

Zacchaeus Transformed

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to Luke chapter 19, and these verses 1 to 10, as we say, well-known, a very well-known story. And just go through it briefly and make one or two observations, practical observations at the end. He entered Jericho and was passing through. There was a man named Sakeas. He was a chief tax collector, and he was rich, and so on. Now, last week at the end of chapter 18, we saw the beggar, the blind beggar, grabbing the opportunity to meet with Jesus and to seek Jesus as Jesus was passing by. And here we meet another man who grabs the opportunity as Jesus is passing through. Last week he was passing by. On this occasion he's passing through. And it's always vital that we grab these opportunities. And before we go any further, I need to ask, have you grasped the opportunity as Jesus passes by? We spoke about that last week. We have to reemphasize it again today. As Jesus passes through, as he does so in the Word as we come under it, it is another opportunity for any person who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ to seek the Lord. Of course, we have an opportunity to seek the Lord any time, but particularly when we're under the Word. This is the time of opportunity. There is something special. It is a way that God has ordained above all other ways. It is under the preaching of the Word. And we must never, ever despise it or, because of our familiarity with it, think that somehow that's all right. I won't hear anything. There's nothing new. Every time we come under it, there is a new opportunity to meet with Jesus. And even if you're an old Christian, you mustn't say to yourself, oh, well, I've met with Jesus. In fact, if you're an old Christian, you wouldn't think like that. But the thing is that even if we have met with Jesus years and years and years ago, every time we come under the Word, it's a new opportunity to get to know him even better. And so this is why it's so important that we meet together under the Word and come around the Word in this way. Because there will come a day when, in this world, Jesus will neither be passing by nor passing through. So it is vital, it is important that we take these opportunities. And here we meet this little man, Zacchaeus, who is a chief tax collector. We've met quite a few tax collectors, but this is the only one we meet who is an actual chief tax collector. And he lived in Jericho. And possibly he was a chief tax collector living in Jericho because Jericho was one of the major toll places between the East and the West. And it was quite a central, quite a vital, quite an important place, quite a rich place in many ways. And we see that Zacchaeus was this wealthy man, but sadly his wealth was not gained by honest means. It was in one of the worst ways possible in exploiting people. He was taking from people, which many of the tax collectors did. That was one of the reasons they were so hated, that they were so hated. And they called at the house and he would look at this list and he would say, actually, you have to pay 15 pounds. That is what is required. And he would demand it because he had the authority of Rome behind. He was representing Rome. And the people would be pushed and he would pocket. He would pocket the fiver himself and hand over the 10 pound, which was the actual tax amount. Men, that's one of the reasons why so many of the tax gatherers were hated is because they were exploiting the people lying in their own pockets. And he would have been one of the figures of hatred.

He would have been so hated in Jericho because there were many people who would be going without, people who wouldn't have food on the table. As Zacchaeus was living in splendor and in wealth, the wealth that was his not by right, but at the expense of these people who were many of them living in poverty. It's a fearful thing. And it goes on to this day. And it's one of the things that that is obnoxious in the sight of God. And that's what makes Zacchaeus' confession and God's love in Christ to him so wonderful. It shows that even because if you go through the Old Testament, you will find one of the sins that God judges most severely is where people are oppressed unjustly and where they're exploited. Wherever there is the exploitation of people and people are oppressed unjustly.

God, if you read through the Old Testament and read through the prophecies, read through the law, you will find that this is something that is abhorrent in the sight of God. And the conversion of Zacchaeus is showing God's great grace and his great mercy so that even somebody who is steeped up to his neck in a sin that God really hates and passes his judgment upon so forcibly in Scripture, we find that God's mercy in Christ is reaching out like this. And what an encouragement it is to us to see that God's grace and God's mercy reaches and reaches and reaches out.

[6 : 17] But here, as we see this man, Zacchaeus, I think it's worth highlighting, just in passing, in chapter 18, there was a huge crowd following Jesus. We only read, there might have been more, but we only read of one man, one man, one man that came to Jesus. Again, in this chapter, we read of a huge crowd following Jesus. But we only read of one man, again, who comes to faith in Jesus. So many people are bystanders. So many people look on. So many people talk about conversions. So many people know about conversions. So many people speak to the one who's been converted, and yet they don't do anything about it themselves. So many people are onlookers with regard to the gospel, looking on, but not actually becoming involved. Looking on, but not seeking Jesus. I hope, my friend, if you're here today as an onlooker, that you will go beyond looking on, and you will look up to Jesus as a savior of sinners.

Anyway, here's this little man who wanted to see Jesus, but he couldn't because he was so small. And there was this great crowd, and there was nobody in the crowd who was prepared to make their way through. You know, sometimes if there's a crowd, you have to kind of push your way and jostle your way.

