

The Gospel of Salvation

Scripture: *Luke 19:1-10.*

Summary of Sermon: The gospel reveals the *reason*, the *requirement*, and the *result* of God's salvation in our lives.

Introduction

Luke 19:1-10 is the familiar NT story about Zacchaeus. In this story Luke presents to us three basic truths about the salvation of God that comes to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

First, this passage shows us the *reason* we need God's salvation. Second, it points us to the key *requirement* for experiencing God's salvation. Third, it shows us the *result* in our lives of God's salvation.

I. The Reason (verses 1-7)

- 1) In Israel, during the days of Christ Jesus, certain vocations carried a heavy social stigma. These vocations were called "despised trades" and no devout Jew wanted to engage in them. The tax collecting profession was one such vocation.
- 2) The reason for this was that in those days Israel was a colony of Rome, and Rome was primarily interested in how much money they could squeeze out of their colonies.

Rome collected taxes from its provinces through a method called *tax-farming*. In this system, wealthy businessmen in Rome bought contracts that gave them the right to collect taxes in a Roman province. These contractors then sub-contracted the tax collection rights to local businessmen in that province.

These local businessmen would, in turn, divide the collection of the taxes into smaller segments of territory. These local sub-contractors, would pay to the contractors in Rome what they had paid to the Roman government to secure the contract, plus an interest of 25%.

This tax-farming system allowed the Roman colonial government to collect its operating expenses each year without effort. But this tax-collection scheme was very costly to the provinces. This was because, with Rome's power and authority to back them up, the local tax collecting sub-contractors squeezed as much as they could out of the ordinary people in the Roman provinces.

- 3) So, in Israel, tax collectors were despised as traitors who had sold out their people to their enemy for a profit and they were considered by the people to be the worst kind of sinners one could find. (Eg: Pandemic billionaires). This explains why, in **verse 7** of our passage, the members of the public referred to Zacchaeus as a *sinner*.

- 4) We don't know what made Zacchaeus willing to enter a profession that would make him so hated by his own people. As a matter of fact, we don't know much about Zacchaeus at all, except that **verse 3** tells us that he was very short.

Maybe because he was so short, all his life, Zacchaeus had suffered from low-self-esteem, and he had decided to make up for this by becoming a big man by getting very rich, no matter what it takes for him to get rich. So, money became an idol in his life and Zacchaeus became very rich as **verse 2** tells us.

We get the impression, however, that although Zacchaeus had become very rich, his wealth did not give him the satisfaction he had craved all his life. This was probably because he found the rejection of his people very hard to live with. So, all his material success left Zacchaeus feeling empty and unfulfilled.

- 5) Earlier on in Luke's gospel, in **Luke 5:27-33**, we read the story of Jesus calling another tax collector to follow him whose name was Levi, later to be called Matthew. Matthew had left everything to follow Jesus. In **Luke 5** we read that Matthew held a big party at his house for Jesus, which was attended by many tax collectors.
- 6) We don't know if Zacchaeus attended that party in Matthew's house, but even if he did not, he must have heard about it, and he must have felt that Jesus had somehow met the deep spiritual needs of Matthew, who had been a rejected tax collector like himself. So, Zacchaeus must have suspected that Jesus could probably meet his own deep inner need for meaning and fulfillment in his life that money had simply failed to give him.
- 7) So, we can summarize **our first R** from this passage by saying that, the **reason** we need the salvation offered to us by the gospel of Christ is that there is a Zacchaeus in all of us that makes it impossible for us to find true fulfillment from anything else in life, as we confront the inner shortcomings of sin and moral failure in our own lives.

II. The Requirement (Verses 5-9)

- 1) This story of Zacchaeus appears in the second part of Luke's Gospel where, after three years of teaching and healing mainly in Galilee in the northern part of the Israel, Jesus is making his final journey to Jerusalem in the south of Israel. As Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem, He travels through several cities, one of which was Jericho, the city in which Zacchaeus lived.

The news of Jesus' arrival in Jericho must have caused a great deal of excitement in the city and we can imagine that Zacchaeus finally saw this as the chance he had been waiting for to see Jesus, and perhaps, even to meet Jesus.

- 2) So, here is Zacchaeus, wanting to see Jesus, but there's a large crowd. Knowing how much he was disliked by the public, and because of his short stature, Zacchaeus decided to climb up into a sycamore fig tree. He climbed the tree both to hide from the public who disliked him, and to get a good view of Christ Jesus.

But it may also have been that Zacchaeus climbed up into the tree to see over the crowd, to get the kind of advantage he had always wanted to have in his life over everybody else.

