

The Evidence of True Conversion, Part 1

Luke 19:7-10

Well, I want to ask you to turn to Luke's Gospel this morning as we take another look at Zacchaeus and Jesus. It's a story of salvation, and it's a story of the salvation of one of the most loathed kinds of sinners that there were in the first century world: the tax collectors. In that song we just sang, talked about the grace of God, "Once your enemy, now seated at your table." And here we're going to see and think about just how much of an enemy, how far gone a person can be and still be rescued by the grace of God.

I'd like to introduce our text this morning by starting out not in Luke 19, but just back a few chapters to Luke chapter 5. So find your way back to Luke chapter 5 and verse 27. And I want to introduce the topic this morning and the sermon this morning in the calling of Levi, Levi whom we know as Matthew, the writer of the Gospel of Matthew. He also was a tax collector.

And there are parallels between Jesus' seeking and calling of Levi and his seeking and saving of Zacchaeus. Both accounts,

obviously, they're about Jesus showing love for tax collectors, bringing the mercy of God to tax collectors. He's even willing to eat and drink with them and in both accounts, Matt, Levi in the one hand, Zacchaeus on the other, people, people around him seem to be willing to reject Jesus based on who he embraces, based on who he accepts. They're willing to reject him outright. And no matter what public opinion may be, Jesus does not listen to public opinion. We're so thankful for that. But he stands with those that he came to save.

Look at Luke 5:27 through verse 32, "After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me,' and leaving everything he rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others, reclining at the table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' And Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'"

Just as Zacchaeus rejoiced, remember in our story he rejoiced when Jesus called him down from the tree, "Hurry and

come down for today, Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house.” He rejoiced to come down from that tree. He came down in a spirit and attitude of joy. Levi, here, too, he rejoices to invite Jesus into his house, to put on this massive, expensive feast for Jesus. He treats the Lord to his generous hospitality. And when Jesus partakes of this hospitality and eats and drinks and fellowships with him, what happens? He's immediately criticized. He defends his actions and explains his actions in this way: He points to his mission. His mission is, as it says there, “to call sinners to repentance,” to call sinners to repentance.

With that in mind turn over to, now, to Luke 19:1, and notice how the same themes that we see back there in the early days of Jesus' ministry in that account about his sa, salvation and calling of Levi, those same themes show up again in the story of Zacchaeus. There are people who are willing to reject Jesus, and on the basis of who it is that he accepts. And yet Jesus stands firm, standing with, standing alongside, defending those whom he came to seek and to save. That is his mission.

With that in mind, let's read the account again of Zacchaeus, starting in verse one, chapter 19. “He entered Jericho and was passing through, and there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich, and he was seeking to

see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd, he could not because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 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.' And so he hurriedly came down and received him joyfully, and when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'

"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 four-fold.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today, salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'"

This is the only place in the Gospels that I could find where Jesus invited himself over to somebody's house. But Zacchaeus, hearing Jesus invite him over, he's not, he doesn't take any offense, obviously, not at all. He immediately receives Jesus with joy. He welcomes him with open arms, as he should. It says in verse 6, "He hurried and came down and received him joyfully," and so the two of them set off together, surrounded by this massive crowd. They're walking down this street in

Jericho, the two of them, Shepherd and sheep, Savior and sinner, and they start walking together and talking together and heading to Zacchaeus' house. The Lord comes to Zacchaeus' house, he partakes of Zacchaeus' hospitality, and when we read ahead, we see in verse 11, the next parable that he gives happens in the context of Zacchaeus' house and indicates that Jesus probably stayed the night that night.

After giving that parable, we see in verse 28, that's when Jesus departs for Jerusalem, and we head into Passion Week. But back in verse 7, we see that the crowd doesn't like this at all. Not one bit. They don't like it that Jesus plans to stay at Zacchaeus' house. Why is that? Because as we've said, as we've seen, as, in, throughout our study, not just in this account but all through Luke's Gospel, there was a deep, deep antipathy among the Jews against tax collectors, in particular, all the sinners that are associated with tax collectors as well, but tax collectors in particular. They were the ringleaders at the top with the money to fund all the other thievery and thuggery that was happening underneath them.

