

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 70 – “JESUS SAVES THE UNEXPECTED”

LUKE 19:1-10

Ps. Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 70 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Jesus Saves the Unexpected."

Introduction

On January 26th, 1972, an explosion tore through the baggage compartment of JAT Flight 367 as it was flying over Czechoslovakia, and the aircraft began to break apart.

Vesna Vulović was a flight attendant on board, and she fell about 10 kilometers (or 6 miles) from the sky without a parachute.

But *unexpectedly*, she survived. She was pinned inside the main body of the aircraft, which landed at an angle in a heavily wooded and snow-covered mountainside, which cushioned the impact.

And *unexpectedly*, she made an almost complete recovery but continued to walk with a limp.

To this day, she holds the record for having survived the highest fall without a parachute.¹

<pause>

Now *everything* about that situation would have led us to *expect* that Vulović should *not* have survived that fall. *Salvation* from a fall from that height seemed *impossible*. And *yet*, somehow, she was saved.

Similarly, when it comes to our *spiritual* situation, Jesus previously described our salvation to be "impossible" by our own strength (Luke 18:27). All of us should *expect* to plummet into eternal death because of our sins. But when Jesus comes into the picture, we should *expect* him to be able to do the *impossible*—what no one could ever do themselves. We should expect Jesus to seek and save the unexpected.

So that's what we'll look at more in today's passage.

¹ "Vesna Vulović," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 6 November 2023, 00:51 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vesna_Vulovi, accessed 14 November 2023.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 19:1-10.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

In the last couple weeks, we've seen Jesus interact with a couple individuals, who were a bit of extreme cases: one was a ruler who was extremely rich (Luke 18:18-30); the other was a beggar who was blind (Luke 18:35-43).

- In the first case, the rich ruler wanted to inherit eternal life, and he thought he obeyed all of God's commands, but when Jesus exposes his idolatry when he tells him to sell all his possessions, distribute them to the poor, and follow him, he walks away from Jesus very sad.
- In the second case, the blind beggar believes that Jesus is the promised Messiah King, and when Jesus restores his sight and affirms his salvation, *unlike* the rich ruler, the beggar actually follows Jesus.

So that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 19:1-10.

¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

This is God's Word.

The One Thing

We should expect Jesus to seek and save the unexpected.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in three parts:

- I. An unexpected seeker (vv. 1-4)
- II. An unexpected guest (vv. 5-7)
- III. An unexpected response (vv. 8-10)

I. An unexpected seeker (vv. 1-4)

Look at verses 1 and 2.

[¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.]

Jesus was passing through Jericho, which was one of the last stops before entering Jerusalem.

And then, we're introduced to a new character, Zacchaeus, and only two things are said about him here: he was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.

Tax collectors were considered traitors by the Jewish people of the time because they themselves were Jews, yet they were participants in the Roman oppression over their own people. But not only that, but tax collectors were known to extort their own people, charging them higher amounts than were actually owed, so that they could get richer and richer off the backs of their own people (Luke 3:12-13). So "tax collectors" became basically synonymous with "sinner" (Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:2; 18:10).

Now, if *tax collectors* were so bad and poorly regarded by the Jews, Zacchaeus was a *chief* tax collector. That means that other tax collectors worked *under* him, so he's the *kingpin* of the whole extortion operation. He's the *head* of the mafia (so to speak).

Jericho wasn't just *any* city either. Jericho happened to be one of the big three cities inland where taxes were collected.² So Zacchaeus wasn't just rich, but he was *extremely* rich.

And in the eyes of the Jewish people, Zacchaeus was *extremely* sinful.

<pause>

But then, look at verses 3 and 4.

[³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.]

Unexpectedly, Zacchaeus was seeking to see who Jesus was. This kingpin of the Jericho tax mafia was seeking out Jesus. And Zacchaeus wasn't just kind of passively wondering about Jesus, but he was actively pursuing the opportunity to see him.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

Unfortunately, there were two problems: the crowd and his height. There were too many people around and he was simply too short, so he couldn't get a clear view of Jesus.

