

## THE GOOD NEWS OF A NEW BEGINNING

### Luke 19:1-10

Janus was a false god worshiped in ancient Rome. The name Janus means doorway, passageway, or archway. Ceremonial arches were erected in honor of Janus throughout the Roman Empire. When their armies went to war, they would march in a choreographed procession through a Janus-inspired archway. This expressed their superstitious confidence in Janus who was considered the god of beginnings. The month of January is named after Janus, who was depicted as a man with two faces. One face looked back, bearing traces of sorrow, dismay, and perplexity; the other looked forward, personifying hope and confidence. The symbol of Janus taught there are two ways to live. You can live in the misery of yesterday's failure. Or you can live in the hope of a new beginning.

Janus was a dead idol who could only give the false hope of a new beginning. But there is true hope of a new beginning that is real, life-changing, and available right here, right now. This hope is found in Jesus, not Janus. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." 1 Peter 2:9 says: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

I have good news for anyone and everyone who has taken a wrong turn in life: You can begin again. If you think your life is on a dead-end street, you are looking in the wrong direction. Make a U-turn. Come to Jesus. Run to the cross. God can give you a new beginning after wrong decisions, moral failures, broken relationships, shattered dreams, and missed opportunities. You cannot go back and start again from the beginning. But you can start again where you are and have a new ending through Jesus Christ. That is the message of the conversion of Zacchaeus.

Luke 19:1 tells us this life-altering encounter took place as Jesus was passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, seventeen miles away. The end of Luke 19 records the TRIUMPHAL ENTRY into Jerusalem, which begins the final week of the life of Jesus, culminating with his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. The conversion of Zacchaeus is the climatic end of the public ministry of Jesus. In verse 10, Luke records the mission statement of Jesus: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." The conversion of Zacchaeus illustrates the good news of a new beginning three ways.

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### I. THE POWER OF A NEW BEGINNING

Luke 19:2-3 says: "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." These two verses

introduce Zacchaeus. The name, “Zacchaeus,” means pure or righteous. Zacchaeus apparently had devout parents who had great expectations that their son would lead a virtuous life. Zacchaeus was a great disappointment to his parents, because he was “a chief tax collector.” Tax collectors were notoriously wicked for two reasons: (1) to partner with the Roman government in collecting taxes from other Jews was a betrayal of one’s family, nation, and God; and (2) the business of tax collecting was inherently corrupt. The only way to profit from tax collecting was through mafia-like extortion that bribed the rich and muscled the poor.

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. He was not a street thug that did the crime. He was the godfather who kept his hands clean of the crime while keeping his hands on the dirty money. As a result, Zacchaeus was “rich.” Yet verse 2 says he “was seeking to see who Jesus was.” This statement reveals the neediness, emptiness, and lostness of Zacchaeus. He chose a path in life that would make him wealthy, connected, influential, powerful, and successful. But there was something missing. When he heard about Jesus exposed the void. He determined that if he could just see who Jesus was, it might fill the void in his life.

This rich man’s consuming desire to see Jesus is a powerful reminder that money is the bottom-line of a bankrupt life. You can be rich but unhappy. You can be powerful but unloved. You can be successful but unsatisfied. This civil war between appearance and reality raged in Zacchaeus’ heart. He had to see Jesus. His desire was so sincere, earnest, and desperate that he was willing to lose his dignity in order to see Jesus. Verse 4 says, “So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.” In the ancient Near East, men of status did not run or climb trees. But Zacchaeus felt that seeing Jesus was more important than maintaining his image. So this little man ran ahead of the crowd, climbed up a sycamore tree, and waited to get a glimpse of Jesus as he passed by.

This is a word to unbelievers: Do not let anything get in the way of you seeing Jesus today. You need Jesus! No matter who you are, you need Jesus. No matter what you have, you need Jesus. No matter what your past is, you need Jesus. Our approach to life is often as absurd as the enthusiastic young man who received his plumber’s license and visited Niagara Falls. He studied it for a minute and said, “I think I can fix this.” You do not have the tools, skill, or experience to deal with life, sin, death, judgment, and eternity on your own. You need Jesus.

- **Don’t let your past get in the way.**
- **Don’t let your career get in the way.**
- **Don’t let your money get in the way.**
- **Don’t let your image get in the way.**
- **Don’t let other people get in the way.**

This is also a word to believers: Do not give up on anyone. If you took a poll of the residents of Jericho that asked the most notorious sinner in town, Zacchaeus would have won in a landslide. He would also be voted the one person in town who most likely did not want to see Jesus. But you cannot trust polls. Zacchaeus was a notorious sinner whose family, friends, and neighbors thought was helpless and hopeless. But God was working in his heart. That’s a word for you who are concerned about some hard-hearted husband or wife, son or daughter, mother or father, brother or sister, friend or neighbor, classmate or coworker. You’ve been

praying for them. You been witnessing to them. And you've been waiting on them to change. But they seem to be getting worse, rather than better. But don't give up on them. Don't stop praying. Don't cut down the sycamore trees. Just because you cannot reach them does not mean Jesus cannot reach them.

**THERE IS NO RUT SO DEEP YOU CANNOT LEAVE IT.**

**THERE IS NO DREAM SO LOST YOU CAN'T RETRIEVE IT.**

**THERE IS NO PAIN SO GREAT YOU CAN'T ENDURE IT.**

**THERE IS NO SIN SO BAD THAT GOD CAN'T CURE IT.**

At the end of Luke 18, Jesus ministers to the poorest man in Jericho, a blind beggar who sat by the road on the outskirts of town. At the beginning of Luke 19, Jesus ministers to the richest man in town. The good news is that Jesus loves you enough to meet you where you are - rich or poor, young or old, married or single, gay or straight, black or white, republican or democrat, if you grew up in Sunday school or if this is your first time in church.

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## **II. THE PROOF OF A NEW BEGINNING**

More than a century ago, CHARLES SPURGEON established a Pastor's College to train young men for ministry. A famous feature of the college experience was "the question oak," a large tree on Spurgeon's estate where students gathered on Friday afternoons to ask Spurgeon questions and deliver extemporaneous sermons. On one occasion, Spurgeon called on a student to give a message on Zacchaeus. The student rose and said: "Zacchaeus was of little stature. So am I. Zacchaeus was up a tree. So am I. Zacchaeus came down. So will I." Then he sat down as Spurgeon led his fellow students in applause.

You are a guilty sinner who has fallen short of the glory of God. You are up a tree and out on a limb unless the sovereign grace of God reaches out to you through Jesus Christ. But that does not mean you have no responsibilities before God. Zacchaeus came down out of the tree. So must you. As Jesus reaches out to you with his amazing grace, receive him with gratitude, repentance, trust, obedience, and joy. Jesus loves you enough to meet you where you are. But he loves you too much to let you stay there. A new beginning is only a beginning. There must be an initial conversion to Christ. There must also be an ongoing conversion to Christ. Christ wants to cancel your past, conquer your problems, and change your personality. True conversion changes your relationship to Jesus and to everything else.

### **A. TRUE CONVERSION CHANGES YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS.**

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. But he did not want to be seen by anyone, especially Jesus. But verse 5 says, "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.'" Can you imagine how Zacchaeus felt when he heard these words? "How

does he know my name?" Zacchaeus thought. "If he knows my name, what else does he know about me?" Then Jesus commands him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." This is the only time Jesus invites himself into someone's home.

Verse 6 says, "So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully." Jesus called Zacchaeus to himself. And Zacchaeus received him. He did not stay up in that tree. Jesus said he must go to Zacchaeus' house "today." Not later. Not when Zacchaeus cleaned up his house. Not after Zacchaeus changed his ways. Zacchaeus did not tell Jesus, "You can come to my house later. Come after I have finished my career. Come after I'm done having a good time. Come after I have changed my ways and cleaned up my act." Just as quickly as the Lord extended grace, Zacchaeus received it. That is the proof that a real change has taken place in your life. Your relationship to Jesus changes. You receive him.

- **If he comes to you as Savior, you receive his salvation.**
- **If he comes to you as Lord, you receive his rule.**
- **If he comes to you as King, you receive his authority.**
- **If he comes to you as protector, you receive his protection.**
- **If he comes to you as counselor, you receive his guidance.**

Zacchaeus received Jesus with joy. This is what it means to receive Jesus. Jesus will not drag to heaven any person who does not want to go. Joy in Jesus is the mark of true conversion. Does Jesus bring you joy? 1 Peter 1:8-9 says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

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## **B. TRUE CONVERSION CHANGES YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PEOPLE.**

Verse 7 says, "And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'" Luke 7:34 reports that people called Jesus "a friend of tax collectors and sinners." This was an indictment, not a compliment. Jesus' willingness to go to Zacchaeus' house was all the evidence they needed. How could Jesus be a man of God if he is willing to go home with someone like Zacchaeus? Imagine you lived in Jericho and heard about Zacchaeus' life changing experience with Jesus. But the next day he came back to rob you as he collected taxes. You would conclude Zacchaeus was a hypocrite and Jesus was a fraud. It is the same with you. If Jesus has given you a new beginning, it ought to show in how you treat other people.

