

Giving Out of Abundance or Poverty
Luke 19:1-10, 21:1-4
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Read Luke 19:1-10, 21:1-4

"(Jesus) said, 'Blessed (rather) are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)

Introduction

William Thomas lived in South Wales in an area close to where the famous preacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, pastored a church. William was in his 70s and was described as a "filthy-talking, nasty, old drunk." One night at the pub he overheard some other guys talking about the preaching at the chapel, and how they had heard Dr. Lloyd-Jones saying that there was hope for everyone. William was drawn to the church, but the first two Sundays that he walked up, he lost his nerve and never went inside. But on the third Sunday, one of the men from the pub saw him standing by the gate and said, "Are you coming in, Bill? Come and sit with me." Receiving an invitation from a friendly face, he did come into the church and was so moved by the sermon that he came to faith in Christ that very night.¹

"Come and sit with me" might not seem like a powerful way to bring the Gospel to someone's life, but it can be. Other variations that you might have used are: "Would you like to get coffee together?" or "Would you like to come over for dinner?" or "Is there anything I can pray for you?" or "Our church is having a picnic, would you like to come?" None of those is the full-blown, classic outline of an Evangelism Explosion Gospel presentation, but they can be effective first steps to invite someone into the life of faith. The ministry of friendship and presence is under-rated as a step on the road to a changed life. In our Scripture passage this morning, "*I must stay at your house today*" was the entrance into a man's life in Jesus' day. It was said to a man who didn't make friends easily, who was definitely not a popular person, but one who, it turns out, was ready to change his life. We don't know everything that transpired between Jesus and Zacchaeus, but we do know that Jesus modeled for us the ministry of

I. Giving Your Time and Attention (19:1-7)

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."

Usually when someone complained about who Jesus was hanging out with, it was the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, some uptight religious leaders, right? They didn't like that Jesus ate with sinners, that He let a sinful woman anoint His head, those kinds of things; it wasn't respectable, holy behavior. But here in v. 7, it was not the Pharisees who complained, but the crowds. Because they had standards too. And the Jewish people greatly resented the men who collected the taxes for Rome, especially when they were Jews themselves, as Zacchaeus was. The resentment was both that it was taxes going to the hated occupying nation, but also that the men who collected it usually

¹ Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), pp. 222-23.

charged whatever extra they wanted. That was the system, and you can see why it angered them. And Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector, he was a "chief" collector, meaning he oversaw others and had a bit of pyramid scheme going because he had become very wealthy off of the arrangement. Michael Card comments that, "the people don't despise him because they are close-minded and judgmental; they despise him because he is a slimy, good-for-nothing thief."² You get the feeling that in verse 3, Zacchaeus could not see through the crowd because he was short, but the crowd didn't help him with that. They were probably willing to get in a few accidental elbows to his head and were happy to block his view.

Unlike the story from last week where the blind man cried out to Jesus, "*Son of David, have mercy on me!*" Zacchaeus never cried out to Jesus. He was just hanging out in the tree that he had climbed to get a better view. The text said that he just wanted "*to see who Jesus was,*" he didn't necessarily need anything from Jesus (that he knew of). Maybe he had known Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples, who had been a tax collector. So Zacchaeus was curious and hopeful that there was one religious leader who accepted people like himself.

Jesus did have something for Zacchaeus, though, so he came right to him: "*Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.*" The fact that He knew his name should have impressed the tax collector enough, but His boldness to declare with authority what was going to happen got his attention as well. I'm not sure what your experience has been being invited over to people's houses for dinner, but generally *you wait for an invitation*. I don't think I've ever said straight up to someone that I didn't know very well, "Hey, we need to eat a meal together, so you're hosting me; so go get ready. I like my steaks medium rare and my wines red; set it up, my friend." Inviting yourself over to strangers' houses is generally frowned upon in polite society. But this was Jesus, and He didn't have a place to invite Zacchaeus to, plus He knew that he would receive Him with joy.

Our first challenge and application here is to slow down and look around in life. Look for the people whom no one else befriends and offer them your friendship. Giving people the gift of our time and attention is a beautiful way to break down walls and gain a hearing for the Gospel. I'm not saying there's never a time and place for us to walk up to someone on the street and say, "Can I ask you about your eternal destiny?" My friend, Shibu, does that on the busy streets around Philadelphia weekly, and he and his team have had some wonderful conversations and conversions. But we need to live out relational evangelism, we need to be intentional about reaching out to people that are not in our immediate sphere of friends and family. There's a saying that I heard over and over when I volunteered with Young Life: "Earn the right to be heard." It's not always true, sometimes people are open to hear the Gospel from a 10-minute conversation on a bus or on the street. But usually people want to know they're accepted and that you care before they'll hear about your God.

Jesus invited Himself into Zacchaeus' life; He accepted the tax collector for who he was, but let's see if He left him as he was. And let's see if a camel can fit through the eye of a needle...