But that didn't stop Zacchaeus. Instead of missing this opportunity to see Jesus, he does two things that no adult man would have done during that time—he ran ahead and he climbed a tree.

Those were things that status-less children did, but to do those things as a high-status adult would have been totally undignified and socially unacceptable at the time.³

But Zacchaeus was determined. Jesus was going to pass that way, and he was *not* going to miss seeing him, so he was willing to endure further disgrace for the sake of simply *seeing* Jesus.

Zacchaeus had no control over the crowd or his short stature, but he didn't allow those things to stop him.

He doesn't think to himself, "Oh, I'll just see Jesus next time he passes through Jericho." The reality is that there would be no next time. It was going to be "today" or not at all. Jesus was going to Jerusalem to be arrested and crucified, and then to resurrect and ascend into heaven. The next time Jesus is coming back to Jericho is in his second coming.

<pause>

Just think for a moment for yourself: What are the things in *your* life that are *preventing* you from seeing Jesus?

And how might you be rationalizing your passivity and lack of urgency to see Jesus? How might you be blaming other people ("the crowd") or your circumstances ("your height") rather than taking personal action to see Jesus?

I've heard it said that "we can make excuses or we can make progress, but we can't make both" (Craig Groeschel).

We may spend our lives wasting away in excuses, or we may spend our lives progressing in *seeing* Jesus—or what Scripture calls "*beholding* the glory of the Lord" and "being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Zacchaeus had an urgency and determination to see Jesus, and he wasn't going to allow any barrier to prevent him from doing so.

<pause>

Now what would cause Zacchaeus to want to see Jesus so badly?

Perhaps news of Jesus' *teaching* and *miracles* had spread to Jericho.

Perhaps he had heard of Jesus' *reputation* for being a friend to tax collectors and sinners.

Perhaps he had heard of the dramatic conversion of Levi (Luke 5:27-31)—another tax collector that became one of Jesus' twelve apostles and who many of us know as Matthew.

³ Nicholas Perrin & Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Luke*, TNTC (Westmont: IVP, 2022).

Perhaps Zacchaeus even knew Matthew personally, since he was a fellow tax collector in Capernaum, which was one of the other big three tax cities in Palestine.

At the end of the day, we don't really know for sure why Zacchaeus was so determined to see Jesus. All we know is that Zacchaeus's seeking of Jesus seemed genuine. But *that* in itself should already give us pause.

<pause>

If *you* were in the crowd, would *you* have expected Zacchaeus to be a genuine seeker of Jesus?

Perhaps we would have written him off as too sinful and too self-satisfied to be interested in Jesus.

On the outside, Zacchaeus had money, status, and power. He had reached the pinnacle of the path he had chosen. He was a chief tax collector in Jericho, a kingpin of the city, a man to be feared with wealth to be enjoyed.

But who knows what was going on *inside* of him?

Perhaps he was beginning to feel dissatisfaction with the life that he had made for himself. He was at the top, but perhaps he felt more empty than fulfilled.

The reality is that we simply don't know what's going on *inside* a person, no matter what they look like *externally*.

Tom Brady is one of the most successful American football players of all time. He has won seven Super Bowls, which is the most of any quarterback and any other football player in NFL history.

And yet, after he had already won three Super Bowls, listen to what he said in a 2005 interview with Steve Kroft.⁴

BRADY: ... There's times where I'm not the person that I want to be. Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, "Hey man, this is what is." I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think: God, it's gotta be more than this. I mean this can't be what it's all cracked up to be. I mean I've done it. I'm 27. And what else is there for me?

KROFT: What's the answer?

BRADY: I wish I knew. I wish I knew...

Many people are seeking, and yet don't know *exactly* what it is that they're seeking. All they know is that the life they're living is *not* it.