- 3) As Jesus draws closer, Zacchaeus is happy that he'll get such a good view. But then, suddenly, Jesus was not only close to his tree, Jesus was standing right under his tree looking up into the tree!

And the whole crowd, hundreds of people, are looking up into the tree with Jesus! Can you imagine how Zacchaeus must have felt? I can imagine someone in the crowd asking, "What is He looking at?" and I can also imagine someone else answering by saying, "I don't know; looks like there's some kid up there in the tree."

- 4) And then, in **verse 5**, Christ Jesus, standing under the sycamore tree and looking up, says to Zacchaeus: *Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.* Luke does not tell us how Jesus knew Zacchaeus was up in the tree, but it almost seems as though Jesus knew in advance that he had a life-changing meeting with Zacchaeus in Jericho!

Imagine how Zacchaeus feels. He thought he was going to hide in a fig tree and watch Jesus from a safe distance, but now, suddenly, Jesus and the entire crowd know he is hiding up in a tree!

No one was prepared for what Christ said to Zacchaeus; they just could not believe that Jesus wanted to have fellowship with this corrupt, and traitorous tax collector! In fact, in **verse 7**, we read that all the people who heard and saw Jesus offering to go to the house of Zacchaeus began to mutter, and say, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." This is a pandemic billionaire, and Jesus is offering to go and eat in his house! Can you imagine that?!

Verse 6 tells us that, at the call of Christ, Zacchaeus came down eagerly from the tree and gladly welcomed Jesus into his home. Luke does not give us the details of the conversation that took place between Jesus and Zacchaeus in the privacy of Zacchaeus' home, but we must assume that some considerable time elapsed between **verse 7** and **verse 8** because of the dramatic change we see in Zacchaeus as a result of the time He spent with Jesus.

- 5) Zacchaeus' response to his encounter with Jesus is what the NT calls *repentance*. In the NT this word means not just feeling bad about our sins. Instead, this word refers to a deep inner spiritual experience that involves a real change in our mind, and in our heart, that leads to a real change in our behavior, so that, going our own way from God all our lives, we now inwardly turn around and we return to God.

- 6) In **John 16:8** Jesus explained that it is God the Holy Spirit who opens our inner eyes to enable us see ourselves as lost sinners in need of God's salvation. **Eph. 2:8-9** teaches us that it is also God the Holy Spirit who then imparts to us the faith we need to believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who offers God's salvation to us.

So, we can say that, in his house that day, as Zacchaeus talked to, and as he listened to Jesus, it is God the Holy Spirit who worked in his heart to enable him to experience genuine *repentance*. And it is this genuine repentance that resulted in God's salvation in the life of Zacchaeus. This explains why, in **verse 9**, Jesus said: *Today salvation has come to this house*.

Unfortunately, today, we have many people in our churches who were asked in a meeting somewhere to come forward and to repeat a certain prayer, and they did so, but without having first experienced the kind of true repentance that Zacchaeus experienced he hosted Christ in his house that day.

You see, the truth is that the Bible does not tell us to pray to *receive Christ as our personal Saviour* nor does the Bible ask us to pray *to invite Christ into our life*. What the Bible asks us to do instead, is that when God calls us through our hearing of the gospel, we need to respond to it with faith and genuine repentance in our hearts that is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

A person who says *I am saved* or *I am born again* but who shows no change in his or her life with reference to God and to sin shows that they have not truly repented of their sin, they have not truly understood the gospel of salvation, and they have certainly not personalized the gospel in their life.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our second R** by saying that the key **requirement** for our salvation is true repentance that is the change of our minds and hearts about God and ourselves as sinners and that turns us from our own way back to God, as we see Zacchaeus doing in this story.

III. The Result (Verses 8-9)

- 1) In the NT the word *salvation* refers to God rescuing us, through the gospel, from first, our spiritual separation from Himself, second, from our subservience to Sin, third, from our misguided Self-rule, and fourth, from the control of Satan. And this spiritual rescue of salvation happens in such a decisive way that the results show clearly in our behavior.
- 2) In this passage we see such a clear result of salvation in the life of Zacchaeus, as he now comes out of hiding, socially and spiritually. In **verse 8**, he says: *Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount*.

According to the Law of Moses in **Exodus 22:9**, Zacchaeus was only required to pay double what he had taken wrongly from anyone, but we see here that Zacchaeus now goes beyond what the Mosaic Law required to replace greed with generosity by offering to pay *four* times!

Zacchaeus is offering to donate half of his wealth to the poor plus *twice* the restitution required by the Mosaic Law. This is a pandemic billionaire offering to give away his ill-gotten wealth to the poor! Can you imagine that?!