So it's this antipathy towards tax collectors in particular that prompted Jesus' parables about seeking and finding the lost that we went through back in Luke chapter 15. God is, Jesus is

telling these parables, telling these stories with a point, God is like a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep behind to go after that one that's lost until he finds it. God is like a woman who loses a coin in her home, and she diligently searches that entire house until she finds it. God is like a father who loses a son, who watches that horizon every single day, waiting for his son until he returns home and when he returns home, he lavishes his love upon him.

Some of the most beautiful stories ever told, but we need to remember that those stories are parables, and as parables, they are making a point. Why did Jesus tell those parables? He told them to rebuke the censorious attitude of the Jews. He told those parables, and they had a sharp edge, a point that penetrated into this criticizing attitude of the religious people in his day, this grumbling that they had against God and his grace, if you can believe it, this criticism against the Lord.

It says in Luke 15:1, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him, and the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man, this man, almost with a, a spewing him out of his mouth, "'this man receives sinners and eats with them.'" And so," verse 3, "he told them this parable."

And it's not just one parable. It's, well, it's the same parable, but it, three different ways.

All through Luke's Gospel we see this. We see the Jews represented in Luke 15 by the Pharisees and the scribes. But they do not like Jesus offering salvation to tax collectors and sinners. They hate those people. They hate them deeply. They would rather see them burn in hell than be saved. Same attitude we find here in Luke 19. So as we look at the text, as we think about the impact of this account in our own lives, we need to ask ourselves hard questions at the heart level.

Because as we've said throughout our study of Luke's Gospel, the Jews of that day, especially represented by the Pharisees and the scribes, those people in our context would be called evangelicals. They would be the ones who run our seminaries and institutions, many of the people who pastor churches, exercise leadership. They're the evangelicals. They're the Bible people. They're the ones who can, are concerned about voting the right way, about putting the right people in public office. They're, they're conservatives. There is a lot in common between us and them. And so this warning is particularly important for us to hear and to heed.

So as we enter into the text this morning, let's ask ourselves this question, what, what kinds of sinners do I have the hardest time forgiving? What kinds of sinners does society have the hardest time forgiving? What kinds of sins seem to be beyond salvation? What kinds of sinners would many people today remand to the pit of an eternal hell? Those same people that deny hell, reject hell, when they, when they meet one of these kinds of sins and these kinds of sinners, they're very quick to allow, oh, I believe in hell for those kinds of people.

What does the Bible say? Can racists be forgiven for the sins of prejudice? Can they be forgiven for the sin of hating others, for treating people with such injustice? Does the Gospel apply to such people? Flipping it around, what about philandering politicians? What about those in politics and universities, and in all different places of influence? What about those who promote godless ideologies just to get votes, just to curry favor with the mob, just to, just to keep their power and their influence? Does God forgive sins like those, too?

Let's make this even more uncomfortable for ourselves as we ask some questions. Does the Gospel apply to pedophiles? Does it apply to despicable, deviant sins? What about those who abuse



others? What about those who victimize others, especially victimizing women and children? Is there forgiveness for human traffickers? Is there forgiveness to be found for modern slave traders?

Because sin is so rampant today, and because the true Gospel is so hard to find, many people have become harsh, unwilling to see certain kinds of sinners forgiven. They have no Gospel that can relieve the need for justice, and so they pursue their own justice, but it's a warped justice because it's coming from the human heart that merely demands retribution and vengeance, harsh penalties. What we're living through right now is probably a prelude to what Jesus describes in Matthew 24:12, He said, "Because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold." Oh, that's what we're seeing today, cold-hearted people. And I'm not talking about the world and the secularists. I'm talking about religious people. I'm talking about people in the evangelical camp, conservative evangelicals, who've become cold-hearted, hard-hearted people.

Intellectually, we have to acknowledge, if we're going to be faithful to Scripture, that if the Gospel does not have the power to save all kinds of sinners, to reconcile all kinds of enemies to God, then it doesn't have the power to save any

sinners at all. Intellectually, we get that. But we have to also acknowledge, emotionally, when we are faced with certain kinds of sinners, certain kinds of people who've come out of certain sins and want to join the fellowship of a church, join the fellowship of the redeemed, we have to admit we've got some questions, right? We have some hesitations. We feel a spirit of caution, probably should.

It could be very hard to understand how Christ can extend his forgiveness to certain kinds of sins, how he can offer a full pardon, a complete pardon to certain kinds of sinners, because when those kinds of people come into the church, knock at the door, and seek to enter, we might find ourselves sounding a lot like this crowd in Jericho.

