bearing public fruit *today*. No one is beyond the reach of God’s saving grace. Look for curiosity, and count on the Spirit for insights.

---

<sup>1</sup> R. F O’Toole, “The Literary Form Of Luke 19:1-10,” *JBL* 110/1 (1991), 107-116. The author identifies four parts, to which I add a fifth: the fulfillment of the quest for both men.

---

## DEEP CONVERSION

*"... the half of my goods I give to the poor."*

What repentance looks like

L U K E 1 9 : 8 b

**I**t was well over a century ago, and Dr. F.E. Marsh was preaching and urging on his hearers the importance of confession of sin and - wherever possible - of restitution for wrongs done. Afterwards a young man came up. "Pastor," he said, "you've put me in a sad fix, and I'm ashamed to put it right. I'm a boat builder, and the man I work for is an *infidel* (an old word for unbeliever). I've talked to him of his need of Christ, but he ridicules it all. If I acknowledge it, will ruin my testimony forever."

He went on to say he'd started to build a boat for himself at home. Expensive copper nails are used because they don't rust in the water. The young man had been carrying them home from work. He knew it was stealing, but he quieted his conscience with the idea his boss would never miss them, and besides, he was not being paid enough. He now saw himself as a common thief. "But," he said to Dr. Marsh, "I cannot go and tell him what I've done, pay for those I've used, and return the rest. He'll think I'm a hypocrite. Those copper nails are digging into my conscience, and I'll never have peace till I put this right."

For weeks the struggle went on. One night he came to Dr. Marsh, "Pastor, I've settled for the copper nails and my conscience is relieved at last."

"What happened when you confessed?"

"He looked at me, then said, 'George, I always did think you were a hypocrite, but now I begin to feel there's something in this Christianity after all. Any religion that would make a dishonest workman come back and confess that he had been stealing copper nails and offer to settle for them must be worth having.'"<sup>2</sup>

Are there any copper nails in your conscience? Any places you need to go back and make restitution for some wrong, whether recent or long ago? There were

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.sermonillustrations.com/restitution](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/restitution).

---

for me when I came back to Christ at nineteen and spent a year setting things right. Christ said to me, “I have forgiven your sins. Now together we will set things right.” I had stolen food from the Wake Forest dining hall by letting fraternity brothers use my meal card. I joyfully emptied my bank account to pay them back; things were lean for a while. As a teenager I’d stolen money from my father. I sat at the kitchen table and wept as I confessed to him and offered restitution. There were many went to and apologized for the way I’d mistreated them. To some I wrote letters where appropriate; with others I spoke in person. One was a girl named Linda Kay Walker whom we’d all made fun of in grade school. She was from the mill hill working at a flooring factor, and I a doctor’s son now at a prestigious university. When we sat down, I remember the kindness with which she received my tearful confession and forgave me from her heart. It was always hard, but I grew increasingly attracted to the freedom of conscience that came afterwards, as if my soul had wings.

One you will find humorous concerns an incident when I was seven. I went to Mack’s 5 & 10 cent store in Cheraw with fifty cents in my pocket. I paid for my purchases except one, a small plastic knife that cost a nickel. When I close my eyes I can still see it there in my hand, a worthless piece of junk from Hong Kong, my first conscious memory of deliberate sin as I knowingly violated my conscience just for the heck of it. The feeling I had as I walked out was a mixture of fear and thrill. I’d gotten away with it. But then, after rediscovering Christ, it came to mind, as if an unseen hand reached into the vaults of memory and pulled a buried file of my first willfully deliberate, high-handed sin. “Lord, it was just a nickel!” I complained.

