

The Evidence of True Conversion, Part 2

Luke 19:7-10

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.'" So as we come to verse 8, they're drawing near to

Zacchaeus' house or, as a number of commentators believe, and I think rightly, the scene has shifted, here, between verses 6 and 7, and here they're eating a meal together along with other guests. So it's a scene similar to the one at Levi's house. It says in verse 8, "Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord,' I, "the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I restore it four-fold.'"

Three evidences, here, in this verse of true conversion. Three evidences of saving faith that this tax collector, a former sinner, has been born again, that he has been truly saved. First, notice that he confesses the lordship of Christ. Notice that he confesses the lordship of Christ. Luke tells us that "Zacchaeus stood and said," to whom? "to the Lord." *Kyrios*. Luke wants us to take note of that crucial element of true salvation in what Zacchaeus says. "Zacchaeus stood and said to," to, "the Lord," and what did he say? "Behold, Lord."

So from the sycamore tree in verses 4-6 to this moment in verse 8, Zacchaeus and Jesus have been hearing all this noise around them, the incessant grumbling of the crowd, imperfect tense, there, so the grumbling has continued. It's been on, nonstop, unabated. Did Zacchaeus hear this grumbling? Probably. The crowd wasn't inclined to be quiet in its condemnation. Did

Jesus hear it? Yeah, he knew. But it's important to see what Luke wants us to see, that what Zacchaeus says in verse 8, he is not caving, here, to the pressure of the mob. "Zacchaeus stood and said," not to the crowd. He said "to the Lord." And Luke puts the focus on the lordship of Jesus Christ. He identifies him by his authoritative title, here, *ton kyrion*, Master. Zacchaeus begins with, "Behold, Lord." And then he says, "I give" and "I resolve." Those are the two verbs, there. And he uses present-tense verbs, indicating a resoluteness, indicating a very firm resolve.

There's another indication of resoluteness and firmness here in the, in the sense of that verb, he stood. That's the verb, *histemi*, and that, too, can indicate firmness of resolve, an unwavering conviction. So in the presence of this relatively hostile crowd, what he says, he says with resolve, in spite of the hostile crowd. What he says he says in sole consideration, not of the crowd, but of the Lord. And he says it directly to the Lord.

That's why this is such a clear evidence of conversion, his declaration of commitment and resolve, telegraphing his intentions to everyone, calling attention to himself in public, which he just didn't do. Man, this is a, a reversal of his

character. And he begins where everybody ought to begin, with the fear of the Lord. You see the fear of the Lord, there? It says in Proverbs 14:26, "In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence." He has strong confidence here. He had to have strong confidence. But for him it's not a matter of courage.

It's not a matter of, like, pushing back against the hostile crowd. It's just a matter of what his heart is compelled to do, here in front of the Lord. Something has changed in this man. If you think about yourself, think about in all your time professing Christ, has there been any really significant, profound change in your life, of the continuity of what you were from birth, all the way through your trajectory of, really, your sin, self-centeredness, all of that? Has there been a break in that, in that trajectory to put you off in a totally different direction, so that who you are now and who you were then are two completely different people?

Sometimes I can't even recognize, I, I, not just sometimes, all the time, I can't re, recognize the person that I used to be before Christ. I'm so ashamed that the two of us share the same name, and yet, that, too, is by the grace of God, to bring all glory to him.

Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus. He knew something of who Jesus was and what Jesus had preached. All those reports had come from Galilee, through Judea, Perea, down to Jericho and the intercourse of communication between Jerusalem and Jericho, and obviously through Bethany and all the places around there. Jericho knew who Jesus was. Zacchaeus knew who he was. Jesus' preaching gave him hope, hope of a salvation from his sin, hope of a rescue from his wretched condition, hope of freedom from all of the prisons of his heart and his station in life. And now, having met Jesus, having listened to him and learned, Zacchaeus knows for sure, without a doubt, this is the Lord. This is the Master. This is my Master. So he starts with lordship.

A second evidence of true conversion, second, Zacchaeus commits to showing mercy. Zacchaeus commits to showing mercy. He's now going to be generous to the poor, the poor, who he had barely given a thought to, previously ignored. Zacchaeus really had been like the rich man in Luke 16, clothed in purple and fine linen, feasting sumptuously every single day, all the while ignoring the poor sitting in his gate. And now, having been converted, he's going to change that. He's going to turn from a heart of greed and practice a heart of generosity, practice a heart of mercy.