II. Giving from Your Wealth (19:8-10)

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."*

² Michael Card, *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), p. 212.

We don't know what kind of conversation passed between Jesus and Zacchaeus over lunch, and whether Jesus challenged him about his business practices or his need to make restitution. But Zacchaeus responded to Jesus in a powerful way - he made an immediate declaration of his intentions to undo the wrongs that he had done. A man who, for most of his life, did not care who he cheated and was not concerned that his getting rich came at the expense of others who had much less than he did, suddenly cared deeply. And he didn't just feel emotions of guilt and remorse, he didn't just confess his professional theft. He decided to do something about it, resolved to make the wrongs he had committed in the past right.

In choosing to restore four times as much as what he had defrauded people of, Zacchaeus was not just making up a number out of the air – he was confessing to being a thief who had taken advantage of the poor. The laws in Exodus required that an ordinary robbery be repaid double, whereas a deliberate and violent act of destruction required fourfold repayment. So, technically he only had to pay back double, but he was determined to go beyond what was legally required and pay back the maximum of any restitution amounts to show how much of a changed man he was.³ Where he used to trust in his money to save him, he now trusted in his Lord Jesus to save him! And that meant that he could use his money to please Jesus and love others.

Zacchaeus has become the foil to the rich young ruler from the last chapter. After the encounter with the rich young ruler who went away sad because he could not imagine parting with any of his money, it must have been wonderfully refreshing to see Zacchaeus willing to change and give back after spending time with Jesus. Jesus said, "*Salvation has come to this house*" – is that because the former tax collector was giving back all this money? No, his giving all this money back was a response to the new life of faith. When Jesus comes into a person's life and the Holy Spirit changes their heart, they desire the things of the Spirit. They have a new sense of purpose, they want to please God. Perfection is a long way away, everyone still struggles with their besetting sins. I've heard testimonies where a person came to faith in Christ and immediately stopped cursing or stopped being angry or some other area. But they still struggled with lust, with greed, with any number of other sins. Zacchaeus' decision to make this area of his life align with God's will was a beautiful sight, but I'm sure that he struggled in other areas, because we all do. But God will continue to work on every believer, sanctifying them and helping them grow in Christlikeness for the rest of their lives. It's a cooperative work where He gives us wisdom and grace to change, but we have much work to do to change as well.

If you have been on our website recently, you know that the first picture that shows up is our graphic for this Luke sermon series (designed, as all of them are, by Katelyn Leonardi!). The subtitle for the series is from v. 10 here: "To Seek and To Save the Lost" because it's a great theme of the entire Gospel. In Zacchaeus' case, his fellow countrymen, the Jews, would have said he was not worth seeking or saving, and the rest of world would have said he was rich man, and therefore wasn't lost and needy. But Jesus knew the full truth – that his new friend was both lost and worthy of being sought out and saved. And the beautiful thing is, no matter what the world thinks of us, no matter what our closest family and friends think of us, Jesus sees in us both true need and the worth of being redeemed. I doubt the crowd was suddenly ready to forgive Zacchaeus and accept him. Let's not be like the crowd; let's celebrate God's forgiveness wherever it is found, and rejoice with every sinner saved by grace. We may not love it when people we despise are forgiven. You don't want a convicted murderer or rapist or terrorist to come to faith through a prison ministry? Check your own heart and remind yourself that you don't deserve grace any more than they do.

³ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 235.

We jump two chapters over to a story of a believer who gave sacrificially to God:

III. Giving from Your Poverty (21:1-4)

¹ Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, ² and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

How many of you enjoy people-watching? It's definitely not my favorite thing to do, I've got too many other things to get done. But I'm told that people enjoy it very much, just seeing how strangers behave when they're not aware that they're being watched, or trying to guess what a person's story is. In these verses, apparently Jesus was just hanging out in the temple area people-watching. He saw rich people putting their gifts into the offering box. The boxes were shaped in a way that had narrow openings at the top and large storage chests at the bottom. And they were made of brass, so putting lots of coins in them would ring loud for everyone to hear. But this one widow, who didn't know that anyone was watching her, had two small coins, equivalent to someone just putting two pennies in an offering plater today. Just as Jesus divinely knew Zacchaeus' name and life story, He also knew that those two coins were all she had left. A reasonable person would have kept one of them for herself, that's still giving half of your net worth away; but her love for, and trust in, God compelled her to give them both.

Two things determine the value of any gift: the spirit in which it is given and the sacrifice involved.

1) The spirit in which it is given. A gift given under protest, grudgingly, or for showing off/self-promotion are not gifts that please the Lord. In Matthew 6:3-4, Jesus said, "*But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*" A gift given as an overflow of love from the heart is what the Lord is looking for. Remember 1 Corinthians 13:3 – "*If I give away all I have... but have not love, I gain nothing.*"

2) The sacrifice which it involves. As the widow and the surrounding rich people demonstrated, what is a tiny sum to one person is a huge amount to another. It is not the amount, but how the giver feels about what he or she has left that makes it a sacrifice. Now, I've sometimes talked to people of lesser means who feel bad that they cannot give more to the church, and I point to this story and say, "God cares more about how willing and loving you are in your giving than the amount." Whether you give a tithe (10%) or half like Zacchaeus or everything you own like this woman, your ability to give freely and generously is a way of declaring with your actions that you see your possessions as being under the stewardship of God.