I remember the summer afternoon in August of ‘72 I walked to the home of Mr. Al Carpenter, by then retired, but a long time family friend. I hemmed and hawed, then came clean and gave him the nickel. What a pitiful sight I was! I remember his eyes and mine filling with tears as I awkwardly shared the new things going on in my life. I was learning that obeying Christ was more important than preserving some sort of reputation. With each act of obedience joy increased till there were days I felt nearly intoxicated. I understand that what Zacchaeus did was not out of moral obligation so much as a lavish overflow of joy, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said, “If this is not salvation, it will do until salvation comes along!”

Years ago I was working with a man who’d returned to Christ after a long wandering. Along the way he’d treated several women and the children they conceived with him as disposable. Paying for abortions was just one more expense

---

of his indulgent lifestyle and easily justified, since in his mind they weren't really persons, just byproducts. But then, when he turned to Christ, his dead conscience came alive, and he was rightly tormented because of his evil. His spiritual therapy involved two parts. First, a straightforward confession of his sins of promiscuity and violence, followed by absolution. It still amazes people to experience the potent effects of the blood and mercy of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> When we discussed restitution, we agreed contacting the women years later would not be helpful, but that he should fast and pray for them to find the same help he'd found. We came to the decision that in addition to his tithe he should give regularly to the local pro-life pregnancy clinic, not in any way to pay for his sins, but to help other desperate women, and hopefully the men as well, avoid his crimes. Such close up pastoral work is always messy, like cleaning up after a storm, but it is possible, with careful attention to Scripture and the wisdom that comes through prayer, to set a new course with a clean conscience and new joy at God's restorative wisdom. Our second United Methodist baptismal vow may be read in just this matter, "Do you accept the freedom God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?"<sup>4</sup>

Any copper nails in your conscience? In his book *I Surrender* Patrick Morley writes that the church's integrity problem in our day is the misconception "that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. It is a change in belief without a change in behavior."<sup>5</sup> If the members of this church would take repentance and restitution seriously, it would set off a spiritual shock wave in Greenwood and do much to reestablish us as an outpost of serious Christianity where people's lives are changed. Why should outsiders take our faith seriously if we don't?

Some of us have work to do, and some of it goes back decades. For some it mean going to grave sides and asking forgiveness. For some making financial restitution to the children of those you defrauded. Restitution does not earn forgiveness; that is a free gift of God because of Jesus' self-sacrifice. Restitution is a post-conversion integrity and justice issue. The idea is not to rush out and quickly do something but to patiently let the Lord guide you as to where to start and what to do, and his priorities may be far different from your own. What restitution does is

---

<sup>3</sup> Note the phrase "come feel with me his blood applied," in Charles Wesley's hymn, "O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done," *UM Hymnal*: 287.

<sup>4</sup> *The U.M. Hymnal*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Chuck Swindoll, *John The Baptizer Study Guide*, 16.

---

increase in us the emotional benefits of forgiveness, cleanse the conscience, and show a skeptical world we are serious about costly obedience to Christ. Steps four through ten of the Twelve Steps of A.A. are in line with the intent of Scripture:

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.<sup>6</sup>

Any copper nails in your conscience? They can only be removed by voluntary humiliation, public confession to the one involved, and the willingness to make restitution. There were many copper nails in the conscience of Zacchaeus. But then Jesus came along with a claw hammer and said, “Hey, Zack, come on down. I’m eating lunch with you today. We need to talk about some copper nails.”

### **TURNING TO THE TEXT**

#### **Little Big Man (vv.1-2)**

Location is the most important thing in retail, and Zacchaeus had a prime spot. Jericho was the customs point for goods entering from the east. As chief tax official Zacchaeus received a share of revenues collected by all who worked under his franchise agreement with the Roman government.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> [www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/smf-121\\_en.pdf](http://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/smf-121_en.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> E. Earl Ellis, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 220. Helpful articles include Robert C. Tannehill, “The Story of Zacchaeus As Rhetoric: Luke 19:1-10,” *Semeia*, No. 64 1993, 201-221; Robert F. O’Toole, S.J., “The Literary Form Of Luke 19:1-10,” *JBL* 110/1 (1991), 107-116; D.A.S. Ravens, “Zacchaeus: The Final Part Of A Lucan Triptych,” *JSNT* 41 (1991), 19-32; Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies In The Gospels* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2008),

