



“Jesus and a First Century Scrooge”
Luke 19: 1-10
December 8, 2019

We are going to be in Luke Chapter 19 this morning.

My question for you is: How many of you have ever heard the phrase *baa humbug*? Yes! Have any of you ever used the phrase *baa humbug*? You are giggling, but you are not saying yes or no! Have you? Have you thought it? How many of you have used the phrase *baa humbug* this year as early as we are in December?

That famous holiday phrase came from an old miser named Ebenezer Scrooge. He was a frostbitten old man, who was wealthier than anybody else in his town. yet he was mean and he was intimidating. Everybody was afraid of him, and, even though he was so very wealthy and had so much more than anyone, he was cold-hearted toward people. People tried to get out of the way when they saw him coming down the street.

The story goes that this frostbitten old man was visited by three ghosts, the ghost of Christmas past, the ghost of Christmas present, and the ghost of Christmas future. By the end of the story, Scrooge came away a totally different man. Instead of hoarding all that he had, he was freely giving it away. That was Ebenezer Scrooge, and his story is told in the classic story, *A Christmas Carol*.

This morning as we open the Scripture, it occurred to me that a similar story is laid out before us. This is not a fantasy, and it is not a work of holiday fiction. This story comes to us from Luke’s carefully researched account of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we enter into Scripture this morning, we are introduced to a man named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a tax collector by trade. He would have been a very hardened man. He was a mean man, probably the meanest man in town. Tax collectors accrued much wealth working for Rome and overcharging people for the taxes that they were required to give to that empire.

This was Zacchaeus. He was dreaded and he was intimidating. He did not like people and people probably did not like him very much either. But his story is a story of great transformation. By the end of the story, his heart was filled with so much joy that he wanted to freely give out the things that he had accrued. He was touched by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we work through this story and observe what happened here, it is presented to us as one example of the reasons why Christ came into the world. Stories like this, transformations like this, is what Christ came to accomplish in the lives of people—fallen sinners like us.

Let's read what is laid out before us in Luke Chapter 19 and Verses 1 through 10. Follow along as I read this portion of Scripture.

19 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." **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."

So we have before us what is for many Christians one of the most endearing scenes in the pages of Scripture. I wonder how many of you know that this story has been commemorated in a certain Sunday school song that has been sung by many, many, many children, and maybe by many of you here, both as children and those who have served with children.

Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he. Go for it! He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see! Every time I hear that song, there are two questions that come into my mind. First, what would Zacchaeus think of that song? We are commemorating and remembering him by that wee little man who climbed up in a tree. Would he like that?

When you read the details of this story, it becomes evident that he just might have had something of a Napoleon complex. He was a man born again, so this would not have bothered him so much in the end, but that is one of the questions about Zacchaeus.

Then I wondered to myself what qualifies as a wee little man anyway? I am standing before you at a very impressive five-foot-six-inches tall. So, I don't really have personal interest in that question. But I think that we will all agree that what qualifies as a wee little man would be anything five-foot-five and under. Just so that we are clear on that!

While this story is memorable in its depiction of a short man climbing a tree, I pray that this morning we will have eyes to see the radical miracle that took place in the life of this man. I pray that we will marvel at what we see here in the pages of Sacred Scripture.

This is a big transformation of a small man, but understand that this is the story of a ruthless man becoming a joyful man. This is a story of a very greedy man becoming a very generous man, and this through the encounter that he had with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This story is a wonder to behold. Zacchaeus is our friend, and he is our brother in Christ. As you take a look at the details of this passage, I think that you will find with me that we get to know him in a very close and even vulnerable way as we explore what is here.

There is an intimacy about this story that I want for us to see. The humanity of this story is wonderful, and the power of God in it is unmistakable. I pray that we would have a sense of the truths of God's saving grace burning in our hearts—if we are saved, what He has done in us.

If you came here seeking, I pray that you see that God transforms people like this. As people who are a part of the church, I pray that we would have the desire to be used of the Lord to lead people to Christ so that they might have these kinds of encounters with Him as well.

What I want to do is start off by looking at the details of the first couple of verses to see if we can get to know Zacchaeus a little bit better. From there, I want for us to be able to see three marks of this man's conversion, and rejoice in what we see here.