He intends to do what the rich man of Luke 16 never did. He intends to do what the rich young ruler could not do though commanded clearly by Christ. He does not want wealth to have hooks in his heart. He doesn't want the weight of riches to drag his soul down to the pit of hell. That's not all that's driving him, is his own personal concern for himself. More to the point, having talked with Jesus, having received for himself the free gift of God's mercy, having received the free gift of grace in his salvation, listen, his heart has changed. He wants to give. That, too, is an impulse of a truly regenerate heart: generosity, mercy, compassion, concern.

Jesus once said to his disciples, Matthew 10:8, "Freely you receive, freely give." That's the way we think, isn't it? The converted heart is a generous heart. The converted heart is not a covetous heart, not a stingy heart. The converted heart is generous, ready, eager to give, looking for ways to give, searching out ways to give, not waiting to be told, not passive, but active. "The half of my goods I give to the poor," he says. "Half of my goods." That's not just money. That's not just what's in the bank account, the liquid cash. This includes all his possessions; yes, the cash, but also real estate, businesses, business assets, investment. This is lavish generosity on his part.

The second half of his commitment, "I restore it four-fold." Listen, considering how much money he needed to fulfill that commitment, it's a staggering amount, an even more astounding transformation of the heart, to go from the practice of greed and covetousness to a heart of generous mercy. This change from greed to generosity for the sake of mercy to the poor, the poor having absolutely nothing that they could hand back, no way that they can *quid pro quo*, hand back and do for him, because I've done for you, there is nothing, there's nothing that they can give in return.

This change, it's a remarkable change. Jesus said in the previous account, the rich young ruler, he said of the rich, it's an impossible change. A man cannot do it on his own. So this is only possible by the grace of God. Again, it's an indication of true repentance that there has been true, genuine conversion, here. There's a radical, deep, profound transformation in this man's life.

One more, a third evidence of true conversion, Zacchaeus commits to practicing justice. Zacchaeus commits to practicing justice. He intends to, to rectify all wrongs. He intends to pay restitution. And here's where we see Zacchaeus' converted intellect at work. He is thoughtful in acknowledging his sin. He

is biblical in making restitution for his sin. He's, he's genuine in his obedience, and he's committed to moving forward in the fear of the Lord and going where the fear of the Lord takes him.

Imagine what's going to happen, here, to the city of Jericho when Zacchaeus takes the proceeds of half of his possessions and disperses it to the poor. Imagine what's going to happen. It's going to get people's attention, isn't it? Once he starts executing on his plan, people are going to take notice. They're going to trace all of his actions to this point, to this declaration of commitment before the Lord to show mercy and to make restitution for past wrongs.

And so when Zacchaeus says, "If I've defrauded anyone of anything," he uses the word there, *sykophanteo*. *Sykophanteo*. It's from *sykon*, which is the word for, figs. And then *phainrao*, to show. So literally it's, to show figs. What in the world does that mean? In our day not much unless you're a fig grower, you know, then you understand. Almond grower, you could say the same thing. A literal sense is to show figs by shaking the tree, so those ripened figs fall to the ground. It's a metaphor. It pictures, when it's done to people, that's a, that's called a shakedown, roughing them up to extort money from them.



So he uses that word to refer to his actions. He puts this commitment to restitution in the form of a conditional sentence. Notice, it's an, if/then. "If I have defrauded anyone of anything, then I'll restore it four-fold." It's a first class conditional in the Greek which, and this is key, here the speaker assumes the truth of the, if, statement for the sake of argument. He assumes the truth of it.

The fact that he's guilty of extortion, here, that's not in doubt. But the extent of his extortion, that's going to take some investigating on his part. By saying, "If I have defrauded someone of anything," Zacchaeus is really, there's an admission there, yes, of the general charge, but he's opening himself up to closer scrutiny. He is willing to allow his life and his work to be examined. He's going to consider any complaint that's brought to him as credible, and from anyone whom he or maybe a subordinate of his may have defrauded of anything, he's going to consider that complaint credible.

Remember, he's an *architelones*. He's a chief tax collector, and as such, he's overseeing a number of different tax houses in Jericho, each of them run by a separate *telones*, a separate tax collector. Each tax collector has his own method of collection, his own network of thugs, all with their own schemes. Probably

lots of robbery going on that's miles wide and many layers deep. So the complaint department at Zacchaeus' tax office, it's going to be opening early and staying open very late for a very, very long time. Expect a long line of victims extorted by close associates of the office of the tax commissioner. Everyone needs to just take a number, settle in for a DMV-sized wait time.

This commitment, here, that he's made to a four-fold repayment, some see this as magnanimous and over the top. It's really not. Zacchaeus is just following the law of Moses, but he's doing so to the fullest extent. Numbers 5:5-7, it says, "When someone sins, breaks faith of the Lord, results in injury to others, he shall confess the sin he's committed, to make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong."