---

Somewhere along the way Zacchaeus made the decision having money and working with winners was more important than Jewish faith and his relationship with family and community. To work for Rome was to be both a traitor to your nation and your faith since in Judaism they were inseparable. In our day he's the church member who enters a shady occupation because it's lucrative. Loans at exorbitant interest, a chain of liquor stores in poor neighborhoods, preying on the weakness and ignorance of others; you get the idea. Don't care what people think. A scalded conscience. Nice guys finish last, especially nice guys who are vertically challenged like Zacchaeus. That was Zacchaeus, else he could not have been doing what he was doing long enough to be the top tax man in the Jericho district.

The name his parents gave had become a joke; in Hebrew it means *righteous* or *pure*. Like a hooker named *Chastity*, Zacchaeus' name was testimony to all he was not, but he laughed all the way to the bank. The word *sinner* meant nothing, only that he wasn't allowed in the synagogue. No one wants to marry Ebenezer Scrooge, and what Jewish father would give his daughter to such a man? If married, perhaps it was to a Jewess who liked the lifestyle or one he married before entered the tax business. To the Romans he was a Jew, to the Jews a traitor. He lived in no-man's-land as a marked collaborator and was careful about mixing in public. A sword hidden under a cloak could be his undoing. He is the man or woman in Greenwood no one thinks could be saved. And though I use historical imagination here, I'm not far off from what Luke's hearers brought to mind when they heard these words read in the assembly, "Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and rich." But Jesus was never just *passing through*. The Holy Spirit radar of Jesus was always turning, picking up on the screen those who needed to be sought and found.

**The Magnetic Pull Of Preventive Grace (vv.3-4)**

This story is a favorite in Bible story books because there's a touch of humor. Children climb trees, not adults. And Zacchaeus is a short man, *mikros* in Greek, from which we get the prefix *micro*, literally *a little one*. Long on money, short on stature; long on greed and short on faithfulness. At least he was curious. He'd heard about Jesus, the man from Nazareth who had a former tax underling named Levi in his inner circle.<sup>8</sup> What kind of prophet was this who risked including someone like

---

Chapter 13, "The Blind Man and Zacchaeus," 170-188.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 5:27-32.

---



him? Better check it out, but he could not see over a crowd of perhaps thousands lining the road. He jumped up and down, squatted down to look between people's legs, caught an elbow or two in the face, then decided there was only one way to *see Jesus*. He ran ahead in an undignified manner for so powerful a government man and scrambled up a sycamore tree just outside town, a tree known for its short trunk and wide branches. There he perched behind the thick foliage, noticing for the first time how different things look from higher up.<sup>9</sup> No one would see; he was well hidden .

So why was Zacchaeus so motivated? It was the magnetism of God's grace, a yearning in the soul that may hide under curiosity or depression or express itself in the question, "Is this all there is to life?" John Calvin put it this way:

"... though faith was not yet formed in Zacchaeus, yet there was a sort of preparation for it... In this manner, before revealing himself to men, the Lord frequently communicates to them *a secret desire*, by which they are led to him, while he is still concealed and unknown...."<sup>10</sup>

To us Methodists it is known as *prevenient* or *preventing grace* referring to the necessary drawing work of the Holy Spirit that precedes faith in Christ. John Wesley wrote that "All these imply some tendency towards life, some degree of salvation; the beginning of deliverance from a blind unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God."<sup>11</sup> This *primal* and *universal form of grace* is at work at all times in all unbelievers; what differs is only their degree of response to its strange and perturbing power. It's the work of God that sets some now curiosity in the mind or an indistinct yearning in the heart. It is a divine restlessness that nothing in this world can satisfy. Not beauty, not work, not human love and passion, not money, not entertainments and diversions, not sports or travel, not learning or fame or acclaim; nothing can fill the void made for God alone. It's an itch in the soul only Jesus can scratch, a question mark for which he alone is the answer. It is the uncovering of the primal desire for God, even if it cannot yet be named by the one who experiences it.