First, setting our attention on Verses 1 and 2. The Lord has a way of telling us all what we need to know in very concise statements. That is the case in the couple of verses that begin this account. Verse 1:

¹He entered Jericho and was passing through. ²And behold (pay attention to this; take a close look at this; weigh this up and consider this), there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

Let's start with his name. Zacchaeus is a Hebrew name. He as a man of Jewish ancestry and according to Thayer's Lexicon, a dictionary of Bible words, his name means pure or innocent. I wonder how the people of Jericho must have seen the irony in this man's name? *Oh, yes, here comes the pure one. Here comes the innocent one. Innocent one, my foot. Here he comes to take me to the cleaners.*

That was his name, but going even further back into his life, even into his infancy, it would seem that this name was a reflection of the hopes of devout Jewish parents who wanted to see their child grow and walk blamelessly in the ways of the Lord. I imagine that they never dreamed of the direction that his life would take, because as we read here in this text Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector.

That means that at some point along the path of his life, he came to a crossroad and one dark night, he decided that the opportunity for personal gain was too tempting to pass up, so he went to work for Rome extracting taxes from his own countrymen, from the people of Israel.

As a publican or a tax collector, he would have worked for a twisted kind of commission. The agreement was that he would have signed up and have been responsible to pay Rome for a certain amount of money for that region in a certain amount of time. Then whatever extra he could get from the people was his to keep with the blessing of the Roman Empire.

Rome would have even assigned to him a small group of Roman soldiers to help him enforce the taxation of the people. This was Zacchaeus. This was the work that he was doing. Not only was he viewed as a traitor, but he was also viewed as an extortionist.

For all of the humor that we find around this man's story, we must stop and understand that Zacchaeus was a very, very serious man. He was serious as a heart attack. This was one imposing, short man.

Not only was he a tax collector, but he was very successful in his field, for we read that he was a chief tax collector. Did you see that? This is the only time that title is used of anyone in the pages of the New Testament. This is the only chief tax collector that we are introduced to us in Scripture. That tells us that Zacchaeus made the most of his profession.

He did not conduct his work in any kind of half-hearted way. He went about it energetically. So, you can imagine if he went to collect taxes from a man who had fallen behind, and that man needed a warning, Zacchaeus would tell the guards to give him warning and they would inflict him with blows, letting him know that the next time that they came, it would be even more serious.

These men were ruthless. If there was a widow that could not pay, they would take her estate from her. This was the kind of man that Zacchaeus was. He was so good at it that he rose to the top. He was so effective that the Romans put him in charge of a whole district, managing other tax collectors as well.

Zacchaeus was not serving in just any city, but in the territory of Jericho. This was like a resort city in that First Century context of Israel. Palm trees were growing there. Herod recognized this and built a winter palace there. He also built a chariot track there for those kind of games.

Herod built a theater there. They lined the streets with sycamore trees that were brought in and planted. They did all these things to beautify this location. There were balsam forests and, from the balsam trees, they extracted resources to produce a balm or a lotion from them. This was a very high-priced commodity.

This man Zacchaeus was in charge of the taxation of this entire territory which was a territory of great wealth. This man was serious business. This is the man that we are introduced to. It says in kind of an understatement at the end of Verse 2 that, *He was rich*. Yes!

This man was filthy rich. This is an understatement. He was the man that wore the finest of garments. He drank the most aged of wines. He lived in the most lavish of homes. Zacchaeus was at the top of the collection pyramid. He was wealthy with ill-gotten wealth.

But we have read his story, haven't we? We have read his story of transformation. This is laid before us as evidence for the fact that by the power of God, a camel can, indeed, pass through the eye a needle. A rich man can repent and humble himself.

Let's understand, we are all a bunch of wealthy people compared to the world standard. But even a man who would have bent at his knee to the idolatry of wealth, he can be born again, and Zacchaeus was born again. He was radically transformed, and we see that laid out before us in this passage of Scripture.

