

“Suddenly and Surprisingly Saved!”

Luke 19:1-10

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

Conversion, being saved or being “**born again**” is the very center of the Biblical message. And although the phrase “**born again**” may have been trampled underfoot and misused by many it is still the center of the message of Jesus. In fact Jesus sums up his ministry to his disciples at the end of this story in verse ten by saying, “*the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*”

Conversion or being born again is all about change and throughout the Old and New Testaments; the message is that it is never too late to change. You do not have to be locked into what you have been or what you have done. You do not have to be a prisoner of your past. The possibility of being saved is God’s gift to everyone and it is never too late to repent and turn to God. Both biblical and secular history abounds with examples of sudden and surprising conversions. A classic story in the New Testament of a *sudden and surprising conversion* is that of Saul of Tarsus. Saul was a young Jewish religious figure of the time and a leading advocate of the persecution of Christians whenever and wherever they might be found. In **Acts chapter nine** Saul is making his way to the city of Damascus to stamp out yet another breeding ground of Christianity, when *suddenly and dramatically* he meets Jesus on the road. There he is thrown to the ground and sees a blinding light and hears a voice from heaven. The result was that Saul became Paul. From chief persecutor of the Christian way to one of the chief advocates of Christianity in a moment. It would be difficult to find a more unlikely candidate to be saved than Saul of Tarsus. *But then the new birth is always a miracle.*

Such also is the story of Mitsuo Fuchida, the man who led the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Mitsuo not only helped to plan the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor he also led the strike force of pilots who carried out the mission. It was Mitsuo who uttered the words still remembered from that attack, “Tora, Tora, Tora.” The war ended with Mitsuo still convinced of the justness of the Japanese cause. But two things were a witness to him. He heard the story of Peggy Covell, who had ministered to Japanese POW’s, he learned that her parents had been missionaries in Japan, but persecution broke out and they were executed. He could not understand how this woman could help those responsible for her parents’ death. And then on another occasion he was handed a tract written by Jacob Deshaze. Jacob had been a member of the Doolittle raid on Japan and had been captured. At the end of the war he returned to Japan as a missionary. Mitsuo was touched by the power of Christ that compelled these people to love those who had hurt them. Mitsuo sought out and found a Bible and there in the crucifixion story found in **Luke 23** he gave his heart and life to Jesus. He spent the remainder of his life as a witness to the power of Jesus to transform a life. His was a sudden and dramatic conversion. [Story gleaned from “**Pearl Harbor Remembered: The Miracle of a New Birth.**” Stephen Rost. Baptist Bible Tribune (Dec 4, 1991)

But it should not be forgotten that sometimes a conversion looks sudden, but the struggle may have been going on for a long time.

In **Luke 18:25** Jesus said, *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”* The disciples’ amazed response was, **“Who then can be saved”** (v. 26). I would like to submit to you that a camel is about to go through the eye of a needle as we witness the sudden and miraculous conversion of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus certainly illustrates the truth that **“the things which are impossible with men are possible with God”** (v. 27).

Now in **verse one** we read, *“Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. (2) Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. (3) And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature”* We are introduced to a man named Zacchaeus, his name meant **“righteous one,”** how ironic for he was an unscrupulous tax collector. Tax collectors in Jesus’ day were little more than government sanctioned crooks, in the Gospels they were mentioned together with “sinners” and “prostitutes.”

Taxes were collected at three places inland – Capernaum, Jerusalem and Jericho, so Zacchaeus had one of the big three. If tax collectors had a cartel, then Zacchaeus would have been the kingpin, for He was not just “a” tax collector, he was “the chief tax collector.” As a tax collector Zacchaeus had it made.

Today in terms of conversion experience, the story of Zacchaeus is an important case study. I want you to notice four important principles with me this morning.

First, When Jesus Comes It Does Not Matter What Tree You Climb (vv. 4-5)

“So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.”

Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax collector, was a part of the crowd trying to see Jesus. But Zacchaeus being a short man, was unable to see, so he climbed a tree. That is the nice part about being filthy rich, he does care what people think. Zacchaeus, being a rich man, was free to do something others might think was silly – like climb a tree.

But why did Zacchaeus want so desperately to see Jesus? I want to suggest several intriguing possibilities. First, It may be that he had heard of Jesus through the acquaintance of another tax collector, Levi also called Matthew, had also been a tax collector prior to becoming a disciple of Jesus (**Luke 5:27-31**). Perhaps Matthew reaching out to his former circle of friends had told Zacchaeus about Jesus and what a change he had made in his life.

Secondly, I have to believe that Zacchaeus had found his wealth and lifestyle unsatisfying. How often even today, do we hear of people who seem to have it all as far as the things of this world, who find their lives very unsatisfying? You may be experiencing unease; nothing in your life is satisfying. Perhaps like Zacchaeus you lack peace, you lack wholeness, and you need something more than this life can offer.

