

Does it cost to be a Christian? Be careful how you answer that question. You say, "The Bible says, 'For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works so that no one can boast.' Salvation is free. We contribute nothing to salvation." And you're right. Salvation is of the Lord. We add nothing to the sufficient atonement provided for us by Jesus Christ.

But does it cost us anything to *be* a child of God? The biblical answer is *yes*. It doesn't cost to become a Christian, but it does cost to live as a Christian. And the latter is not optional equipment, but part of the package deal.

Am I saying we have to change our lives in order to become a follower of Christ? No, but in order to be saved we must come to Him with a willingness to *be changed*. God does the changing.

What happens when we become a disciple of Jesus? Things change. In fact, Jesus changes us from the inside out. As we'll see this morning, no one is too far gone for Jesus. Case in point--Zacchaeus.

Last week, in message number 3 in our series on "The Cost of Discipleship," we considered the story of a rich young ruler, a man who said he wanted to be saved, but was unwilling to let go of his money. With this man in view, Jesus said, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,"

While we watched this ripe candidate for the kingdom walk away from Jesus, we pondered the question--Can *anybody* be saved? The answer, as we'll see this morning, is Yes!, but hold on to your seats, because it's not a person you would expect!

Is a person saved who "believes" in Jesus but refuses to allow Jesus to change his life? This is no moot question, is it? In the American Church this morning, there are scores of people who "believe" in Jesus, yet who know nothing of the life-changing power of Jesus, and in fact, have no desire to experience it for the simple reason that they retain the controls. Are those individuals genuine Christians? Where will they go when they die?

**Proposition: In our day of easy-believism, we need to consider seriously the conversion account of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. There are four episodes in the story of Zacchaeus, a man who emptied his wallet for Jesus.**

- I. Episode #1: The Contact (1-4)
  - A. Jesus came to Jericho (1).
    1. He was on His way to the cross.
    2. He had a divine appointment.
  - B. Zacchaeus was there (2-4).
    1. He had power.
    2. He had possessions.
    3. He had a problem.
- II. Episode #2: The Call (5-6)
  - A. Jesus sought Zacchaeus (5).
    1. He came to where he was.
    2. He commanded him.
  - B. Zacchaeus submitted to Jesus (6).
    1. He obeyed the Lord.
    2. He received the Lord.
- III. Episode #3: The Change (7-8)

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\*\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- A. The crowd murmured (7).
- B. Zacchaeus made restitution (8).
  - 1. A true Christian wants to please the Lord.
  - 2. A true Christian seeks to live like the Lord.
  - 3. A true Christian makes right wrongs done to others.

#### IV. Episode #4: The Climax (9-10)

- A. No one is too far gone for Jesus (9).
- B. Jesus came to seek the lost (10).

Implication: When we come to Jesus, what's ours becomes His.

#### I. Episode #1: The Contact (1-4)

Did you know that the gospel that Jesus preached offended some people? Some hearers literally turned away from Him (John 6:66), like the rich young ruler. But others, whose hearts the Spirit of God had renewed, gave Him their allegiance. Like the woman at the well in Samaria, Lazarus, Mary and Martha, and an unlikely candidate we meet in Luke 19. Two incidents led to this latter contact.

**A. Jesus came to Jericho (1).** "And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho." Jericho, the city of Palms, was a wealthy, important town. Josephus called it "a divine region," "the fattest in Palestine." Why did Jesus go to Jericho that day? For two reasons.

1. *He was on His way to the cross.* Consider the words Jesus had just shared with His disciples in 18:31-33, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully treated and spit on; And they shall scourge him, and put him to death. And the third day he shall rise again."

Jesus is en route to the cross in Jerusalem (19:28). His triumphal entry on the colt is recorded later in chapter 19. You say, "I don't get it. If Jesus was going to Jerusalem, why did He pass through Jericho?" Because Jericho was on the way to Jerusalem. And...

2. *He had a divine appointment.* Jesus didn't just happen to be in Jericho. He was there on a mission. He came there to meet someone and change his life. In fact, He already had fulfilled one divine appointment in Jericho when he gave sight to blind Bartimaeus (18:35). Another awaited him as we discover in verses 2-4.

**B. Zacchaeus was there (2-4).** "And behold, there was a man, named Zacchaeus, who was the chief among the tax collectors; and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus, who he was, and could not because of the crowd; for he was little of stature. And he ran ahead, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him; for he was to pass that way."

Many of us remember this story from childhood, and recall the little jingle associated with it, "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he." But we miss the shock of the story if we see him merely as a "wee little man." There are three important details we must not miss concerning Zacchaeus.

1. *He had power.* Zacchaeus was a "chief tax collector." As such, he was the most hated man in the district. He had reached the top of his profession, and he had stepped on a lot of people to get there. In the Hebrew, the name "Zacchaeus" means "pure" or "righteous." But this fellow certainly didn't live up to his name!

Tax collecting in Israel was corrupt. The Romans farmed out the tax collection (it went to the highest bidder). They assigned a collector to a district and specified the amount of required taxes he had to turn in at the end of the year. Whatever he collected in excess, he was allowed to keep. Since the people had no idea how much tax the Romans actually required, this publican could abuse and exploit the hoi-ploi as much as he desired.

Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector, but the *chief* collector. Before us is the CEO of the IRS! Here was a man who had power.

2. *He had possessions.* The text specifies, "And he was *rich*." Jericho was a good spot for a tax man. An important trade route from Jerusalem to the east passed through Jericho. No wonder Zacchaeus was rich! He was the top executive in a system that defrauded men and women. He made his livelihood and lined his pockets at the expense of defenseless, hard-working families.

Before us is an unlikely suspect for spiritual matters. Or is he? In His ministry, the Lord Jesus had a special love for tax collectors, a fact which Luke reiterates over and over in his gospel. Every time Luke mentions a tax collector, it's in a positive sense (3:12; 5:27; 7:29; 15:1; 18:10; 19:2). Jesus reached out to the riffraff of society.

Beloved, no one is too far gone for Jesus. Before us is a rich, powerful, sin-hardened man. But that all changed when Jesus entered his life.

3. *He had a problem.* Verse 3 pinpoints his problem. He wanted to see Jesus, but couldn't because of a physical limitation. He was short, and the crowd was big (and you can be sure no one would share a seat with this cheat!).

Had Zacchaeus ever seen the Lord before this? Probably not. Perhaps he had heard about the conversion of his fellow tax-collector, Levi. News of Jesus had spread throughout the district. In fact, not long before, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, an event which happened in Bethany, not far from Jericho.

When Jesus came to town, the Jericho-ites lined the streets to behold Him. A parade-like-atmosphere filled the city. Jesus was coming! Zacchaeus tried to get close to Jesus, but couldn't make it, so he devised a plan.

Zacchaeus was clearly a man of resource (he hadn't become the chief tax collector for nothing! Morris, 272). Verse 4 says he ran ahead of the crowd, and climbed to a perch in a sycamore tree. This type of tree has a short trunk with wide, lateral branches forking out in all directions, making it easy to climb (Barclay, 234). When was the last time you saw a millionaire climbing a tree?!

For Zacchaeus to mingle with the crowd that day took a lot of courage. He wasn't exactly a popular man in town, and not a few bystanders would have cherished the opportunity to give him an elbow to the ribs (if not a knife to the back)! Why did he risk it then? One commentator says it was curiosity. I think it was more than that. It's the same reason why some of you are in church today though your peers might ridicule you.

Zacchaeus was wealthy and powerful, but he wasn't happy. No doubt he was lonely, for though his castle was full of *things*, his life of sin had short-circuited his relationships. With people. And with God. Perhaps he wondered, "Can this Jesus bring hope to my dismal life?" He had to find out. Then, after the contact, he got the shock of his life.

## II. Episode #2: The Call (5-6)

We can't help but see the sovereignty of God as we notice two elements of the call.

**A. Jesus sought Zacchaeus (5).** Verse 5 states, "And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at your house." Jesus sought Zacchaeus, as indicated by two activities.

1. *He came to where he was.* What a shock it must have been for Zacchaeus when the Master moved to *his* tree, and stopped right beneath *him*! Jesus came to where he was. That's what Jesus did for me at age 11. He met me where I was, and changed my life. How about you? Do you remember where you were when He met you?

It might seem at first that it was Zacchaeus who was seeking Jesus, but the truth is that if the Lord had not first sought him, he would never have come. No one seeks God on his own, according to Romans 3:11. We are dead in sins, in total dependence upon the grace of God.

Only when we have been touched by the Spirit of God can we respond and seek the Lord. An anonymous hymn writer put it this way (in MacArthur, 92):

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;  
It was not I that found, O Savior true; No, I was found of Thee.*

Jesus elaborated on this in John 6:37 and 39, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out...And this is the Father's will who has sent me, that of all that He has given me I should lose nothing." Then in John 6:65, Jesus stated, "No man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father."

Zacchaeus would not have come to Jesus that day had not the Spirit of God drawn him. Nor would we have.

Jesus came to Zacchaeus. Jesus looked up. Jesus saw him. Jesus sought him. In case you doubt that, listen to the first word that Jesus spoke, "Zacchaeus." He called him by name! Surely Zacchaeus must have marveled, "How did he know my name?" Zacchaeus thought he was hidden in the tree, but Jesus saw him. Jesus sees not masses, but individuals. And those He sees He knows.