To others, perhaps Zacchaeus was a *lost cause*—not worth even trying with. But to Jesus, Zacchaeus was *lost* but not a *lost cause*. In fact, as Jesus will say later in this passage, he "*came* to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

⁴ Daniel Schorn, "Transcript: Tom Brady, Part 3," 4 November 2005, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-tom-brady-part-3>, accessed 21 February 2020.

<pause>

Who are some people in your life right now, who at least on the *outside*, may not seem the least bit interested in Jesus?

And how can you begin to point them to Jesus? Let me give three quick suggestions.

First, identify yourself as a follower of Jesus.

When you talk about your weekend with each other, let them know that you gathered with your church over the weekend. When you talk about what books you're reading, share about a Christian book you've been reading and how it's been helpful to you.

Second, pray that God would open doors to move conversations from the surface, to the serious, to the spiritual.

Ask questions about their interests. Ask questions about their opinions on particular issues. Ask questions that get them to engage with their worldview and to consider what difference God would make.⁵ Asking good questions and listening well are great ways to get others to open up, so pray that God would help you in that.

And *third*, be willing to share about your own personal struggles, and how your relationship with Jesus makes all the difference.

When you're feeling anxious, insecure, or going through a time of pain and suffering, how does all that Christ has done for you at the cross and all that he will do for you in eternity help you in the midst of what you're going through?

Let them eavesdrop in how your relationship with Jesus affects your everyday life, especially in the hard times.

People around you are seeking, even if they don't know exactly what they're seeking yet. And one of the most loving things you can do is simply point them to Jesus.

<pause>

So first, an unexpected seeker; and second...

II. An unexpected guest (vv. 5-7)

Look at verse 5.

[⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."]

So Zacchaeus is now sitting in a sycamore tree. All he wants is just to *see* Jesus *pass by*, but when Jesus gets to the tree, he does something *unexpected*.

⁵ Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Stay Salt* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020), 197-215, Kindle. For a summary article, see Ginger Blomberg, "The Evangelistic Power of Listening and Asking," The Gospel Coalition, July 22, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/stay-salt-becky-pippert/>.

He doesn't just *pass by* like everyone, including Zacchaeus, expected him to do. Zacchaeus thought that he was just going to get a *glimpse of Jesus*, but everything must have stopped as Jesus looked up at *Zacchaeus*, and then *spoke* to him!

And notice, Jesus doesn't say, "Sir" or "Hey little man," but he calls *Zacchaeus by name*. Just think about how unexpected that would have been for *Zacchaeus*. It's *expected* that *Zacchaeus* would know who *Jesus* is. Everyone in the city knew who *he* was; that's why there were crowds surrounding him wherever he went. But how is it that *Jesus* knows *Zacchaeus* by name?

Perhaps *Zacchaeus'* notoriety was well-known, or perhaps Matthew recognized him. Or perhaps, as the divine Son of God, *Jesus* *knew* *Zacchaeus* in the most profound way even before he was knitted together in his mother's womb (Ps. 139:12). He *knew* *Zacchaeus* even before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

<pause>

If you're here today and you would *not* consider yourself a follower of Christ, it's *expected* that you would know of *Jesus*. The birth of *Jesus Christ* is the dividing line of history; there is B. C., or Before Christ, and there is A. D., or Anno Domini—that is, "in the year of the Lord." Millions of people around the world throughout the last 2000 years have testified to having encountered the risen Christ by faith and their lives have been completely transformed and reoriented around worship of him.

It's *expected* that *you* would know of *Jesus*, but what may be *unexpected* to *you* is that *Jesus* knows *you* by name.

When *Saul* was persecuting Christians in the book of *Acts*, the risen Christ appeared to him on the road to *Damascus*, and calls out to him *by name*, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (*Acts* 9:4). So even if you're living a life that is in *opposition* to him, he *still* knows you and he calls out to you *by name*.

But *Jesus* doesn't just call our name without reason. He has something to say.