I want us to look at three qualities of Zacchaeus' conversion as we take a closer look at what is here in this text. The first thing that we see as Christ entered into his life is that he was affected in such a way that he had:

1. **Humble Persistence (19:2-4)**

Zacchaeus had humble persistence by which he just had to see who Jesus was. Verse 2:

²And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

I hope you understand what a stunning picture is set before us here. Zacchaeus had to see who Jesus was. He was absolutely persistent in this. He was being blocked because he was a short man. He could not see over all the people who lined the street where Jesus was passing by.

I don't know what Zacchaeus might have done in the day and age that we are living in. In our day and age, he might have taken his state-of-the-art cell phone, probably like a Note 8, 9 or 10 by Samsung. He might have stuck that camera to the end of a selfie stick and stretched out above the crowd to get a video or a picture so he could discern who it was.

However, he did not have any of those kinds of tools of modern technology at his disposal. But he had his two legs and he had a tree. Understand that men in that culture did not do the things that Zacchaeus did—running like the wind ahead of the rest of the crowd to get to a certain vantage point first. That is the first thing that men in that honor-shame culture would not have done.

Then he climbed a tree? Picture a man in a five-thousand-dollar suit climbing a tree, running ahead of everybody else. It's almost a picture of desperation. It is certainly a picture of humility. This man had to see who Jesus was. It is a remarkable picture that is set before.

Something was happening in this man's heart. It is not difficult for me to imagine this man in the weeks or days preceding this, laying in his bed at night staring at the ceiling and thinking about what his life had become; thinking about what his heritage was; what his predecessors and his family had hoped for him.

You wonder if the things Zacchaeus did to get his wealth, stepping and trampling people under foot with violence, could have been haunting him. Certainly he had heard of Jesus. He heard that there was one coming with power and truth and authority and with grace.

Maybe Zacchaeus even caught wind of the fact that the Galilean tax collector, Matthew, was now part of the Lord's inner circle. I don't know, but what we can say looking at this text is that there was something happening within Zacchaeus that he would jeopardize his standing in the eyes of people by running and climbing up a tree.

He was going out a limb in more ways than one, understand that. It is a pretty amazing thing that we see here. It is humble persistence. With God's help, by God's grace, Zacchaeus was overcoming one of the greatest barriers, probably the greatest barriers, to anybody coming to know Christ. That is pride.

We are seeing this man's humble persistence, and there is a great deal of pride in the human heart that deters so many people from coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. They can't get over their egos. Perhaps, they think they are good enough. They don't need to confess their fallenness and their sin before the holiness of God. They are self-righteous.

Others think they have life handled, and that they can do it all on their own. Pride is a barrier for anybody whose going to enter into the Everlasting Kingdom of God. It starts with the humbling of the heart, in particular, first and foremost, in relation to our own sin and iniquity before the pristine holiness of the Living God.

That humility does not need to manifest itself in us climbing up in a tree, but it does require us to look up to the tree, to the cross where there was a Savior who was nailed and crucified and who spilled His blood because, yes, our sin is that serious.

By His grace, in His love, He went there as a lamb and as a substitute that anyone who looks to Him in faith will have their sin taken away from them; that they can be covered by His righteousness, not their own righteousness. Our righteousness apart from the gift-righteousness of Jesus is as filthy rags before the Lord, declared the prophecy of Isaiah.

More than anything else in your existence, you need righteousness that you might enter into the Everlasting Kingdom of God. Each and every one of us, we have sinned daily, who knows how many times every day? But Jesus gives the gift of His righteousness to those who are humbled before Him, saying, *You are holy and I am not. You have love for one even such as me that I could be cleansed and forgiven.* It starts with humility.

This is a humble picture that we are seeing here, and it is pretty amazing to see. We continue, and we see a second aspect of Zacchaeus' conversion. First, we see a man humbling himself. In addition to that, we his:

2. Joyful Responsiveness (19:5-7)

We see his joyful responsiveness as we continue. Verse 5:

⁵And 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." ⁶So he hurried and came

down and received him joyfully. ⁷And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”

Zacchaeus climbed up into that tree to identify who Jesus was, imagine his great surprise and shock when it all got turned around and it was Jesus identifying who he was. What must he have been thinking when noticed that Jesus’ gaze was fixed upon him?