---

<sup>9</sup> On the details, see "Zacchaeus: Up A Sycamore Tree," <http://trivialdevotion.blogspot.com/2013/02/zacchaeus-up-sycamore-tree-luke-194.html>.

<sup>10</sup> From Calvin's commentary on Luke, no citations.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abington), 40. See also Thomas Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings, Volume 2: Christ and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), "Prevenient Grace," 142-143.

---

**Luke 19:1-10 ..... 10**

And if we learn to watch for its signs in others, we can better help them on their road to Christ. A book, a prayer, a note of encouragement, if well timed, can be of enormous significance. We become way stations and watering holes on people’s journey towards Christ. Prevenient grace makes people do strange things like read the Bible and listen to Christian radio and begin giving to good causes. It sometimes makes some attempt a moral reformation of their own souls. It sets them off on a spiritual journey. It made a hated rich man in Jericho climb tree in the middle of the day just to get a peek at Jesus.

Stage one on the path of salvation is *Prevenient Grace*; it refers to the whole of God’s work in a life before they come face to face with the Savior: their family, their history, education, choices, favorite sins, religious training or lack thereof, hopes and dreams and fears. These are the materials the Holy Spirit uses to cultivate a soul. Zacchaeus was the most unlikely man in town, but if, like Jesus, you could see the invisible workings of prevenient grace, you’d see Zacchaeus was a ripe apple about to fall into the hand of Jesus with the slightest shake of the sycamore tree.

**Divine Surprise And Community Resistance (vv.5-7)**

At his point in the path of salvation the sinner is aware they’re on some kind of search; they are not aware, however, that they are also *the object of a hunt* from the other side. Zacchaeus had been moved by the Holy Spirit into the divine cross hairs, and God the Father was about to pull the trigger. It is done with such absolute precision and economy. Jesus simply calls his name and invites himself over for a meal, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I *must* stay at your house today.”

You don’t reach a lost world sitting in the church and wringing your hands while fumbling through prospect cards. You take the initiative and reach out to people, trusting the Spirit for insight and guidance. It’s what Jesus’ did. Walking under the tree, he received a nudge, “Look up, Jesus. His name is Zacchaeus and he’s the most hated man in town. Invite yourself over for lunch.” Jesus’ boldness was not the result of market research; he heard the voice of God and obeyed. He was originally *passing through* on his way to Jerusalem; he now allowed himself to be diverted and go back into the city. I know this because behind the little word *must* in English is a Greek word that indicates divine necessity, as if Jesus said, “It is a divine call that I stay at your house today; I *must* stay with you, Zacchaeus.”

It was shocking to the good folk of Jericho for Jesus to engage Zacchaeus. He was unclean and defiled by Gentile contact; so was his house and everything he

---

touched or sat on. But it's how Jesus operated, under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He was bold and unconventional. He shakes trees and catches what falls out. Jesus gets personal, "Zacchaeus," and this is the second stage on the path of salvation. You are searching for something to make life work, you then find that someone is already searching for you and arranging attention-getters. The risen Lord makes a decisive move in your direction, and you realize not only has someone been listening to your ill-formed prayers; he knows your name! You've been personally addressed by God. Remember that Zacchaeus' desire was *to see Jesus*. God heard the prayer of his heart and arranged for Zacchaeus *to see Jesus up close*.

The third and fourth steps are *immediate obedience* and *initial joy*. What Jesus commanded, Zacchaeus did, and Luke notes it was with visible joy, verse 6: "So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully." To obey when directly addressed and to *receive him with joy* is a decisive turning point, what we would normally term being *justified* or *regenerated*. Zacchaeus now has a personal relationship with Jesus characterized by external obedience and internal joy as brokered by the Holy Spirit. Sounds like conversion to me.