In the case of *Zacchaeus*, he says to him, "hurry and come down, for I *must* stay at your house today."

Again, this is *unexpected*. Usually, the *host* invites the *guest*, but here, *Jesus* invites the *host* to have *him* over as a guest. Actually, it's really *not* an *invitation* at all; it's an *imperative* or a *command*. *Jesus* is *not* asking, but he's *telling* *Zacchaeus* what to do.

As a *chief* tax collector, *Zacchaeus* was probably used to issuing commands and telling *others* what to do. *None* of the Jews would have dared to issue any commands to him.

Yet that's exactly what *Jesus* was doing.

Jesus was commanding the kingpin of the city to not just *come down*, but to *hurry*, and to essentially host him and his twelve apostles. According to custom, that would have meant not only serving him and his apostles a meal, but most likely to have them stay the night.⁶

<pause>

Now, if *you* were in that crowd, how do *you* think *Zacchaeus* would have responded?

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

Or if you were *Zacchaeus*, the head of the city's tax mafia, how do you think *you* would have responded to this man telling *you* to do these things?

<pause>

Look at verse 6.

⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.

Is that what you expected?

Zacchaeus does *exactly* what Jesus told him to do.

- Jesus said, "hurry and come down," so Zacchaeus *obeyed*—"he hurried and came down."
- Jesus said, "I must stay at your house today," so Zacchaeus *obeyed*—he "received him joyfully."

To Zacchaeus, this wasn't a matter of *offense*, but a matter of *opportunity*.

Zacchaeus could have stayed in the tree and said, "Who are *you* to tell me what to do? No, I will *not* come down and you are *not* staying at my house." And that would have been to his own loss of joy.

Rather, even though Jesus used imperatives, perhaps Zacchaeus didn't even hear Jesus' words as commands at all. Perhaps he was thinking, "Jesus, *you* want to stay in *my* house? Of course, I'll hurry and come down then. Of course, you're welcome to stay at my house!"

Why would Zacchaeus respond one way vs. the other? It all depends on who Zacchaeus understands *Jesus* to be.

If Zacchaeus thought *Jesus* was nobody special, then he would have been *offended*.

But because Zacchaeus thought *Jesus* was somebody special, he saw this as a great opportunity. He *wanted* to obey because he wanted *Jesus*, and he was *overjoyed* that Jesus would want to stay at his house at all!

<pause>

So how about us? When Jesus tells you to do something, do you see his commands as a matter of *offense* or a matter of *opportunity*?

That all comes down to who you see *Jesus* to be.

Is Jesus *really* your Lord and Savior, who has the right to command your life?

Is it *really* true that "for from *him* and through *him* and to *him* are all things," and so, "to *him* be glory forever" (Rom. 11:36)?

Followers of Jesus see his commands as *opportunities* to greater joy and intimacy with him.

Perhaps some of us are here today and we *know* that Jesus has commanded us to do something—to repent, to believe, to forgive, to pursue reconciliation. Or perhaps it's something else more specific—to confess your sins against others and ask for their forgiveness, to get baptized and join a church, to initiate a hard conversation with a particular person you've been avoiding.

And we can either get *offended* that Jesus would command us to do such things and just stay up in our trees by ourselves (so to speak), or we can see his commands as *opportunities* to have Jesus in our house—to share in his joy and the full life that he died and resurrected to give us.

If you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, I urge you to respond to Christ's call to you—"hurry and come down, for I *must* stay at your house *today*." *Today* is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). Don't get *offended* by his command, but receive this gracious *opportunity* to repent and believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior—to have him make a home in your heart, and to have him as the source of your forgiveness, adoption, eternal life, and unending joy. If that's you, please talk to the friend that you came with today, or talk to any of the pastors. We'd love to help confirm your faith, celebrate with you, and help you in your followership of Christ.