Well, Zacchaeus would no doubt have been trying to push through. People would look, oh, no way through for you. Because he was the kind of man who was so obnoxious in the eyes of the crowd, he wouldn't have been allowed to go through. They wouldn't have allowed him to get through. But he was determined to see Jesus. And let me say just here, if your desire is to see Jesus, there will be obstacles put in your way as well. Be quite persuaded of that. If today you're in church, and I'm quite sure that there might be people, there might have been people who wanted to come to church today, who had a genuine desire and saying in their heart, you know, I would really like to, I would like to know more about Jesus.

And here, for whatever reason, sometimes people, there are obstacles put in their way. If you begin to seek the Lord, there will be voices going on in your ears saying, no, no, no, no, not just now.

Leave that again. If you begin to concentrate just now upon the word, Satan will come in and he'll begin to cloud your mind. He'll bring before you something. You know, it's unbelievable, the sort of thing. Sitting in church, and you're caught up in a sermon, and all of a sudden you're saying, you know, I don't think I put the oven on. And you're thinking about, it's just such a little practical thing. Satan's got you. Because your mind is saying, oh man, the dinner's, it's not going to be cooked.

[9 : 28] And there's loads of things, or something you forgot to do yesterday. You were going to do something, and you forgot all about it. You had to do it, and it's just come before your mind just now.

And that's it. The sermon's gone. And you see, Satan is our master at doing that, putting any obstacles in the way of anybody who's wanting to see Jesus. Well, that's how it was for this little man, Zacchaeus. The thing is, we need to see Jesus. Anyway, Zacchaeus wasn't going to be put off, so he runs ahead and he climbs up into this tree. And I'm sure there's many people looking around and looking at him and pointing and laughing. But anyway, didn't matter. Zacchaeus is up there, and he's sitting in the tree, and he's looking. He's probably up in a branch, maybe hidden in the leaves, just put enough to see through. And as Jesus is filing by, he stops and he looks up. And what a shock Zacchaeus must have got, because he calls Zacchaeus by name. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up.

Jesus was walking on. And then Zacchaeus must have nearly fallen out of that tree with a shock. Because Jesus turns around and he says, Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today. You see, Jesus knows us by name. He knows his people. And so Jesus, he's the one who's come to seek and to save, that which is lost. And Jesus will find all his people, whether it's Nathanael under a fig tree, or whether it's Matthew at the tax booth, or whether it's Zacchaeus up a tree, he'll find them. Because that's why he's come, to seek, to save, wherever they are. He will look his people out.

And here he is, he's walking along, and here's one that he's come to seek and to save. Zacchaeus, I've come for you. This is your time. This is your moment. I am going to deal with your soul.

Now, many conversions are not at all as public as this. This was one of the most public conversions ever, where Jesus deals savingly, and he brings this man Zacchaeus down from the tree where he's in. And not the urgency in Jesus as he speaks to him. Jesus is saying to him, hurry up and come down. Hurry up. And then he says, today, hurry up, he says, and come down, for I must stay at your house today. Must hurry today. See, that's the way the gospel is. And there's Zacchaeus, he's away up there, and Jesus is saying to him, come down. And you know, that's what the gospel is always saying to us as well. When you were saved, that's how Jesus came to you. It is come down, come down from your perch, come down from your place of pride. Because that's, we're sitting up in our branches, looking down, looking down upon God, looking down upon Christ, looking down upon the gospel.

[12 : 41] People who reject the Lord are looking down. That's what they're doing. You may not realize it. If you're here today, and so far you've pushed Jesus Christ away, you might not realize it. But in, deep in your heart, there is, you're resting in a self-sufficiency. You might be here, and you're saying to yourself, I intend one day to deal with these things. I am not going to leave it forever. I want to be made right with Christ. But, but not just now. Not just now. Doesn't make sense. You see, that's why the Lord is saying today, Zacchaeus, you might not have tomorrow. You see, I'm passing through. This is your day. This is your opportunity.

We, while later, I'll be gone. You'll still be here. See, we've got to grab these opportunities and come down from our perch, come down from looking down on Jesus.

You know, again, there are other people who think that the Lord won't bother with them. You might be here today, and you might think that. Somehow, within your own heart, it's locked in this way of thinking. I know, I believe this gospel, and I accept that the Lord has saved so many people.

And I've seen him work. I've seen him work in people's lives, but maybe he won't bother with me. And you might have your own reasons why you think the Lord won't bother with you.

Well, let me see. None of you here is quite like Zacchaeus. None of you. Zacchaeus, as we said, was this corrupt person who had wronged so many people, had exploited so many people. He was the most, probably the most hated person in the community. Despised.

[14 : 50] And yet, Jesus stops. And he says, Zacchaeus, I'm coming for you. Because I'm going to be your Lord.