Similar direction in Leviticus 6:4-5. "If he sinned and realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it," so that's 20% increase, "and shall give it to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt."

So no doubt Zacchaeus is considering those texts about robbery, about oppression. But in his mind, his guilt has gone further than that, and so he sees Exodus 22:1 as most applicable

to his situation and what he's done. "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an oxen, and four sheep for a sheep." He puts himself in that category. Whether he committed that kind of theft intentionally, literally, or figuratively, both are possible in the way that people collected what was owed. They could have stolen animals, actually, and turned them into money.

But he considered himself guilty of a sin of the same kind. He had taken from others what they depended upon for their livelihood. So he's saying, I've done the same. You see how this statement, here, tacitly but clearly, this statement is Zacchaeus admitting his wrong. It's him confessing a sin. He is willing to take on the full penalty imposed by the law because he counts himself guilty. Rightly so.

Lots of people, though, are willing to confess sin when it costs them nothing. Zacchaeus' confession of sin and the outworking of his repentance, it's going to cost him, isn't it? The genuineness of his conversion, though, it's evident in the fact that he voluntarily confesses it, and he is eager to make restitution. Notice how thoughtful he is here at this point. Even in rectifying his wrongs, he does not turn off his brain and roll over and accept whatever fate the mob deals out.

He intends to be thoughtful, to be diligent, to test any of their claims of injustice against him based on the actual evidence. That's not him being stubborn. It's him being wise. First class conditional again means Zacchaeus has accepted the general charge that he defrauded people. But instances of guilt, those must first be tested. He is committed to doing justice. He is also committed, in doing justice, to due process. He knows he's guilty of the charge. He accepts responsibility. But for each specific case, he's going to need to presume innocence until he verifies the guilt in each instance. He needs to clarify the extent of the offense and thus how an equitable restitution is to be made.

I hope you see that, here. It's so important, considering the context we live in today, of a demand for reparations, to just open up the coffers of the federal government of taxes extracted from the populace and just start handing them out to victim groups. That's what Zacchaeus' repentance, and the kind of repentance and thoughtful desire for restitution, it argues against that. Zacchaeus isn't simply going to liquidate half his possessions, walk out in the street, and throw a bunch of cash in the air. Why not? That's not justice either.

He has a concern for restitution, yes, but it's a restitution that's going to be based on truth and based on justice. He's not going to cater to the passion and demands of an angry mob because that is not justice. Those who are wronged, they will get their due recompense. If evidence of guilt is verified, then he'll pay. He's eager to pay. He's the one setting this up. As he said, "I restore it four-fold." Listen, the day that Jesus leaves Jericho, heads up to Jerusalem, Zacchaeus has to go back to work that day. He's still the tax commissioner in Jericho. He's charged with the responsibility to collect taxes for his employer. Now, though, he returns to his job with a new commitment to justice, to do right by the people from whom he must collect taxes. He has a stewardship to perform here. He's got a completely different mentality about it. "Collect no more than you are authorized." Very simple instruction. And with that charge, Zacchaeus has got a lot of work to do.

But now it's a good work. Now it's a God-glorifying work. Jericho is going to be one city among so many that is the exception to the rule. It's going to be a city that benefits from this odd and anomalous form of God's blessing: a saved and honest tax commissioner committed to the just and righteous assignment and collection of tax. Will this be easy for

Zacchaeus? No. Has coming to Christ been without consequence for him? No. But what does that matter? What does that matter? He's been forgiven. He's been set free. He has been reconciled to God. He has a new heart, one that delights in doing mercy and justice, mercy to the poor, justice to right past wrongs, rectifies extortion, pay back what's due.

Earlier, I asked you to think about the kinds of sinners you'd have a hard time forgiving. Think about it. Back up and think about it. If you have benefited from God's mercy, if you've received divine grace for salvation, does that help you at all to look past someone's sins, their past sins, their history, sins that once characterized the bad person and see the true evidence of genuine conversion? Can you do that? By God's grace I know you can. Sincere, life-long commitments to the lordship of Christ, a heart that loves mercy and justice, a wide heart of generosity and compassion along with concern for truth and justice; no salvation apart from those internal changes, apart from that kind of a repentance.

The crowd's revulsion is answered by the evidence of Zacchaeus's conversion. Now it's time for the crowd to repent and to see this the Lord's way. So one quick final point, number three, and this is verse 9: the declaration of the Lord. The

declaration of the Lord. I love how Jesus, here, Shepherd of the sheep, he steps in to claim and affirm his own, and he does so publicly. Verse 9, "Jesus said to him," remember, he's saying this in front of everybody, "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."