If you're already a believer in Jesus Christ, remember that this is the God who commands you. He is not an authoritarian, absent God who knows nothing of struggle and suffering. But he is the compassionate, ever-present God who knows the hellish pain of the cross. And he is the powerful, sovereign God who rose from the grave and has gone before you to prepare a room for you in his heavenly house. All his commands are for your joy. So trust him and enter into his joy.

<pause>

Now, let's look at verse 7.

⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

The "they" here are the crowd. This was *not* the *first* time Jesus had "gone in" to be the guest of a sinner. Levi (or Matthew), one of his twelve apostles, was a tax collector who threw a great feast for Jesus with other tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:27-32).

Of course, Jesus had *also* "gone in" to be the guest of the religious, who Jesus pointed out were just as much of sinners as the so-called "sinners" that the crowds referred to (Luke 7:36-50).

To Jesus, "*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and so, *all* are in need of salvation.

Man looks on outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

It doesn't matter whether we are Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, male or female, *more* or *less* outwardly sinful, *all* of us stand justly condemned in our sin before a holy God and *all* of us are in desperate need of salvation.

But just as Jesus told the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost sons, all of heaven *rejoices* over *one* sinner who repents (Luke 15:6, 7, 9, 10, 24).

At this point, even if it was unclear to the crowd whether Zacchaeus was truly repentant or not, should they *not* have rejoiced in seeing *Zacchaeus's* unexpected joyful reception of Jesus? Should they *not* have rejoiced in seeing *Jesus's* unexpected seeking of Zacchaeus, one of the most notorious sinners in their city?

And yet, when Zacchaeus, Jesus, and all the angels in heaven were *rejoicing*, the crowd was *grumbling*.

<pause>

When I first moved to Indonesia, there was a time when I was on Benton Junction [which is an outdoor seating area for a bunch of restaurants in Karawaci], and I was hanging out with a group of people who were all smoking.

And there was someone in our church who happened to pass by and saw me sitting with them. She didn't say anything to me; I didn't even know that she passed by. But apparently, she reported to another Life Group leader in our church and said to her something like, "I saw Eric smoking with a bunch a people on Benton Junction."

Thankfully, the LG leader vouched for me, and said something like, "I know Eric. I'm pretty sure he wasn't smoking, but he was probably building friendships and sharing about Jesus with them."

And as it turns out, that's exactly what I was doing. And by God's grace, one of those guys eventually started coming out to our church, professed faith in Christ, and got baptized into membership.

Now, rather than *grumbling* that I was hanging out with people who were smoking and reporting a false charge against me to that LG leader, what if that person *rejoiced* that those guys were building a friendship with a Christian and had an opportunity to hear the gospel? What if, instead of *gossiping* about me, she *joined* me and became their friends too, so that they could have even *more* Christian friends and *more* opportunity to hear and see the gospel in the lives of Christians?

Perhaps you're thinking, "Well, if I saw someone from our church hanging out with questionable people, you can't expect me to think that they're *evangelizing*."

Well, that's just the problem, isn't it? Why *can't* we expect that?

What if the culture of evangelism in our church was so that it was *normal* to intentionally share the gospel to persuade others to put their trust in Jesus?

What if we were regularly hearing prayer requests in our Prayer Gatherings about people we're building friendships with and those we're praying for opportunities to move conversations from the surface, to the serious, to the spiritual?

What if we invited fellow members to hang out with our non-Christian friends where they are?

Thankfully, I don't have to imagine. I've been so encouraged to hear these prayer requests in our Prayer Gatherings and hear these testimonies of members hanging out together with their non-Christian friends, intentionally having these kinds of spiritual conversations and their friends being open to such conversations.

I know that we still have a ways to go, but I'm thankful for God's work in cultivating this kind of culture of evangelism in our church thus far, and I'm praying to hear, see, and participate in more and more of it, so that more people may enter into the joy of salvation found in Christ alone.

<pause>

So first, an unexpected seeker; second, an unexpected guest; and third...

III. An unexpected response (vv. 8-10)

Look at verse 8.

[⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” ⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.]

We don’t know *exactly* when Zacchaeus said this. But from what the crowd said in verse 7 (that Jesus had “gone *in*” to be Zacchaeus’s guest) and what Jesus says in verse 9 (that salvation has come “to *this* house”), it seems like this all happened *inside* Zacchaeus’s house.

So perhaps, as they were *reclining* over a meal together in his home, Zacchaeus felt compelled to “stand” to his feet and make this bold declaration.

Notice, he doesn’t call Jesus, “Teacher” (Luke 18:18) or “Jesus of Nazareth” (Luke 18:37) as others had done before. Rather, he calls Jesus, “*Lord*.” This was more than a title of respect, but like the blind man who *also* acknowledged Jesus as “Lord” (Luke 18:41), it was perhaps Zacchaeus’s *first* explicit confession of faith in Jesus as *his* Lord.

But that’s not all. Look at what Zacchaeus says: “the half of my goods I give to the poor.” And just like that, 50% of his wealth is gone.

And still, that’s not all. He then says, “And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

Do you know what all this pictures? It pictures *repentance*.

Now, look at verse 9. Jesus declares Zacchaeus a “son of Abraham.” Scripture is clear that one does not become a “son of Abraham” by mere physical descent, but by sharing in the *faith* of Abraham (Luke 3:8; John 8:39, 40; Rom. 2:28, 29; 4:1-16; Gal. 3:13, 14). So Jesus is pointing to the *faith* of Zacchaeus.

But why is Jesus bringing up *faith* here when *repentance* is pictured? Because faith and repentance are really two sides of the same coin. Repentance is turning *away* from sin and faith is turning *towards* Christ. True faith is a *repentant* faith and true repentance is a *believing* repentance. You cannot have one without the other. So here, when true repentance is pictured, Jesus recognizes that true faith is also present.

And so, by means of Zacchaeus’s repentance and faith, Jesus confidently declares, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

We’ll look at the nature of Zacchaeus’s salvation more later on in verse 10, so for now, let’s go back and examine verse 8 a bit more closely.

<pause>

In verse 8, when Zacchaeus says “if,” he’s not saying, “If I have defrauded anyone of anything, which I *haven’t*, I restore it fourfold.” That would be a worthless statement.

And if that’s *really* what Zacchaeus was saying, there’s no way Jesus would have said what he says about Zacchaeus in verse 9.

Zacchaeus is also not making a promise for the future, as in, “if I defraud anyone in the future, then I’ll pay them four times back.” No, he shouldn’t be defrauding people in the future, period. Again, that would be a worthless statement, and Jesus would not have said what he says about him in verse 9 if that were the case.

Rather, Zacchaeus is confessing that he *did* indeed defraud people, as I’m sure most in the crowd could have affirmed. But he wasn’t just *saying*, “sorry,” but he was willing to *show* his repentance by making restitution to those he had wronged—he was willing to pay them back for what he had stolen from them—with *interest* (so to speak).

<pause>

Now, to the crowd, this would have been an *unexpected*—perhaps even *excessive*—response from Zacchaeus. By the world’s standards, nobody does this.

But from God’s standards, this is what is *expected*.

The Old Testament Law called for *double* restitution in cases of stolen money (Exod. 22:7), and *fourfold* restitution in cases of a stolen animal (Exod. 22:1; 2 Sam. 12:6).

Zacchaeus had stolen *money*, so the Law called for *double* restitution. But he was willing to make a *fourfold* restitution for defrauding people, which was *double* what the Law required.

Now, in the church, this kind of response should also be *expected* of believers. If we’ve wronged our brother or sister, we ought to go out of our way to try to make things right with them. We initiate a hard conversation, we own up to our sin and apologize without justifications, we ask for forgiveness, we reconcile, we pray together, we grow together, we’re committed to one another. This is *unexpected* out in the world, but this ought to be the *norm* for believers.

The point here is about *repentance*—what repentance *looks* like.