And I'm coming home with you. And I'm going to abide with you. Not just coming home. Yes, he came home for the day, but he came home forever into the heart of Zacchaeus. Jesus, remember, has come to seek and to save sinners. What category are you and I in? The sinner category.

So, it's for you and for me that Jesus has come. So, please don't build up these barriers within your own heart. And just say to the Lord, Lord, I may have issues. I may have many problems. Please just come in. Break all these things.

Take them out of my thinking. Because people do have issues. People have baggage. People have problems. There's all sorts of things. One of the things that many people say, and this is one of the failings that so many people, but it's human nature. It's part of the self-righteousness. There are many people will look at Christians and they will say, well, I know I'm not perfect, but I see these Christians.

And if the truth be told, I feel that I'm just as good as them. There might be one or two Christians you look at and you say, they are real Christians. And there might be another crowd and you say, well, yeah, they're Christians. But then you look at another Lord and you say, well, you know, I'm better than them. And there are many people who make that kind of judgment. And they think that at the end of the day, as they face the Lord and judgment, that this will be their argument. And they will say, well, there was all these people in the church and, you know, I was better than them.

[16 : 45] God doesn't judge us one against another. That's not the way judgment works. God doesn't put one person against another. He takes each person individually against his law. That's where judgment is. That's what we're judged against. Against God's law. And straight away, there's not one of us, not one can stand up and say, I'm okay against God's law. No, we're all condemned.

And that is why Jesus came. Jesus is saying, I will take your condemnation. I will stand in your room and place. I will be your substitute. Take my life, my work as your own. And then you can stand because I've done it. I fulfilled the law. And that's the only way. And that's why it says in Romans chapter 8, verse 1, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Because Jesus has fulfilled the law for us. Remember, it's the law that will judge us. And if Jesus has fulfilled the law for us, then we're free. We're set free. If not, we're condemned. So my friend, please don't hide away by making your assessment against other Christians. Make it in what the Lord is calling us to do and to be. And so as Jesus deals with Zacchaeus, and he calls Zacchaeus down, you know, it was really this quite remarkable thing that happened. And as Jesus says, I must stay at your house. We just said that this wonderful thing, this abiding, the abiding presence of Christ.

And we see right away the change in Zacchaeus' life. There was an instant change. This conversion was a real conversion. And you know, we could say this, a faith in Christ that doesn't change the life is not a real faith at all. That doesn't mean that the Christian doesn't sin. It doesn't mean that there won't be failure. But there should be, there should be a growing change. There should be development. As we're talking to the children in becoming more Christ-like, that ought to be our prayer. That is how it should be. And that's what happened straight away in the life of Zacchaeus.

The meanest man in Jericho becomes the most generous. Because as Jesus deals with him, with the powerful, penetrating look of Christ that went right into Zacchaeus' heart, his sin was exposed to himself. He was utterly ashamed of the kind of passion. And this is through repentance, where there's a turning away and a trying to deal with. And he's saying, Lord, I have been such a rogue. I have been such a horrible man. And everywhere where I have exploited people, I am going to make restitution.

This is real Christianity at work. This is what happens. Dealing with the issues. And that's the kind of passion that Zacchaeus was. And you know, the impact of Zacchaeus' life in Jericho would have been, I would imagine, extraordinary. Jesus didn't stop. He was passing through. But he left this little man who was well known but hated. What a testimony to the transforming power of God's grace. As Zacchaeus would be going around the houses knocking at the door, and they would open the door and they'd be saying, oh no, he's here for more money and I have no more to give him. And Zacchaeus would be going into his pocket and he'd be taking out the money. He says, here you are. I took that from you. I took it by default. I'm really sorry. In fact, here's some extra.

[21 : 05] People wouldn't believe it. They would be saying, they'd be punching themselves and saying, is this a dream? But it was real. Because this is the transforming power of God's grace at work. Radical transformation.

And Zacchaeus was going around. What a testimony. And you know, sometimes the greatest testimony is not by what people say, but by what people do, what people are. I'm sure we have all been influenced by Christians whose lives spoke to us more than their words. There was something about them. And we knew this passion. There's a reality of a closeness to God. It's an amazing thing.