Then Jesus addressed him by name! *Zacchaeus, yes, I’m talking to you. Zacchaeus, you come down from that tree. Yes, you can’t miss the humor of this story. Zacchaeus, you come down from that tree, I must come to your house today. I discern the will of My Father. I must go with you. Salvation is coming to you today.*

Jesus called him down. How did he know Zacchaeus’ name? Maybe somebody told him his name, but I wonder if He knew Zacchaeus’ name the same way that He knows our names. Just that little detail reminded me of the song that I have sung so many times and that I have called to heart in the midst of the heavy times:

**He knows my name
He knows my every thought
He sees each tear that falls
And He hears me when I call**

Jesus told Zacchaeus that He was coming to him. Jesus looked up at him, but did not say, *Zacchaeus, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, you wretch.* Jesus discerned the humbling that was taking place in this man’s heart. So, grace flowed forth, and it is a beautiful picture to see.

How did Zacchaeus respond to this? Zacchaeus hurried down the tree with something in his heart, something of a new sensation that he had not experienced for who knows how long, if ever. We get the sense of this man’s burden of sin being lifted and removed.

This man’s heart was being set free and he was being lit up with a glow that all his possessions could never give to him, for he was being filled with the joy of the Lord as he came down quickly. Zacchaeus was going to prepare for and bring the Messiah into his home.

He came down and he came down joyfully. This is the joy of the Lord! A man who was tough as nails, and now something new entered in. A fruit of the Spirit is joy and this is the real kind of joy. What an amazing thing to see!

Jesus saw it, but the people of the town did not see it. There was Zacchaeus, full of joy, but what was the rest of them filled with? Bitterness and grumbling! And I don’t blame them. I could feel that. This is the man that ripped them off all the time. I don’t know if it were a daily collection for each individual, but Zacchaeus was a man who took them to the cleaners for his own good.

Last week I did a little bit of Cyber Monday shopping. There were already Cyber Monday deals on Sunday night, and I was trying to get ahead on a little bit of Christmas shopping. I ordered three items on Khol's.com. I saw they were sent off.

Later last week, one of those items arrived, packaged by itself. The other items were not there. I got this item after we have been gone for several hours. I wondered where the other two orders were. Later that night, I went onto the order summary online and it said that all three items were fulfilled. They were sent. Done!

I wanted to know where the other two were. I was thinking to myself, *Porch Pirates!* I don't know what happened. I did not know if they were lost in the mail. I did not know what was happening, but I began thinking about this on Friday afternoon and I was getting so burned up inside. *Why don't they go buy their own Christmas presents?!*

I bought those items during a wonderful Cyber Monday sale, but still I was having the sense of anger about it. And Zacchaeus was a man who would divest people of estates, so you can kind of get the anger that they felt.

Understand, God is just. For those who fail to repent, judgment is going to come. For those who don't enter into Christ with humility and repent of sin, judgment is to come. It is happening. There is a place called hell. There are measures of discipline and even wrath that take place in this world too. God tells His people, *Don't take vengeance, leave it to Me. It is Mine to avenge. I will repay.* That is in Scripture.

God is a god of justice, but He is also a God of grace. Where there are hearts that are humbled, He brings forgiveness. And the people of this village, they did not have the eyes to see the total transformation that was taking place in this man, Zacchaeus.

But they were about to. Sweeping on in this joy that Zacchaeus was experiencing in his heart, we read one more aspect of his conversion. We read of his:

3. Radical Transformation (19:8-10)

I imagine they were still in the hearing of all the grumbling people, people who were upset, but of all the people who were there in Jericho, Jesus was going to have fellowship with Zacchaeus. With all that in the background, it says in Verse 8:

⁸And 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."

⁹And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

The faith of Abraham was becoming evident. Verse 10:

¹⁰For the son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Not only had Christ entered into this man's home, but it would seem that Christ entered into this man's heart as well. His conversion was about to become visual. At the very beginning, his conversion was very, very personal, but it was not private. It was about to go public.

That is the case of every conversion. It is something very, very personal but it is not something that stays private. When a person has an encounter with the grace of God in salvation, that which is personal begins to show itself visibly in the lives of the people surrounding the one that is born again.