I was once part of a church campaign to raise money where they asked for pledges that would be paid over the next three years. And the idea was that this was above your normal giving, your tithe. And they didn't want people to get second jobs or be totally strapped, but the idea was that you were to think about your life and not just pledge some amount that you came up with out of the air, but that you could point to something that you would give up and give that amount. That was a very concrete way of thinking about the concept of sacrifice in giving. One person might say that if I give up my daily Starbucks, if I just brew coffee at home rather than buying it, I can give \$20 a week to the church, which equates to roughly \$1,000 a year, so I'll pledge \$3,000 over 3 years. I gave up getting LASIK eye surgery and gave that amount to the church. Other people cut cable or various monthly subscriptions; we gave from what we had sacrificed. C.S. Lewis gave this advice about how we should give:

“I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditures on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc. is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them”⁴

2 Corinthians 8 is one of our great texts for reminding us how to give. In the first five verses, Paul wrote: *“¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”* Did you catch all that? The Macedonian church was full of poor people who begged Paul to let them give to their fellow believers in Jerusalem who were in great need. Paul was impressive. Then in verse 7, Paul says that giving is one of the many ways that we exhibit maturity in our faith: *“But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you - see that you excel in this act of grace also.”* There’s a lot of ways you’re growing in your faith, make sure generosity in giving is one of them.

Conclusion

What’s so great about Zacchaeus’ story is that he didn’t avoid his biggest sin and deal with it last. He didn’t say, “Well, I know I’m rich from taking advantage of people, but it sounds like I could learn a lot from following Jesus about controlling my tongue or keeping the Sabbath holy. Maybe I should study theology for a while so I can grow in my faith before I make any radical changes.” No, he knew his greatest sin was in the area of money, so that’s the area that he attacked first. What are the prevailing sins in your life, and what changes does God want to bring? Learning from Zacchaeus, it’s not enough to just feel bad about your sin, we must take practical steps to turn away from them and show that we know they are wrong.

Zacchaeus said, *“if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”* From that idea of restoring comes the beautiful concept of Restitution, meaning to make a past wrong right. The most common one I’ve heard from people’s life stories is something along the lines of, “When I was a kid, I stole something from a store and when my mom found out, she marched me right back and made me confess my crime and give it back.” Another phrase for this concept is “making amends.” The 9th step of the 12 steps in recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous says: “direct amends to... people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.” This has the power to not only restore relationships, but to allow the person to take full responsibility and consequences for their actions. Even if we were never addicts, as Christians, we should look to make restitution like Zacchaeus did. When we have sinned against someone, ask if there is a way to make it right. Theft is one of the easier ways to do this, simply return what you stole. But if you have gossiped about someone, perhaps you need to apologize to the person and then go back to the people you spread gossip to and repent of that as well. I’ve heard of people writing letters or calling someone and saying, “I’ve become a Christian and realized how terrible I acted towards you when we were kids; I bullied you and I’m sorry.” These things will look different in every case, but the idea is that your repentance is followed by concrete action correcting your past wrong.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 67.

Ultimately, in a way, the Gospel is about restitution being made to God for your sins. But the first step is to recognize that you can't provide restitution for your sin in God's accounting. There's no way to "pay God back" for all the ways that you've violated His laws. The only way to clear the ledger is to pay the penalty of His law with your death, or have someone else pay it for you. And that's what the Gospel is: the substitution of Jesus' death for your own to pay the penalty of your sin, so that you don't have to suffer eternally apart from God. Not only is your debt to God paid off, but He throws in the riches of His kingdom with it, every spiritual blessing we can fathom! After that all happens, after salvation comes to your house, then you can go about the work of making the ways you've wronged others right.

Maybe you're like Zacchaeus, you're here having heard about Jesus, curious about what He might be like. We invite you to take a closer look, get the best view you can, not by climbing a tree, but by diving into reading the Bible and faithful books by people who can explain Christianity to you. We will be the opposite of the crowd – we will make room for you and help you get the best view you can because we know that Jesus loved each one of us. He invited Himself into our lives and hearts and brought salvation and eternal life to our houses. We may not be the perfect representations of Christianity, but He is. And your life will change in all the best ways after you meet Him. There's a time and place for curiously watching and gathering information; then comes the time when Jesus walks right up to you and says, "I'm coming to you, I must visit you and bring salvation to you." When that happens, it's time to jump down out of your lofty perch and follow Jesus, wherever and whatever it takes. Amen.

Benediction

2 Corinthians 4:5-6 - *"For what we proclaim is not ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*