And in this whole area of becoming more Christ-like, I think we've got to take this on board. Because when you look at the life of Jesus, Jesus was a person who dared to be different. And I use that reverently. Jesus wasn't different for the sake of being different. He was different because he was different. And the Christian should be different. And in order to make an impact upon society and upon a community, we have to be different. And if that means rattling people's opinions, if it means sometimes doing things that even other Christians will, ta-ta-ta, so be it. If it is done in the right way, in a Christ-like way, for the right motive, to the glory of God, because that has always got to be the underlying. We can deceive ourselves and do things and say, oh, well, I'm doing it for this and that, when it's not the real reason. You see, if Jesus had listened to public opinion, I'm just gone by what people were saying. If Jesus had listened to the hierarchy of the church, he would never have stopped to deal with Zacchaeus. Never. He would have never stopped to deal with any of the lepers because he wasn't allowed into close contact by the law. By the law. Even on the Sabbath day, as he healed people, he was facing ridicule and opposition all the time. And if Jesus had listened all the time to the public opinion to the public opinion and even what the church leaders were saying, there would have been many, many people who would never have been healed and would never have been saved. But Jesus wasn't listening to them. He had eyes alone for his Father in heaven. And my friend, if your focus is upon Christ, and you are Christ-centered in what you do, seeking the glory of God, let me tell you, your witness will be effective and powerful. And you will do things for him. And even if other people don't understand what you're doing, that doesn't matter as long as you're doing it for the right reasons and you're doing it sincerely to the glory of God and you believe that what you're doing is biblically based and it is following what Jesus says. Because we have to follow him. And the last thing we will say here as well with regard to this, when we look at the life of Zacchaeus, facing up to his wrongdoing, we see true Christianity at work here. Because we've got to remember that the church is not full of perfect people. It is full of forgiven people. And this is what we see in the life of Zacchaeus. We see admission, we see forgiveness, and we see restoration, and we see restitution. All parts of what makes up the Christian life. That's how it should be. An admission. Naturally, we want to cover things over.

The important thing is admitting. There's an admission. And when there is the admission, with the admission, there is a sorrow for what is done. Then there is a forgiveness. Then there is a restoration. You know, you could almost see Zacchaeus as he's speaking to Jesus. And as Jesus' eye has gone into his heart and exposed his sin as the light of Christ penetrates. Zacchaeus doesn't try to hide what he is. There's a lovely honesty. Oh, Lord, he says, you know, see what I've done? Oh, you know, he tells, behold, Lord, half of my goods I'm going to give to the poor. And if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. Round about them, they were all grumbling. Isn't that extraordinary?

Here's the Lord making a remarkable work and change in a person's life. And the people surrounding are grumbling. Oh, isn't it awful? See who Jesus is talking to now. You know, sometimes you have to shake your heads at the blindness and the blinkeredness of people. Here is salvation coming to this house and into the life of this man being transformed. And people are groaning and grumbling and complaining.

[26 : 50] What sin that is. Grumbling before God when God's working is real sin. And we see that right throughout the Bible. But here is Christianity at work. And you know, that principle of admission and forgiveness and restoration and restitution ought to be part and partial of our lives, whether it is personally at home, whether it is publicly at work or in the church. That is the way the Christian life ought to focus and to work. In that whole area of admitting our faults, of asking for forgiveness.

And that sometimes, yes, it is primarily before the Lord. And if we admit and confess and repent, we will be forgiven and we will be restored. And if we have to make restitution, then we must.

But it is also through one with another. In our own personal relationships and in our dealings with one another. This principle ought to apply. Sometimes it is difficult. We are going to have to go up and say to people, look, I have wronged you. I have said things that are wrong about you. And we are often doing that because our assessment of situations is nearly always wrong. You know, we see something and we make our own judgments and we talk about it. And quite often, a wee bit down the line we discover and we think, oh, oh. And we make our judgments because we only know a wee bit of the picture.

We don't know the full picture. If we have been making wrong assessments and saying wrong things about people and spreading it, we have a duty to go to that person and ask them to forgive.

Please forgive me. I have really been, I have wronged you. Because it's a serious thing if we are spreading wrong things about someone. And then if we do that, then the person you are asking forgiveness from has a duty to forgive you. And restoration is made. And it's a wonderful thing. This is Christianity at work within communities, within people. And we are being taught that from this passage. This is the way it should be. May we seek then to have God's grace in our heart, in our life, so that we will work and live in this particular way. And Jesus finishes by saying, today's salvation has come to this house.

[29 : 45] Salvation comes to any person's house when somebody in that house is saved. You know, it's a wonderful thing for a light to shine in a house. A light shining for Christ. Because Jesus has come to seek and to save that which is lost. Let us pray.

O Lord, we give thanks for this great gospel. We give thanks, O Lord, for the teaching of it. And we pray that our lives might be transformed day by day into the radical teaching of Christ. And may we seek to live in this radical way which so often goes against the tide of the natural way that people live.

Because we live in a world that exalts greed and promotes so often corruption. We pray that there might be an honesty and an integrity about our dealings one with another by word and by action.

And when we fail, that we may confess our sin and that we may seek to live in this way of admission and forgiveness and restoration and restitution. O Lord, bless us, we pray. Guide us and take us home safely. In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen.