



“Transformed”
Luke 19:1-10

Idea: Jesus seeks out and rescues people who are far from God.

Intro: It is said that when Christopher Columbus made his voyage west in 1492, he kept two logbooks, one of which contained falsified information. He wanted his crew on the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria to believe that they were closer to land than they really were. Apparently, Columbus felt that the morale of the crew was more important than the integrity of the captain.

The Lord Jesus, as He journeyed toward Jerusalem, told His disciples what would happen there. He wanted them to know where they were. Sadly, they could not grasp what their Lord was saying (Luke 18:31-34). They, like many of the people in the crowds that gathered around Jesus, believed He was going to Jerusalem to deliver Israel from Roman oppression and usher in the Kingdom of God. Others simply followed Jesus just to see the next miracle He would perform.

There was broad speculation about who Jesus was at this time in His life and ministry. Luke, as he was writing years later, understood that for those reading his Gospel there might even be questions about who Jesus was at this point in the story. Therefore, in chapter 19, the good doctor focuses on settling that speculation. He presents a three-fold ministry of a Savior who seeks the lost, a Master who rewards the faithful, and a King who offers peace. Today, we will examine the first facet of this ministry. From the story of Zacchaeus, we will learn that Jesus seeks out and rescues people who are far from God.

Read Luke 19:1-10.

Inquiry: The name Zacchaeus means “righteous one.” This chief tax collector, however, was not living up to his name. Without a doubt, the Jewish religious community would not have considered him righteous. As a tax collector, he would have been thought of as the scum of Jewish society. These enforcers of the Roman tax system were Jews who extorted their brethren for personal gain. As such, they were regarded as religious and political traitors. In today’s culture, the closest social equivalent would be drug pushers and pimps, those who prey on society, who make money off others’ bodies, and make a living of stealing from others. Tax collectors or publicans were renegades in the eyes of the Jews. They were thought to be hopeless and beyond redemption. Tax collectors, however, were precious lost sinners in the eyes of Jesus. They were never outside the reach of the Lord’s transforming grace.

This traitor to his name and creation was gloriously transformed by Jesus. It is crucial that we recognize that it was Jesus whom Zacchaeus sought. He understood that whatever was missing from his life could only be filled by Jesus. Nothing of this world could do that for him. He would not find what he needed in health, religion,

wealth, or prominence. His problem was deeper than all of those. You see, if a man goes to a psychiatrist, he simply becomes an adjusted sinner. If he goes to a physician, he becomes a healthy sinner. If he achieves wealth, he becomes a wealthy sinner. If he joins a church, he becomes a religious sinner. Let a man, however, sincerely go to Jesus in repentance and faith, and he will be transformed sinner. He will become a new creature in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

This beautiful and glorious transformation of Zacchaeus has telling connections to the two previous events in Luke's Gospel. The healing of the Bartimaeus who was lost in blindness and poverty corresponds here to a man lost in wealth and corruption (18:35-43). The Lord's interaction with the rich young ruler connects because of the impossibility of the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God. What is impossible with man, however, is possible with God (18:27). Zacchaeus along with his tax collector colleagues seemed to be the least likely candidates for citizenship in the Kingdom. If Jews were going down to the Vegas in their land to place bets on the likelihood of people making it into the Kingdom, Zacchaeus and his buddies would have been given 1,000,000 to 1 odds. Humanly speaking, there was no way for him to be saved and his life cleaned up. They were right, but with God what is impossible is possible.

The last line in this account articulates for us the purpose of Jesus' life and ministry (19:10). Seeking out and rescuing people who are far from God is what Jesus was all about then, and it remains His mission today. The story of Zacchaeus tells us that no one is beyond the reach of Jesus. He can, wants to, and will transform the lives of far from God people if they will believe on Him. Transformation begins with Jesus. There are three truths for us to see about Him.

1. Jesus sees you where you are.

Verse 2 provides a description of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and a wealthy man. His despicable occupation speaks of his wicked and shameful heart. He was also rich, which speaks of the hopelessness of his spiritual condition. He is cut off to and condemned by God because of his sin and rebellion.

As Jesus entered Jericho and began to pass through the city on the way to Jerusalem, people began to flock to Him. The crowd was huge, which made navigating through the streets difficult. The size of the crowd made it very difficult for people to see the Lord if they were not stationed up front or taller than others. Zacchaeus could not see over the people because he was a short man (vs. 3). For this reason, he decided to run ahead of the crowd and climb a tree to get a look at Jesus. When Jesus arrived at where Zacchaeus was, he looked up at him (vs. 5). Picture Jesus here with hundreds if not thousands of people around Him. They are pressing in on Him. This is an Eastern culture, so they would not have been as conscientious of personal space like us. No, in this moment people were right up on Jesus, filling the street. In the middle of that mass of people, Jesus saw Zacchaeus. He looked up at and singled him out.

Today, in a similar manner, Jesus sees you where you are. Whether or not other people can or want to see you, Jesus sees you right where you are. He sees your sin and shame. He sees the predicament of your life. He sees your vain attempts to manufacture purpose and a sense of fulfillment. He sees the spiritual façade that you attempt to project. He sees the distance that stands between you and Him. Despite all your attempts to rebel and run, His eyes are graciously fixed on you.

2. Jesus meets you where you are.

Zacchaeus was in a sycamore tree. These are beautiful and sturdy trees that are found throughout this region. They grow to be about forty feet high, with a short trunk and wide branches. They are easy trees to climb, so, as the Lord walks up, He finds this small and rejected man, alone and hidden up in the branches. Surely, Zacchaeus was hoping that no one in the crowd would see or recognize him up in the tree as he peers around from the backside of the trunk. He was satisfied with a personal view of Jesus

from afar, but Jesus wanted more. Therefore, Jesus met Zacchaeus where he was. He met him in his sin and shame. He met him in his seeking. Jesus did not ask or command him to clean his life up before He would come to where he was. No, Jesus simply met him where he was.