2. *He commanded him.* "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." This is known as the direct approach to evangelism! Jesus gave a command, not a suggestion. It wasn't, "I've got an opening next Thursday. Will it work on your schedule?" We come to Jesus on His terms, not ours. How did Zacchaeus respond to the call? Jesus sought him and he...

**B. Zacchaeus submitted to Jesus (6).** "And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully." He submitted to Jesus with two responses.

1. *He obeyed the Lord.* He did exactly what the Lord commanded him to do.

2. *He received the Lord.* How do you become a Christian? By praying a prayer, or walking an aisle, or signing a card? No. It happens when you do what Zacchaeus did, when you receive the Person of Jesus Christ into your life (John 1:12).

Do you have a personal relationship with Christ? If you don't, stated bluntly, you are not a biblical Christian. A nominal Christian, perhaps. A church-goer, maybe. But to be a Christian, you must submit your life to Jesus. What happens if we do? Episode #3...

### III. Episode #3: The Change (7-8)

Watch the influence Jesus' actions had both on the crowd and on Zacchaeus.

**A. The crowd murmured (7).** "And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying that he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." Murmured refers to the low muttering that goes through a crowd when it's complaining (Morris, 272). Why did they murmur? Because of their disdain for Zacchaeus ("A sinner!"), yes, but also for Jesus (He should know better! That fellow is no candidate for the kingdom!).

**B. Zacchaeus made restitution (8).** What happened next may have occurred after Zacchaeus emerged from the house. Here's how the LB puts it, "Meanwhile Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, 'Sir, from now on I will give half my wealth to the poor, and if I find I have overcharged anyone on his taxes, I will penalize myself by giving him back four times as much!'"

Here is a radically changed man! The taker has become a giver (MacArthur). The fact is, Zacchaeus went far beyond what the Law required (Num 5:7 specifies a penalty of one-fifth as restitution for a wrong). When you think of how he had made his money, I doubt this was a short list! It's interesting to note he uses present tense verbs indicating he is so committed to restitution he's already started his giving. This is no shallow, emotional promise, but a deliberate, calculated decision. He had counted the cost.

Why did Zacchaeus do that? It was a thankoffering from the heart of a changed man. It was the sort of "fruit in keeping with repentance" that John the Baptist had preached about (Lk 3:8).

Frankly, you don't have to twist the arms of people who have truly been changed by Jesus in order to get them to live for Jesus. They want to go to church. They want to get involved in Christian service. They want to spend time in God's Word and prayer. They want to give their tithes and offerings to the Lord. Why? Out of duty or fear? No! Because they are eternally grateful for what He has done for them.

Are you thankful for what Jesus has done for you? Are you showing Him you are? Zacchaeus reveals three characteristics of a true Christian.

1. *A true Christian wants to please the Lord.* It wasn't so much that Zacchaeus' attitude towards people had changed, though it did. First, his heart changed toward God.

Listen, if we have to pull teeth to get our "converts" to live for Jesus, it indicates a faulty conversion. True disciples want to please the Lord, no matter what the cost.

2. *A true Christian seeks to live like the Lord.* Isn't that what Zacchaeus did? Why did he choose to give to the poor? Because he knew that's what Jesus would do (and in fact, had done; 2 Cor 8:9).

3. *A true Christian makes right wrongs done to others.* We seldom talk about this. We think, "Well, if God forgives me, that's all that matters." Wrong! God wants us to make restitution for the wrongs we've done to others.

Before you became a Christian, did you ever cheat anybody? Did you ever defraud another person sexually? Did you ever ruin another person's reputation by slander? Is so, you can be forgiven. Ask God for forgiveness. Then go and make restitution. You say, "What if I'm not willing?" Your unwillingness reveals you don't mean business with God.

I read the story (in Barclay, 235) about a meeting where several women were giving their testimonies. One woman sat in grim silence while the others talked in beautiful words about the Lord. When asked to testify, she refused. When asked why she replied, "Four of these women who have just given their testimony owe me money, and I and my family are half-starved because we cannot buy food."

A testimony is worthless if it's not backed up by a life that honors Christ. Does your life attract people to Christ or repel them from Him?

I wonder what Jesus said to Zacchaeus inside the house. We're not told. We do know a change occurred. I like the way G. Campbell Morgan surmises the transformation that happened to Zacchaeus (213), "He went in, mastered by the passion to get. He came out, swept by a compassion that gives. His life had been one in which he had made revenue the means of self-enrichment. Now he would make righteousness the method of self-abnegation. Something had happened inside the house."

What happened? We need not speculate because Jesus answers the question for us in verse 9. Zacchaeus got saved! "This day is salvation come to this house."

#### IV. Episode #4: The Climax (9-10)

There are two undeniable lessons illustrated by the account of Zacchaeus.