Verse 8 says, "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.'" These acts of charity and restitution were more than the law required. It was a generous pledge that put Zacchaeus' entire fortune in jeopardy. Yet transforming grace changed his value system. Greed may not be your issue. But you must live a different life in the area that is your issue. The reality of your new life in Christ is evidenced at the point of your weakness. His problem was greed.

Nobody would have believed he had changed unless he had changed at the point of his weakness. The proof of a new beginning is that you lay your sinful weakness at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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### **III. THE PROMISE OF A NEW BEGINNING**

In verse 8, Zacchaeus vowed to give half of his estate to the poor and make full restitution to anyone he defrauded. In verses 9-10, Jesus responds to these generous vows Zacchaeus makes. These verses tell us the basis upon which Zacchaeus was saved: The divine promise of amazing grace, not the human performance of good works.

#### **A. THE WRITTEN WORD PROMISES SALVATION.**

In verse 5, Jesus says, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." In verse 9, Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham." No one in Jericho would have dared go to Zacchaeus' house. They even grumbled against Jesus for going to the house of a sinner. But Jesus declared that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house. Salvation had not come because he promised to give half his money to the poor or to repay anyone from whom he had stolen. Jesus said that salvation came to his house because he was a son of Abraham. Jesus called Zacchaeus a son of Abraham because he exercised saving faith as Abraham did. Abraham believed the promise of God. By faith righteousness was accredited to his account and he was justified. Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham. Jesus had not yet died on the cross. But Zacchaeus believed the promise and was saved. This is how we are saved.

Romans 10:9-10 says: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Verse 13 says: "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." You receive the gift of salvation if you believe the promise of God's word. And you can receive the assurance of salvation if you believe the promise of God's word. 1 John 5:11-12 says, "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." BILLY SUNDAY testified: "I am a Christian because God says so, and I did what he told me to do, and I stand on God's Word, and if the Book goes down, I'll go with it."

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#### **B. THE LIVING WORD PROMISES SALVATION.**

Verse 9 states the fact of Zacchaeus' conversion. Verse 10 states the foundation of Zacchaeus' conversion: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." This is the Golden Verse of Luke's Gospel. JOSEPH PARKER commented: "The

whole of the Gospel is in these words, and yet there is not a word amongst them of two syllables. You cannot revise them into anything grander. If you touch it, you spoil it." In this verse, Jesus calls himself the Son of Man. This is the term Jesus uses more than any other to identify himself, more than 80 times in the Gospels. It is a statement of both the humanity and deity of Jesus. As the Son of man, Jesus came to earth with a divine purpose. He did not just show up in a barn in Bethlehem. He came to earth on a mission from God the Father: to seek and to save the lost. Both verbs are important. Jesus seeks sinners! Jesus saves sinners!

In Matthew 1:21, the angel told Joseph concerning Mary, "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Jesus confirms this angelic prophesy by declaring, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." The conversion of Zacchaeus illustrates the mission of Jesus on earth. God so wanted Zacchaeus saved that he placed a tree along the pathway in Jericho. And God so wanted you saved that he placed a tree on the slopes of a skull-shaped hill where Jesus died for your sins. We got in trouble in a Garden. We got out of trouble in a Garden. We got in trouble with a tree. We got out of trouble with a tree. We got in trouble with a woman named Eve. We got out of trouble with a woman named Mary. We got in trouble with a man named Adam. We got out of trouble with a man named Jesus. Jesus was born of a virgin on Christmas, died on a cross on Good Friday, and rose from the dead on Easter to seek and to save the lost.

- **To the artist he is true beauty.**
- **To the astronomer he is the bright and morning star.**
- **To the banker he is the hidden treasure.**
- **To the biologist he is the life.**
- **To the carpenter he is the door.**
- **To the doctor he is the Great Physician.**
- **To the educator he is the Master Teacher.**
- **To the farmer he is the Lord of the Harvest.**
- **To the florist he is the lily of the valley and the rose of Sharon.**
- **To the geologist he is the Rock of ages.**
- **To the horticulturalist he is the true vine.**
- **To the jeweler he is the pearl of great price.**
- **To the judge he is the righteous judge who will do right.**
- **To the journalist he is glad tidings of great joy.**
- **To the philanthropist he is the unspeakable gift.**
- **To the sculptor he is the living stone.**
- **To the soldier he is the captain of salvation.**
- **To the sinner he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.**