But not everyone says *Yes* when called. Lord Kenneth Clark, internationally known for the TV series *Civilization*, lived and died without faith in Jesus Christ. He admitted in his autobiography that while visiting a beautiful church he had what he believed to be an overwhelming religious experience. "My whole being," he wrote, "was irradiated by a kind of heavenly joy far more intense than anything I'd known before." But the "gloom of grace," as he described it, created a problem. If he allowed himself to be influenced, he'd have to change, his family might think him daft, and maybe the intense joy would prove an illusion. He concluded, "I was too deeply embedded in the world to change."<sup>12</sup> The grace of God will lead and draw, even convince, but not coerce.<sup>13</sup>

To be called so clearly as Clark, then to reject God so decisively is to take upon oneself the burden of one's damnation. No excuses are left, and some are damned by a love of sophistication and the elite company they keep. To be converted to Jesus like some low common sinner is just beneath them. The grace of God and the

---

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *Our Daily Bread*, February 15, 1994, found at [www.sermon-illustrations.com/a-z/s/salvation](http://www.sermon-illustrations.com/a-z/s/salvation).

<sup>13</sup> For Calvinists of TULIP convictions, grace is irresistible, for Wesleyans resistible.

---

opportunities it offers are not something to be trifled with. Twice Jesus used the word *today*, "...for I must stay at your house *today*.... *Today* salvation has come to this house." New life is available *today*, and if you turn from it *today* you will not be the same tomorrow; you will be a bit deafer and your rebellious heart overlaid with another layer of unfeeling callous. When God gives grace, it is a moment of destiny, and either way you change. You move towards reality or away from it.

There is a scene in Lloyd Douglas' story *The Mirror* in which he imagines a conversation between Jesus and Zacchaeus:

"Zacchaeus," Jesus says gently, "What did you see that made you desire this peace?"

"Good Master," was his reply, "I saw mirrored in your eyes the face of the Zacchaeus I was meant to be."<sup>14</sup>

What were you meant to be? What is God's dream for your life? You will never know it, or what remains of it, apart from Jesus Christ. There are capacities locked within to which only he has the key. How sad to stand at the day of judgment, and to be shown a movie of what your life might have been with Christ at the center guiding the unfolding of your destiny. It's never too late to start again, never too late to come to Christ, never too late change by the power of amazing grace. Old sinners can be saved, old drunks made sober, old lechers become chaste, old cheats become honest, old skeptics learn faith, and old misers become generous. A heartfelt *Yes* to Jesus Christ will change your life and bring joy.

But there will be resistance. Kenneth Clark spoke of the necessity of change, the opinion of his family and his fear that such joy was illusory. True enough: the opinions we have of ourselves and others have of us comprise our identity, our persona, and are we willing for that socially constructed self to be reconstructed by Jesus Christ? In the case of Kenneth Clark the resistance was primarily internal-between his ears, but in the case of Zacchaeus external, verse 7: "And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner," and in this they were right. Jesus is taking onto himself the hatred of the community for an unclean Zacchaeus, and by going into his home Jesus is rendered ceremonially unclean according to the holiness code of the rabbis, which bothers everyone else but not our Lord. His is the more potent holiness of a divine love that changes the status

---

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Dr. Alan Walker, *How Jesus Helped People* (World Methodist Evangelism), 14.

---

of everything it touches rather than the reverse. Others don't pollute him; he cleanses them! First they hated Zacchaeus for the kind of man he was, then they despised Jesus for not agreeing with their assessment. Zack has a new friend, and Jesus a new bunch of enemies, but not for long. You see, atonement is not just on the cross but culminates there as a focal point because Jesus absorbed human sin and evil every single day, and at the end the weight was so strong it crushed him. Reports of such unacceptable behavior will precede him to Jerusalem and contribute to his death.