There is a repentance that is produced in them that glorifies the Lord. That is what we are seeing here in Zacchaeus. This is a work of the Lord. Our hearts resist repentance, but the Lord brings it to us with the joy of His saving grace.

So we see his faith going public as Zacchaeus resolved to do two things. First, we see his desire to practice restitution, and his desire to practice generosity. We see both of those in Verse 8. Notice first the restitution.

⁸...And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.

Here was a man that wanted to right previous wrongs by the work of Christ in him. He was a man who wanted to help those whom he previously harmed. He intended to help them substantially, not just restoring what he overcharged, but restoring it fourfold. He just wanted to pour it on their heads with blessing.

So we see this desire for restitution in him. The work of grace within God's people, it makes it so that they want to make right the things they have previously done wrong, or will do wrong in the future. There is restitution.

Understand, brothers and sisters in Christ, as people who are born again, it is absolutely vital and it is the first step that we confess our sins to the Lord. But if you have sinned against anybody in a personal way that affects them and their lives, not only do you confess your sin to the Lord, but you confess your sin to them as well.

You ask them for forgiveness. This is what the Holy Spirit is going to urge you toward. Don't resist the Holy Spirit, do it! It will be up to them whether they forgive you or not. You cannot control whether they do or do not. But you can tell them what you did was wrong and that you are sorry.

This is what Zacchaeus did. He was a man being transformed. First we see him desiring to practice restitution, but then from there, generosity took place. He said that he would give away half of what he had. He was new and free and he was seeing his wealth in a new light. There is joy in giving to people that are stuck that can't be experienced by hoarding. Zacchaeus was just about to be lit up with joy in his generosity.

Do you remember the ending of *The Christmas Carol*? What happened with old Ebenezer Scrooge? He was looking out the window from upstairs and saw a delivery boy and said, *Say,*

lad, buy the biggest goose you can find, and send it to Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim. He was giddy as he was doing that. He told that little boy to keep the change after he delivered the goose. That is the joy of generosity.

Now this First Century scrooge, Zacchaeus, was going to experience that joy in giving. I pray that as people of God we will see great joy in giving to the purposes of the Lord. Giving to Missions. Giving to ministry. Giving to people who are stuck and in need.

I pray that you would know the joy that comes from a heart that is generous and hands that give, because the Lord touches that with supernatural blessing. Do you know what God the Father was thinking as Zacchaeus started setting these things out? God loves a cheerful giver! He delights in the generosity of His people.

When they resolve that they are going to give, God is going to supply them so that they can keep on giving. I don't know if this was the end of Zacchaeus being a wealthy man. According to what is written in II Corinthians 8 and 9, about the blessing that comes with generosity, perhaps God was going to keep supplying Zacchaeus so that he could keep on distributing to the needs that he saw—and experiencing joy in the Spirit as he did so. There is generosity. This radical transformation that took place in this man, Zacchaeus.

I will finish by saying how wonderful it is that this story concludes with the statement that it does in Verse 10, and that we are reading it here on December 8, 2019. What we have in Verse 10 is one of the most important sentences in the New Testament, and it states Christmastime for us.

Do you want to know the meaning and purpose of Christmas? Verse 10:

¹⁰For the son of Man came

That is Christmas!

¹⁰For the son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

That is the purpose of Christmas. This eternal Figure, the Son of Man, the very One spoken of in Daniel Chapter 7, this Everlasting One, this One who came from eternity into time, He came. That is Christmas.

This time of the year we hear people ask, *What is the true meaning of Christmas.* For the most part you are going to get a whole bunch fluffy cotton-candy or hogwash. The meaning of Christmas is that the Son of Man came into the world.

He came to seek and to save that which was lost. For those of us who are in Christ, let's rejoice that He has done this for us. Let's not resist the Spirit. Let's go with the flow of the Holy Spirit. Let's say, *Lord, help me to resolve to do all that You call me to do with all that You have given to me.*

If you are here this morning, and as I have spoken of Christ and His cross and the empty grave, and there is faith rising up, or if you want to talk more about what is to be follower of Jesus, I would love to talk with you. You can talk to me out on the patio, or you can get me by email.

God is good. Merry Christmas, everybody! Let's pray, then we will close with a song.