So coming to the first point in our outline today, put yourselves in their shoes just for the sake of thinking this through. Not that you are the crowd in Jericho, but just go with it for a minute and consider their complaint. Number one, point number one for this morning: the revulsion of the crowd. The revulsion of the crowd. They are revolted at Jesus' action of staying with Zacchaeus. So the revulsion of the crowd. Tax collectors, as I said, were hated by the Jews, deeply despised. They were reviled, and it was for a very good reason.

The tax collectors, they were backed by the Roman Empire, and so they were very well-connected and basically untouchable. They acted like a law unto themselves. They could assess goods passing through their customs houses. They could make their own assessment, assign their own values, and write their own bills. That's convenient. That's a great way to make money. They were well-paid to betray their own people. And because they hiked up the percentages on tax collection, they were nothing more than politically savvy thieves.

As William Smith said, and I quoted him last week, "They, they were regarded as traitors and apostates, defiled by their frequent intercourse with the heathen, willing tools of the Roman oppressor." When you add the element of extortion to all that, collecting taxes by means of, of bullying and intimidation and violence, tax collectors were just the same as robbers. Maybe they didn't put the hands on people, but they hired bullies to do that, to frighten people, to keep them subjected to fear, to pay up.

So verse 7, "When they saw it," when the crowd saw it. Saw what? When they saw Jesus make this overture of friendship to Zacchaeus, when they, they heard that he sought Zacchaeus' hospitality. "When they saw it," it says, "they all grumbled. He

has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” They were right. It’s exactly what Jesus intended to do, to be the guest of the man who was a sinner, and listen, that was scandalous in that day. It was worse than the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, worse than any widespread offense of racists today.

Imagine if the story were told in our own day, and the man that Jesus sought, met, joined in fellowship was David Duke, former Grand Master of the Ku Klux Klan, a notorious white supremacist. That is the depth of revulsion that this crowd felt about Jesus befriending Zacchaeus. How could he? And so they grumbled and they complained. The word is an onomatopoeic word; it’s the word *gongyzo*, which kind of reproduces the sound that ran through the crowd. *Gongyzo*, kind of comes from the back part of the throat and kind of comes out almost like the gurgling sound of someone who's getting ready to vomit. That's really the sound. It's a revulsion. They are revolted by this.

The verb, here, is intensified. It's *diagongyzo* which shows this grumbling, complaining moving through the crowd. *Dia* is the word, through, so it's through the crowd. It's running like this electric current buzzing along at the same speed as of electricity. The crowd is erupting collectively, voicing their disdain and disapproval and muttering condemnation upon the

whole situation. Luke uses *gongyzo* three times in his Gospel. Three times: Luke 5:30, which we just read, the account of Levi, grumbling over Jesus eating and drinking with Levi, a tax collector, then again in Luke 15:2, grumbling over Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners and then here again in Luke 19:7, grumbling over Jesus staying in the house of another tax collector.

The Jews had serious problems every time Jesus ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners because fellowship meant approval. Table fellowship meant sharing in their sins. They loved his miracles. They loved the fact that he could create food just like that, hand it out, feed them best food they'd ever eaten. They loved the fact that he could heal the sick, cast out demons, give sight to the blind, the ability to walk to the lame, hearing to the deaf; they loved the fact that he could do all those wonderful things; from, they loved his teaching, they loved his power, and strength, and teaching, and representing the truth. They loved the fact that he could, he could upend and show up their, their pretentious scribes and Pharisees.

But when he does this, they're willing to cast all that away. In their judgment, Zacchaeus is the sinner, a *hamartolos*.

He's a sinner, and it's not for them in the theological sense of sin that's shared among all fallen humanity because everybody in the crowd is going to admit to having some sin. They, they admit that. They understand the Law of Moses, that they're sinners, they have a, a pathway back to restoration and reconciliation to God and, and finding cleanness from their sins through sacrifice. They get that.

But when they say he is a *hamartolos*, they mean he is so characterized by sin, that sin is so defining of a quality in his life, that this Zacchaeus is irredeemable. He is beyond salvation. He has crossed a line from which he can never come back. Why? Because his sin is so serious, the effects of his sin so far-reaching, his sins pursued for such a long period of time, it is impossible for them to imagine at all this Zacchaeus walking in righteousness, earning enough public trust to regain any credibility, to win back any public trust.