**A. No one is too far gone for Jesus (9).** Salvation didn't come to Zacchaeus because he did good, but because, according to verse 9, he was a "son of Abraham." What does that mean? He was a son of Abraham, not because he was Jewish, but because he did what Abraham did. He believed. Romans 2:28 says, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly." So what makes a true Jew? Romans 4:11 says Abraham is the father of all who believe. Galatians 3:7 verifies, "It is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." All who trust in Christ are Abraham's offspring.

I can't help but see a contrast here between the rich young ruler in chapter 18, and Zacchaeus here. The ruler came to Jesus, but Jesus came to Zacchaeus. The ruler initiated the conversation with Jesus, but Jesus did so with Zacchaeus. Both were wealthy, but as we'll see, the ruler loved his money and Zacchaeus loved Jesus, so much that he gave his money away. The ruler rejected Jesus' invitation and went away lost, but Zacchaeus accepted Jesus invitation and is in heaven today. Of the two, who are you like?

**B. Jesus came to seek the lost (10).** Here is the theme verse of Luke's gospel, the succinct statement of Jesus' mission. Why did Jesus come to this earth? To give us a good example and show us how to live? To inspire us? To restore our broken self-esteem? No, no, no. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

To state it simply, where Jesus is present, salvation is present (Ellis, 221). If you have Jesus, you have salvation. If not, you don't.

We see the power of Jesus to save in the true story of Tokichi Ichii, a man who was hanged for murder in Tokyo in 1918. John Piper tells what happened to this hardened criminal (126-7). "He had been sent to prison more than twenty times and was known as being cruel as a tiger. On one occasion, after attacking a prison official, he was gagged and bound, and his body suspended in such a way that 'my toes barely reached the ground.' But he stubbornly refused to say he was sorry for what he had done.

Just before being sentenced to death, Tokichi was sent a New Testament by two Christian missionaries, Miss West and Miss McDonald. After a visit from Miss West, he began to read the story of Jesus' trial and execution. His attention was riveted by the sentence, 'And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' This sentence transformed his life."

Tokichi shares, "I stopped: I was stabbed in the heart, as if by a five-inch nail. What did that verse reveal to me? Shall I call it the love of the heart of Christ? Shall I call it His compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that with an unspeakably grateful heart I believed."

You say, "Sounds like a death-bed conversion hoax to me. Anybody can say they 'believe' in Jesus." It's true that God alone knows the heart, but we can see the fruit. Here's what happened to Tokichi. When sentenced to death, he accepted it as "the fair, impartial judgment of God." He began to treasure the Scriptures which sustained him in an amazing way. Just before his death, he was deeply moved by the truth of 2 Corinthians 6:8-10, and he wrote:

"'As sorrowing, yet always rejoicing.' People will say that I must have a very sorrowful heart because I am daily awaiting the execution of the death sentence. This is not the case. I feel neither sorrow nor distress nor any pain. Locked up in a prison cell six feet by nine feet in size I am infinitely happier than I was in the days of my sinning when I did not know God. Day and night...I am talking with Jesus Christ."

"'As poor, yet making many rich.' This certainly does not apply to the evil life I led before I repented. But perhaps in the future, someone in the world may hear that the most desperate villain that ever lived repented of his sins and was saved by the power of Christ, and so may come to repent also. Then it may be that though I am poor myself, I shall be able to make many rich."

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. One day in Jericho, He sought and found a lost man named Zacchaeus. To this day, He continues to seek and change lost people. Right here this morning, He is seeking the lost. He can change your life. Are you willing?

Implication: When we come to Jesus, what's ours becomes His.

Response: Salvation is a gift from God. It's free. It must be received, not earned. But God will not give it to a person whose hands are full of other things (MacArthur, 88).

What's in your hands today? If you want to experience the transformation Zacchaeus did, you must open up your hands and heart to the Lord. I invite you to do so while we listen to a song that Jon has written which speaks of the power of Jesus Christ to change us.

*Ministry in Music: Jon Pickens*

Most of us here today profess to have Christ in our lives. Yet profession is no guarantee of possession. When you "became a Christian," did anything change? Is your heart different today than it was? How about your attitude towards money? If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Have you allowed Jesus Christ to make you a new person? If not, perhaps you do not truly know Him. Come to Jesus today on His terms.

William Sleeper wrote the following lyrics that tell what happens when we come to Jesus (see #336), "Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus I come..."

*Hymn of Response: #336 "Jesus, I Come"*

Let's bow our heads as we reflect on God's Word. Zacchaeus took a risk to see Jesus. What kind of inconveniences are you willing to endure to see and know Jesus better? Do you need to make restitution? Are there people you have wronged in the past that you need to go to? Tell the Lord, and ask Him to help you.

*Time for Response in Prayer*

Aren't you glad we have a Savior Who has the power to change us? When we come to Jesus just as we are, yet with a willingness to be changed, He makes us new. Our final song helps us express this confidence in the Lord's power to change us.

*Song of Commitment: #342 "Just As I Am"*