Jesus speaks first to Zacchaeus to assure him with his declaration of justification. And second, he speaks about Zacchaeus, referring to him in the third person, and he calls everyone else to restore this penitent sinner. And then finally, in verse 10, Jesus speaks about the mission of the Son of Man to do exactly as he has done, that is to seek and save the lost.

Jesus speaks to Zacchaeus and declares him justified. We can see this in the first part of verse 9, first clause, "Today, salvation has come to this house." Emphasis there on the word, today, indicates a point in time, a before and after. Before today, no salvation. Starting with today, salvation has come, which means what? He has been declared righteous. He is justified. Declaration of salvation, *soteria*, delivered from the just penalty of his sin. How can Jesus say this? It's because he is the sovereign Lord. Also, though, because he knows that in just one week's time, he's going to ascend the cross, pay the

price, a due penalty for all Zacchaeus' sins, and the grace of God in Christ is going to save him eternally.

A number of commentators, here, wring their hands over the fact that the text does not explicitly portray Zacchaeus as exercising faith, but I think it does. I think, I think that's very clear. Luke has actually portrayed the faith in this account. Since Jesus has justified Zacchaeus and declares him saved, he's righteous in the sight of God. How'd that happen? It's indirect evidence, here, that he has been justified by faith, by the instrumental means of faith. We just confessed that in our London Baptist Confession this morning. The instrumental means of salvation is faith.

We see this in the second clause also, that Jesus declares him to be a son of Abraham. That's exactly what Paul summarized in Galatians 3:7, "Know then that this, it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham." Jesus commands that Zacchaeus be restored. The Shepherd first spoke to his own sheep, assuring Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to his house." That's justification. And now Jesus speaks about Zacchaeus to the rest of the people who are there. "He also is a son of Abraham." He's calling the crowd to obedience, that they would restore this penitent sinner. This man is no longer to be characterized a



sinner as they have done. The Lord has restored Zacchaeus. He's acknowledged him as a son of Abraham.

And by the way, he's not trying to tell everyone Zacchaeus is Jewiss, Jewish. Duh. So he's not a son of Abraham according to the flesh, merely. Paul says, Romans 9:6, "Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. Not all are children of Abraham because they're his offspring, but 'through Isaac shall your offspring be named.'" This means it's not the children of flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."

How are the children of promise as distinguished from the children of flesh, how are they counted that way? Those of faith. Again, Galatians 3:7, "Those who believe the promise, they are the sons of Abraham." So since Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham, by the declaration of Christ, by his justification, no one has the right to withhold fellowship for Zacchaeus. Everyone can feel free to have table fellowship with him. Following the Lord's example, they can sit down, eat and drink, lodge in his house, walk along the way, go up to the temple, offer sacrifices, enjoy the sacrificial meals together.

Being reconciled to God, being a co-heir with Abraham of the promise, no reason he should be excluded any longer from the

temple, from sacrifice, from full inclusion in the spiritual life of Israel and his own community. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It's God who justifies. Who's to condemn?" Zacchaeus is to be received, no longer defined by his former sins, but fully, completely restored in the community. And anyone who refuses to accept and restore Zacchaeus, well, they're going to have to answer to the Son of Man face to face on Judgment Day.

So the only question at this point is, will the crowd heed the Lord's call to restore Zacchaeus or are they going to continue despising him? It's perhaps for that reason to encourage the crowd toward obedience to this call to restore Zacchaeus to fellowship, the Lord adds this in verse 10. Jesus claims Zacchaeus is his mission. "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." That's the purpose. This is the true reason the Son of Man came, according to the imagery of Luke 15, to seek his lost sheep, to find his lost valuables, to save his lost sons.

So beloved, stop being surprised that tax collectors keep coming to Jesus, or our modern day version of them. Stop being shocked. Stop expressing this, any kind of anger or moral outrage when notorious sinners repent and convert and make such

astounding transformations, when they give evidence of true conversion. The salvation of sinners, that is the point. Beloved, the single evidence of true conversion, I shouldn't say the single evidence, I should say these evidences that we've seen in this text of true conversion, it's the same for every single Christian. The same. No exceptions.

We all, if we're Christians, we all confess the lordship of Jesus Christ, and we obey him. We're committed to showing mercy. We're committed to practicing justice. Why? Because we have to? No, because we have a new nature that longs to do that. We want to do that. We love to do that. But the ground of our assurance, I want to make this very clear, the ground of our assurance is not in our actions. The ground of our assurance, the ground on which we stand, that we feel a conviction that we truly are saved, it is not our behavior. It's not our performance. The ground of our assurance is in the gracious declaration of Jesus Christ, who points to us and says, Mine. I died for that one. That one is declared righteous in God's sight. This one was lost, but he is now found. He is safe.