Essentially, Zacchaeus had done what the rich ruler could *not* do. He basically gave away everything that he had and followed Jesus (Luke 18:22).

Zacchaeus probably worked very hard to cheat and extort a lot of his own people to feed his greed and selfish desires for the accumulation of more and more wealth. Money was undoubtedly an idol for him.

But as he encountered Jesus and confessed him as “Lord,” Zacchaeus became keenly aware that no servant can serve two masters; he cannot serve God and money (Luke 16:13).

But *unlike* the rich ruler who walked away very *sad*, Zacchaeus exudes *joy*. Nobody needed to tell Zacchaeus what to do. Nobody needed to pry his tight-fisted hands open to give.

And Zacchaeus doesn’t just give some vague commitment of “I will do all these things in the ambiguous future.” But notice the *present tense* of the verbs in verse 8: “the half of my goods I *give* to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I *restore* it fourfold.”

It’s almost as if his hands are pulling money from his pockets right there and then. Whether or not that’s exactly how it played out, we’re not entirely sure. But one thing we can be sure of is that Zacchaeus had no intention of delaying. His intention was *immediate*, and he was ready to begin right there and then.

For Zacchaeus, his idol was money, and this was him *smashing* that idol. From this point on, he was going to follow Jesus rather than money. And he wasn't just *saying* that, but he was *acting* on that. Repentance is not merely *felt* or *spoken*, but it is always inevitably *seen* in a *transformed* life.

<pause>

Now, what's interesting is that this "transformed life" is often described in terms of how we deal with money. If we just survey the last few chapters of Luke's Gospel account, Jesus is *constantly* talking about money.

- Jesus tells a parable of a dishonest manager and says that you cannot serve God and money (Luke 16:1-13);
- he tells a parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and surprisingly the rich man ends up in hell whereas Lazarus the poor man ends up in heaven (Luke 16:19-31);
- he encounters a rich man who wants to inherit eternal life but he's unwilling to part with his money, so Jesus essentially says that it's impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:18-30).

And here, Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus climaxes with this great transformation in Zacchaeus in how he deals with money.

All of this is to say that money is probably a bigger struggle for many of us than we realize or like to admit. And this is not just a struggle for the rich but for all people. You can be greedy with much or with little. Zacchaeus's problem was not that he *had* money, but that money had become his *idol*. And money as an idol is a problem for the rich, the poor, and everyone in between.

Martin Luther, the great 16th century reformer, said that "there are three conversions necessary to every man: the conversion of the heart, the conversion of the mind, and the conversion of the purse."

In other words, conversion through repentance and faith in Christ is *not* just merely a change of affections and beliefs (a conversion of the heart and mind), but a change of lifestyle and generosity (a conversion of the purse).

As followers of Christ, it cannot be any other way. If Christ has given to us so generously in the gospel of grace, where he took on *our* spiritual poverty and gave us *his* eternal riches on the cross, how can we be stingy and selfish in our use of money?

If you want to see evidence of your conversion and spiritual growth, examine your view and use of money. Is it the source of your security or insecurity? Is it the source of your feelings of self-sufficiency or inadequacy? Are you cheating people or earning money in dishonest ways?

Then like Zacchaeus, perhaps many of us need to repent.

Now, whether it's dealing with sin regarding money or any other sin that has taken root in our lives, the key question in repentance that we ought to ask ourselves is this: What does repentance *look* like?

For Zacchaeus, his specific sin was regarding money, so his repentance looked like giving away money and making restitution to those he defrauded.

If your specific sin is related to sexual purity, perhaps your repentance looks like not taking your phone into your bedroom at night, cutting off access to any sexually explicit material.

If your specific sin is related to laziness and idleness, perhaps your repentance looks like writing down the top three tasks that you need to do each morning, and working in the strength that God provides.

If your specific sin is related to neglecting your family, perhaps your repentance looks like setting hard boundaries around work, so that you're fully present to eat, talk, play, and rest with your family.