It is easy to be skeptical when a notorious man or woman is converted. But we should be patient and recognize that while conversion may occur in an instant, it takes a lifetime to work out the implications. It has for me. Jesus has little use for proper church folk who've grown so starched and stiff that they cannot share the joy of someone else's new life. Do you soon hear complaints like, "But what about all the bad things he did, and what about all the people he wronged and cheated? What about repentance and restoration?" Good questions all. Watch and see.

**Sanctifying Grace (vv.8b-9)**

Steven Curtis Chapman, the Christian singer-songwriter, has written, "In the gospel, we discover we are far worse off than we thought, and far more loved than we ever dreamed."<sup>15</sup> When Jesus called his name, Zacchaeus knew the later, and when sitting at table with Jesus it came to him with force that he was far worse off than he thought. For years he'd ignored and treated as refuse those for whom God has a special love-the poor; he'd cheated folk by the hundreds. In a moment Zacchaeus saw himself and the world differently. For the first time he was in touch with the deep truth about himself, and he did not like what he saw. It was time for a change. Time for the new man to step forward.

There may be some repentance in a person's life before coming to Christ, but the big stuff comes afterwards when the Lord begins to purge and purify the soul of former habits. We see the effects of our sin on others and want to set things right. Now that we have peace with God, we desire to make peace with those we've dismissed or abused. We desire to live a life of love in community. We see ourselves no longer as owners but stewards. The name of this is *sanctifying grace*. *Prevenient grace* got Zacchaeus ready, *justifying or converting grace* empowered him

---

<sup>15</sup> *Speechless: Living In Awe Of God's Disruptive Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999).

---

to obey Jesus with joy, but it was *sanctifying grace* that changed his habits and rehabilitated his reputation in the community. John Wesley used the simple image of a porch, a door, and a house to make these three related operations of grace memorable:

“Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, and three- that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these (repentance) we account, as it were, the porch of religion, the next (faith) the door, the third (holiness), religion itself.”<sup>16</sup>

With verse 8 there’s a shift of scenery from public to private that’s easily missed. That Zacchaeus “stood and said to the Lord” implies they were already back at his home and reclining on cushions for a meal, as was the custom. The prophet was at his table, and the presence of such truth and love was sufficient to cause Zacchaeus to review his whole career. His whole life passed before the screen of his imagination. The most stringent standard in Judaism was that if the loss inflicted on another person was deliberate, the restitution must be four fold.<sup>17</sup> Zacchaeus’ vow to repay at this level is thus a public confession of sin; he has deliberately cheated people and promises to set it right. He will have to review his official records and note each one. His voluntary humiliation is part of his salvation. Each copper nail must be pulled out of his conscience. Each person to whom he goes will say, “Zacchaeus, my old enemy, you’re a changed man. Is it true what I heard, that he called you down out of a tree?” With every act of restitution his net worth went down, and with every act of restitution his conversion was solidified.

A few years back I had a single pastoral conversation with a young man converted while in prison. He had been a notorious thief in Aiken County, stealing most anything he could to support his drug habit. He came to me to ask what he should do with his tithe now that he was working. I’m convinced the counsel I gave him was from God because it came to me in such a flash that I laughed out loud. “Here is what the Lord wants you to do,” I said. “Do not put your tithe in the collection plate yet. Save your tithes in a special account until it reaches a thousand dollars. Then go to one of the persons you stole from, even if they don’t know it was you, and make restitution. Tell them Christ requires it of you. Make full restitution to all you robbed, then give with a clear conscience. We then bowed for a moment

---

<sup>16</sup> Williams, *Theology*, 39-40.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Samuel 12:6.

---

**Luke 19:1-10 ..... 15**

of prayer, after which I asked, “What is the first crime the Lord brings to mind?”

“I once stole a John Deere lawn and garden tractor from a man’s back yard.”