Today, Jesus meets you where you are. He meets you in your brokenness. Rather than shaking His head and walking away in disappointment like we would do, Jesus walks toward you are and meets you in that sinful space.

3. Jesus calls you to leave where you are.

After Jesus saw Zacchaeus and came to where He was, He invited him to leave the tree and come down to where He was. Jesus invited Zacchaeus to Himself. This was an invitation to leave a life of sin and shame and embrace a new life of righteousness and acceptance in Christ. This was the purpose of the gospel encounter. Jesus had come into Jericho not simply to pass through on His way to Jerusalem. He had come to *“seek and save”* Zacchaeus (vs. 10). He had come to call this man who was dead in sin to leave his old way of life and find new life in Him.

Today, Jesus calls sinners to leave where they are and come to Him. If you have never answered that call, then right now He is inviting you to Himself. He is calling you to leave your sin and shame and embrace His offer of forgiveness and cleansing. He is asking you to be transformed through the power of His death, burial, and resurrection.

This transformation begins with Jesus, but it is coupled with our willing and obedient action. There are three actions I want you to see from Zacchaeus’s response.

1) Position yourself to see Jesus.

We do not know what caused Zacchaeus to position himself to see Jesus. It is possible that he had found his wealth and lifestyle unsatisfying. A sense of unease made every pleasure unfulfilling. Nothing lasted. It is also probable that he had grown weary of being hated by his people. He was tired of being an outcast. Whatever the circumstances, Zacchaeus was motivated to seek a change, and he had surely heard how Jesus had transformed the lives of other despicable people. Perhaps, he even knew Levi and the story of his transformation. Therefore, on this day, as news spread throughout the city of Jesus’s arrival, he decided to go and see Him.

Unfortunately, his small stature put him at a disadvantage in the crowd, so he ran on ahead and climbed up in a tree. Luke records significant information for us in verse 4. In the East, it was unusual for a man to run, especially a wealthy government official. Yet Zacchaeus ran down the street like a little boy following a parade. He even climbed a tree to see the event. Curiosity is a characteristic of children, and this sinner was curious about Jesus on this day.

Zacchaeus positioned himself to see Jesus. Today, if you want your life to be transformed, then you must position yourself to see Him. How do you do this? You position yourself to see Jesus by:

- Looking to the Scriptures (Rom 10:17).
Every book and every page of the Bible speaks to and reveals Jesus as the Messiah who alone redeems sinful people. As you put yourself near the Bible, then you are positioning yourself to be engaged with the gospel.
- Gathering with the church.
As you put yourself in the presence of believers and set under the teaching of God’s Word, then you are positioning yourself to be engaged with the gospel.

Zacchaeus positioned himself to see Jesus. Have you taken this action in your own life? Obviously, you are in church today, so in some sense, you have.

2) Ready yourself to hear Jesus.

Zacchaeus heard Jesus's voice from up in the tree. Surely, the crowd was noisy that day. If you remember, as Jesus approached Jericho, Bartimaeus heard the rumble of the crowd (18:36). The noise would have only intensified as more and more people gathered around Jesus in the city. So, as this sinner hid up in the sycamore tree when Jesus approached, his ears would have heard a multiplicity of sounds (laughing, shouting, feet pounding, children running, etc.). He, however, had readied (prepared) himself to hear the voice of Jesus. And so, when Jesus called out his name, he heard it.

Zacchaeus readied himself to hear the call of Jesus. Have you prepared yourself to hear the voice of the Lord calling you to Himself? Do you have ears to hear?

3) Posture yourself in repentance to Jesus.

After positioning himself before Jesus and hearing from Jesus, Zacchaeus postured himself in repentance to Jesus. Luke tells us that he "hurried" down from the tree and brought the Lord to his home (vs. 6). I take this to mean he either slid down the trunk or jumped from the limb. Either way, it is a picture of humility. Zacchaeus did not care what others thought of him. He willfully set aside his dignity. During that afternoon and into the evening as Jesus and the disciples dined in his home with other tax collectors, Zacchaeus listened to the gospel as it was preached to them. Then, at some point, he believed and turned from his sin. He faithed into Jesus as Savior and Lord, which was validated by his promise to give half of his wealth to the poor and to restore fourfold what he had defrauded from others (vs. 8).

Zacchaeus was not saved because he promised to do good works. He was saved because he responded by faith to Jesus' call to Himself. His conversion was validated by Jesus referring to him as "*a son of Abraham*" (vs. 9). Having trusted in Jesus, he then gave evidence of his faith through repentance and generosity. You see saving faith is so much more than pious words and sincere feelings. It creates a living union with Jesus that results in a transformed life. Zacchaeus's view of money and wealth instantly changed. It was no longer his god and identity. Rather than cheating people, he now desired to bless them. Therefore, we are reminded that when a person postures himself in repentance to Jesus it is always seen in a changed life. One's previous affinity with the things of this world are changed.

Conclusion: The story of Zacchaeus tells us that no one is beyond the reach of Jesus. He can, wants to, and will transform the lives of far from God people if they will believe on Him. Transformation begins with Jesus. He sees you where you are. He meets you where you are. And He calls you to leave where you are. This transformation also requires action on your part. You must position yourself to see Jesus, ready yourself to hear Jesus, and posture yourself in repentance to Jesus. If you were to put yourself in the crowd gathered alongside the road next to the sycamore tree that day, where would you be found? Are you a disciple traveling with the Lord, a spiritually ignorant enthusiast, or a seeking sinner wanting to believe on Jesus and be transformed?