Perhaps many of us settle for *feelings* of repentance and *words* of repentance, and then remain complacent with no transformed life in those areas. Some of us have so-called "accountability" where there really is no accountability. We just wallow in our failings, point each other to the gospel so that we feel a bit better, but then we don't really help each other to flee from sin and fight sin.

That's what's been called "cheap grace." It's not the "costly grace" that we've received in Christ.⁷ If we recognize the horrors of sin and the love of Christ, we will not settle for anything less than a transformed life—the life that Christ died and resurrected to give us.

Jesus talks about cutting off your hand and gauging out your eye to keep yourself from sin (Matt. 5:27-30). Repentance isn't just a *feeling* you have or just *words* that you say, but repentance *looks* like something. If your life just continues as-is, no different from before you "repented," then it's questionable that repentance has really occurred. Of course, there may be lots of ups and downs throughout life, but over the years, progression is always evident.

Remember, repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. And just as *faith* without works is dead, so *repentance* without works is dead (James 2:17, 26). Our works are *not synonymous* with faith or repentance, but works always *accompany* or *evidence* faith and repentance.

So by his transformed life, Zacchaeus evidenced true faith and true repentance, and so, Jesus could confidently declare, "Today salvation has come to this house."

Now let's look at 10:

¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

So why can Jesus so confidently declare, "Today salvation has come to this house"? "*For* [or *because*] the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

What does that mean? It means that because God created us, we are accountable to him, but because all of us have sinned against him, we rightfully deserve eternal punishment for our sins in hell. *That's* what we all need to be saved *from*.

So what did God do? He came down from heaven to earth in the person of Jesus to be our substitute—to live the perfect life we should have lived, to die the death on the cross that we deserved for our sin, and to resurrect three days later, so that all who repent of their sins and believe in him as Lord and Savior will not be lost forever in hell, but will be forever with him in the new heavens and new earth.

That's what it means to say, "the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 43-56.

So how was Zacchaeus saved? *Jesus* sought him out. In fact, that's the whole reason that Jesus came. The very reason for the incarnation, where God took on flesh, was to seek and to save the lost. If you want to know Jesus' mission statement, it is this: "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Previously, when interacting with the rich ruler, Jesus said that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God," but then he also said, "what is *impossible* with men is *possible* with God" (Luke 18:25-26).

So here, we have seen the *impossible* happen. Zacchaeus, an extremely rich man, has entered the kingdom of God, he has inherited eternal life, he has been saved.

But this was not Zacchaeus's own doing (it's impossible with men), it was the work of God (it is only possible with God).

Scripture is clear that, in our sinful state, "no one seeks for God" (Rom. 3:11). In that sense, left to ourselves, there is no genuine seeker. In order to seek at all, *Jesus* must seek us out first.

Whether for Zacchaeus or anyone who has ever been saved, our seeking, our repentance, our faith—these are all consequences of *first* being sought out by Jesus.

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Conclusion

This is the good news of Jesus Christ and this is greatest hope that any of us could ever have. And we can either stay up in our trees with simply a view of Jesus from afar, or we can come down from our high places to joyfully welcome Jesus into our homes. We can either get *offended* by Jesus or seize this amazing *opportunity* for salvation that we have in Christ.

For some of us, perhaps we've diminished in our awe of the fact that Jesus seeks and saves the lost. Perhaps we've forgotten that we were once lost and how Jesus sought us out and saved us. Remember again!

For some of us, perhaps you feel like you're the last person that Jesus would care to notice. But whether you're a blind beggar or a rich kingpin or anyone in between, nobody is too unexpected for Jesus to save. Repent and believe in him!

And for all of us, let's realize afresh how amazing our Lord and Savior is that he came to seek and save the lost, including *us* and all the unexpected of the world.

And let's join him on that mission together as his church.

The One Thing

We should expect Jesus to seek and save the unexpected

Let's pray.