“Start there,” I said.”

Moving under Christ’s lordship means deep repentance and a firm commitment to holy living. It means learning his care for the poor, those who live at the edges of survival and are easily ignored by the upwardly mobile and ever-busy. “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.” Zacchaeus did not owe them the same way he owed others. He collected little from them, but when the love of Christ touched him he began to see the poor through new lenses. Personal allegiance to Jesus Christ, a heart for the poor, and a commitment to ongoing repentance and restitution: these are the marks of deep conversion. And until the unbelieving world sees this quality of life, they have reason to be skeptical and ignore us.

**Blessing And Christology (vv.9-10)**

*Assurance* is the name we Wesleyans give to the experience of deep peace with God; we know in a way more convincing than reason and more lasting than emotion that we are accepted in Jesus Christ and need not live in fear as long as we walk with him. This assurance came to Zacchaeus when Jesus looked at him and said, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.” Back in the family! By the miracle of the Holy Spirit Zacchaeus was a new man with a new heart and a new joy and a new set of values that put service over self. Jesus unlocked him from the weight of his past and gave him the keys to a new future. Zacchaeus then made a lot of new friends as he made his rounds of restitution, checkbook in hand.

The last verse of our text, verse 10, is ambiguous. “For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.” Is this the third person self-confession of Jesus? The later testimony of Luke? Or the personal witness of Zacchaeus? Why not all three at the same time? It can be yours as well if you let Jesus do for you what he did for Zacchaeus, which was to turn his life inside out and upside down in a day. Zacchaeus slept well that night; it was the first day of a new life.

**CONCLUSION**

In 1989 in Russia the number-one-graduate-study subject was conversion, but not from a Christian or spiritual point of view. They understood the significance that if there’s a way to change a person’s values, motivations, goals, and lifestyles, you have the ultimate power beyond nuclear weapons. So they wanted to know: If it’s possible,

---

how can we use conversion as a political force for the state?<sup>18</sup> Two years later the Lord showed them as the Berlin wall came down and Germany was restored.

From his storehouse of Jesus tales Luke has selected for us a rich and deeply textured case study in conversion. “Zacchaeus was a wee, little man, a wee little man was he, and he climbed up in the sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see.” There is much to learn here about the manifold workings of God’s grace.

The names Jerry Falwell of the now-defunct *The Moral Majority* and Larry Flynt of *Hustler Magazine* provoke strong reactions even though both are dead. A story shared by Falwell's son Jonathan describes a conversation between the Baptist Pastor and the Smut King. Jonathan had traveled with his dad to Florida where Falwell would debate Flynt. He recalls:

“Mr. Flynt asked dad if we could give him a ride to Lynchburg in my dad's jet.... As we flew, dad and Flynt had a long conversation about sports, food, politics and other ordinary topics. I was bewildered they kept talking like old friends. After we dropped off Flynt in Lynchburg, I asked, ‘How come you could sit and carry on a conversation with Larry as if you guys were buddies? He's the exact opposite of everything you believe in; he does all of the things you preach against; yet you were treating him like a member of your own church. Why?’”

Dad's response changed my outlook, "Jonathan," he said, "there's going to be a day when Larry is hurting and lonely and looking for guidance. He’s going to pick up the phone and call someone who can help him. I want to earn the right to be that phone call!”<sup>19</sup>

If this last story offends you, you haven’t heard what I’ve said today. Jesus came and lived and loved and died and rose to seek and save sinners, even sleazy ones like Flynt and greedy ones like Zacchaeus and pitiful ones like me, and he wants to use us as his bridges. How else will people be reached? We must live the life and be wide open to those the Lord brings across our path. This is our mission.

---

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Larson, “What About Sudden Conversion?” *Preaching Today*, Tape 72.

<sup>19</sup> Jon Greggo, “Conversations That Changed Me,” *Outreach Magazine*, (Outreach 100 Special Issue), 82.

---