From this dramatic change in his behavior, we can see that now, after his salvation, money, which had been an idol in the life of Zacchaeus, has now been replaced by faith in God, instead of faith in his money.

You see, an idol is anything that, if we lost, we would not consider life worth living because it is what gives us our sense of meaning, security, purpose, and satisfaction in life. These can include our work, our family, our money, our beauty, and so on.

- 3) Having a lot of money is what gave Zacchaeus his sense of meaning, his sense of fulfillment, his sense of importance, and his sense of purpose in life.
- 4) As a result of his salvation, we now see a new faith in God that was not there before. Where, in the past, money had been an idol for Zacchaeus, from which he sought a sense of security, now he is able to get his sense of security from his faith in God's ability to provide for him, and to therefore now give away his wealth.
- 5) Zacchaeus' very real experience of repentance that had led to his salvation had delivered him from the idol of money in his life, and we see this very clearly in this dramatic change in his behavior whereby he was now willing to give his money away without anyone asking him to do so.
- 6) As I explained earlier, to repent means not only to feel ashamed of one's sin, it also means to turn away from sin. When a person truly experiences real salvation, as clearly happened to Zacchaeus in this passage, their actions, their thoughts, and their desires will be changed, as we see in the case of Zacchaeus in this story.

If a person says *I have repented* or *I am born again and I love the Lord Jesus Christ*, but there is no change in his or her life with reference to God and to sin, then his or her repentance was false, and he or she is not really saved at all.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our third R** by saying that the **result** of our salvation in our lives should be the kind of demonstrable change in our hearts and in our behavior that we see so clearly demonstrated by Zacchaeus in this story.

Conclusion

So, this is how these **3R's** from the story of Zacchaeus shows us first, the *reason* we need salvation that is offered by the gospel, second, the key *requirement* for experiencing this salvation, and third, what the *result* of salvation should be in our lives.

Let's imagine for a minute that it's you up there in the tree, instead of Zacchaeus. If Jesus were to come along today and see you up there in your tree, what would He need to talk to you about? What is it in your life that you are hiding? A secret sin, perhaps?

An obsession with money, perhaps, because you just don't trust that God will meet your needs? Or perhaps, a desire to be rich, like Zacchaeus, thinking that this is what will give you meaning and purpose in your life?

All our hiding from God began with our first parents in the Garden of Eden in **Gen. 3** when they, with all of us inside of them, sinned by disobeying God. When we see Zacchaeus seeking to be hidden by the leaves of the fig tree that he had climbed, we are reminded of our first parents hiding from God, and sewing fig leaves to make coverings for themselves. When we see Christ coming to Zacchaeus in hiding, we are also reminded of God coming to our first parents in the Garden when they hid from Him. We are reminded that, through the gospel of salvation, God comes to us to bring us back to Himself from all our hiding from Him.

Notice the response of Jesus to Zacchaeus in this story. Jesus did not say to Zacchaeus, "Zacchaeus, if you change professions, and if you pay back what you owe for all the money you have squeezed from people, then I'll come to your house. I won't come now because it would look like I'm condoning what you've done. I can't afford the criticism this would cause, so if you clean up your life I'll come to your house."

Jesus accepted Zacchaeus just as he was. This is the good news of the gospel. In **Rom. 5:8**, the Apostle Paul declared that, "God demonstrates His own love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Perhaps the Lord will have you remember this today that, just like Zacchaeus, who had been hiding all his life from God, through the gospel, God has spoken once for all in Jesus Christ. God is calling you today, even if you are a pandemic billionaire like Zacchaeus, and saying to you: *Come down from your tree of hiding. The time for hiding is over. There is no punishment to suffer, because on another tree called the cross, Christ suffered the full punishment for you.*

That is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All you need to do today, as Zacchaeus did in this story, is to come down from your hiding tree in faith and humility, and to come to the Lord with a genuine prayer of repentance from your heart. When you do that, you will be amazed to find that, as you open your heart to Him, Christ will say to you, as He said in **Rev. 3:20**:

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” This is exactly what Christ did with, and for, Zacchaeus.

In **verse 10** of this passage, Christ said, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” The salvation of Christ, offered through the gospel, will be yours today if you respond as Zacchaeus did.

When we receive God’s salvation that comes to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we discover God’s amazing love for us, His daily presence with us, and His goodness to us every day.

This means that, even when life gets tough for us, as it has been for many of us during these days, we find that, even in our times of trouble and difficulty, we do not need to make money an idol in our lives, as Zacchaeus discovered, because God will meet all our genuine needs.

Let us pray.

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