So that's their judgment against Zacchaeus, and we can somewhat sympathize with this, can't we? We recognize, especially in a time, such a sin-stained time, sin-saturated time like ours, that there are so many false and sub-Christian gospels propagated throughout our country, so that when even some notorious sinner who betrays the public trust and does

something despicable, and when he claims, hey, I found Jesus!, are we not just a little bit apprehensive about that, just a little bit cautious, like, hmm. I wonder what Jesus, what gospel he says he believes. Is it the Joel Osteen gospel, about having his best life now? We can understand their apprehension, their caution.

Having said that, though, notice here that their grumbling does not stop, does not stop on Zacchaeus. Their grumbling actually goes farther, further than rejecting Zac, Zacchaeus. Their complaint, it is based on rejecting Zacchaeus' salvation. But their grumbling is actually not against Zacchaeus; it's against Jesus. Do you see that? Notice in verse 7, when the crowd says, "He has gone in to be the guest," who's the subject of that verb? It's Jesus. Their charge here is against the Savior. They've condemned his saving grace. They've condemned his judgment. They've condemned his wisdom. They've condemned his, his viewpoint. They've gone, they've crossed a line, now.

All these people, they're condemning Jesus for the choice that he has made, to take his rest, to stay the night. The ESV translates the verb, to be the guest of, that's fine. Better here may, may be, to find lodging. And they say, he ought to know better. Are there not other houses to stay in, fine hotels,

inns? Can we set him up? We, we can pool, pool enough money together to get him out of that situation. It's a bad optic for him. This is a bad optic for the Messiah and his campaign. Bad example he's setting for all the little ones.

What is he doing associating with Zacchaeus, a man who is a sinner? They know Jesus is knowingly entering into an environment of uncleanness and un, and ceremonial impurity. This man Zacchaeus has probably been, not been to the temple for many, many years. Why? Because he's been excommunicated, pushed out. Your business is so dirty that it defiles you through and through, there is no salvation for you while you have that job. Table fellowship, partaking of his hospitality, that is showing approval. For them, that's participating in his sins. It's guilt by association. They're charging Jesus with sin. That's really where that it, that goes to.

So taking offense at Jesus, condemning Jesus, they have crossed a line, and as soon as Jesus extends friendship, you know what they should have done? They should have shut their mouths. They should have held their tongues in humility. They should, they should have corrected their judgment, rebuked any impulse of grumbling against the Lord. Why? Because this man, Jesus Christ, Jesus the Nazarene, have they ever heard any



charge of sin against him? Had they not seen the wisdom of God that overcomes all the best teachers they have in Israel? Had they not seen purity and holiness incarnate before them? They should realize that when Jesus touches a leper, it's not the leper's uncleanness that contaminates Jesus; it's Jesus' holiness that contaminates the leper.

When Jesus enters into the house of a tax collector, it's not the uncleanness of that environment that contaminates him. No. He is of such a holy character, holy nature, holy essence, that his holiness pervades the entire environment and certainly it's done so with Zacchaeus. They need to shut their mouths.

Notably, the history of Israel is a history of grumbling, isn't it? Should provide a caution for every subsequent generation of Israel, but as Jesus said, this generation is no different. It, too, is an evil generation, always prone to grumbling, always prone to accusing and condemning God. And so it turns out that this generation, they're just like their fathers. They have not paid heed to the lessons of Israel's history.

By grumbling against Jesus, the crowd reveals this spiritual blindness. They cannot see the Lord as he is, for who he is. They can't see what he's doing by drawing near to

Zacchaeus, and therefore they can't see the evidence of true conversion in him. They cannot see the evidence of real spiritual transformation in Zacchaeus. That's a caution for us, isn't it? Sometimes we get used to our salvation. That's a good thing. I'm thankful. I'm thankful that what God is doing in my life is enough to give me joy and gratitude, that it can eclipse all the evil that I've done in my life beforehand. I'm so grateful for his grace. But listen, we have got to remember that were it, were it not for the grace of God, there goes some of us, right?

We can't be so unfamiliar with our past, unfamiliar with the sins of the world, that, that we think ourselves better. We can see the evidence of true conversion, and when we do see that evidence of true conversion, we need to regard that person the way God regards that person, even if he was characterized as the very worst of sinners. However you fill in that blank in your own mind, we need to regard that person as belonging to Christ, as being one of his lost sheep, whom he came to seek and to save.