Third, It is very likely that Zacchaeus was tired of being hated. When people hassled him, he deserved what he got, but it no doubt made him miserable. In short Zacchaeus was tired of living his sad little life.

In **verse five**, we read, *“And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and*

said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." When Jesus stopped under the sycamore tree in which Zacchaeus had hidden himself, he would have naturally tensed, perhaps even broken out in a sweat. Terror is likely to have grasped Zacchaeus' heart as he braced himself to be made a spectacle for ridicule by Jesus. And then Jesus called him by name and invited himself to Zacchaeus' home. Notice that Jesus did not say "I would like to stay at your home," he said, **"I must stay at your home."** **"Must"** is a translation of the Greek word (dei) meaning it was necessary. This meeting was ordained before the foundation of the world (**Eph. 1:4-6**). I believe that Jesus came to Jericho for the purpose of seeking Zacchaeus. **When Jesus Comes It Does Not Matter What Tree You Climb And ...**

Second, When Jesus Invites You No Other Answer but "Yes" Will Do. (v. 6)

"So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully."

Have you ever wondered why out of all the city of Jericho that Jesus zeroed in on Zacchaeus. Though Zacchaeus may have seemed like the least honest or religious person, it is possible that he was the most hungry of a new life that only God can give him. In the eyes of the world, Zacchaeus was a traitorous, despised nobody, but in the eyes of Jesus he was a precious lost sinner.

This is Zacchaeus' moment. Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good fortune, delighted to take Jesus home with him. I want you to think of all the people who like Zacchaeus have had their lives changed by coming out of the tree, so to speak.

When Jesus Invites You No Other Answer but "Yes" Will Do And

Third, When Jesus Moves In Some Will Not Like It. (v. 7)

"But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."

The reaction to Jesus' choice of a host does not meet with popular approval. The religious leaders judged that Jesus had chosen to be **"... a guest with a man who is a sinner"** and **"they all complained."**

Although it is not stated I believe that Jesus sat down to dinner with Zacchaeus. Wouldn't you have liked to have sat in on that meal with Jesus, listening to the dinner conversation? Did Jesus explain to Zacchaeus all about God, conversion and what it means to follow him? Or did Jesus just let Zacchaeus tell him about himself and his problems?

When Jesus Moves In Some Will Not Like It And

Fourth, When Jesus Enters In – You Will Be Changed. (vv. 8-9)

Sometime probably after dinner, **verse eight** discloses that **"... Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."**

Let's give Zacchaeus his due, when Zacchaeus got saved, he got saved all over. When he got saved, he immediately put his faith into practice.

But it is easy to misunderstand Zacchaeus' actions. More is going on than just a surface examination will gather! The text says that Zacchaeus says, **"... if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation,"** but in the original Greek it is a first class condition meaning **"it is true, I have cheated."** Roman law dictated that if you defrauded someone you were to repay them fourfold. He was only meeting the requirements of the law, where he went beyond the law

was his willingness to give away half of all his goods. He in effect placed his entire fortune in jeopardy in an effort to make things right. That was entirely voluntary.

I like what Kent Hughes says concerning this verse; “Jesus said over and over that it is useless to talk about loving him and trusting him and having the sweet assurance of forgiveness and the glorious hope of Heaven unless it makes a difference in our material attachments.... Jesus’ repeated emphasis is that though generosity is not the means of redemption, it is an evidence of redemption. In fact, generosity and giving are pillars of discipleship.” [Kent R. Hughes. **Luke: That You Might Know the Truth. Vol. 2 (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998) p. 226**]

It is my fear that this is a sticking point in the spiritual development of some Christian’s. You read your Bible, you are honest, but your just not sure about stepping out on faith in the area of giving. It may be that this is the very thing that is stifling your spiritual growth.

Zacchaeus was not saved because he promised to do good works. He was saved because he responded by faith to Christ’s gracious words to him. The apostle Paul explains in **Ephesians 2:8-10**, “*For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*”

From the words that Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus in **verse nine**, we can learn two things. Jesus spoke to Zacchaeus and said, “*Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham.*” First, anyone who is genuinely saved can be assured of that salvation immediately. In **John 5:13** we find, “*These things have I written to you who believe in the name of the son of God, that you might know that you have eternal life....*” It is possible to know and to know immediately that you are really saved.

And secondly, once a person is saved, the evidence will be a changed life. In **2 Corinthians 5:17**, the apostle Paul says, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new.*” The deliverance that comes to us in the form of Jesus Christ is truly life changing.

Conclusion

When Jesus Comes It Does Not Matter What Tree You Climb.

When Jesus Invites You No Other Answer but “Yes” Will Do.

When Jesus Moves In Some Will Not Like It.

When Jesus Enters In – You Will Be Changed.