

Luke 19:1–10 (CEB)

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. ² A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to that spot, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today." ⁶ So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus.

⁷ Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸ Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ The Human One came to seek and save the lost."

Romans 12:1–2 (CEB)

So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. ² Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

A small man. A giant transformation.

Are you disappointed with yourself, your life? Are you the father you want to be? The mother? The husband? The wife? The son? The daughter? The friend? The disciple?

Most of us would answer no. I know that I'm not always the father I want to be, nor the husband. Yes, God has transformed my life over the last twenty years, but still . . . I disappoint myself. I know that I am not yet fully the person that God created me to be.

At the heart of Christianity lies this transformation, this renewing of our entire selves so that we might each become the unique person that God created. Hence, Søren Kierkegaard's insightful prayer, "And now Lord, with your help I will become myself." The Christian life, the life lived before God, is less about doing the right things than it is *becoming the right person*.

When Moses walked over to the burning bush, he didn't have a clue who God had created him to be. When God revealed Moses' startling mission, all Moses could see were the problems and his own inadequacies. Yet, God promised Moses that he could be more and do more than he had ever imagined – for the LORD God would be with him (Exodus 3:12).

Zacchaeus's life is another story of transformation. The people whom Zacchaeus had exploited surely would have thought him to be beyond the possibility of redemption and transformation. What could there be to salvage in a man who had sold his soul to the Romans? Yet, when Zacchaeus encounters Jesus, he is saved, for transformation is the essence of salvation. He was lost and yet is found.

We sometimes make the mistake of thinking of salvation only as a one-time event, an instant when we are made right with God by virtue of our faith in Jesus Christ, which is itself a gift from God. Yet, being saved is just as much a process. Paul urges believers to work out their own salvation (Philippians 2:12). As Roger Olson puts it, salvation is

both gift *and* task.¹ But to say that salvation is a task, as well as a gift, is not to deny that it is all God's work. For, after telling the Philippians to work out their salvation, Paul, in the very same sentence, writes, "for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."²

Zacchaeus's story

Zacchaeus lived in Jericho and was a chief tax collector (see the textbox), a very rich man at the top of his chosen trade. Yes, in the eyes of fellow Jews he was an unsavory

Tax Collectors

Zacchaeus was a tax collector, but the Roman tax system was nothing like our IRS. Rome would contract out the collection of taxes in geographic areas. The winning entrepreneurial bidder would agree to pay the contracted amount of taxes to Rome. The tax entrepreneur would then put together an organization to do the actual collection. The winning bidder would employ chief tax collectors, like Zacchaeus, who made the whole thing work. Zacchaeus would have employed lower-level collectors, like Jesus' disciple Matthew, who would man toll booths and other small tax collection businesses. In all, it was one of the largest enterprises of that time.

In the Roman system, tax collectors would be free to collect all the money they could and keep whatever wasn't owed Rome under the contract. Thus, not only were they agents of the Roman oppressors, we can only imagine the methods they employed in gaining their wealth. Not surprisingly, in the Gospels tax collectors are usually lumped in with the prostitutes.

character or worse. But perhaps even that wasn't bad so far as Zacchaeus was concerned. We Americans, after all, have had a constant fascination with *la Mafioso*. Perhaps Zacchaeus enjoyed the notoriety or the feigned respect that his money could buy.

One day, Zacchaeus hears that this Jesus from Nazareth, the talk of the town, is passing through Jericho. This little tax collector, for he was a short man, runs to catch a glimpse of Jesus even though it was most unseemly for a Jewish man to run. He was probably long past worrying about being unseemly. Zacchaeus even climbs a tree; something else unbecoming for a grown man. Perhaps because Zacchaeus has made such a spectacle of himself, Jesus spots him in the tree and, as was his custom, goes to Zacchaeus' home. In fact, Jesus even invites himself.

Can you imagine the joy Zacchaeus must have felt as he welcomed Jesus? What this would do for his reputation . . . talk about success! Of course, the townsfolk didn't much like Jesus entering the home of the hated tax collector, but Jesus always seemed to hang around with the wrong sorts of people. Having invited himself into Zacchaeus' home, what happens next will be Jesus' miracle.

Zacchaeus asks nothing of Jesus, not even an answer to a question. He simply steps

forward and, without prompting, commits to giving half of his ill-gotten possessions to the poor – not all, but half. Then, in keeping with the most stringent interpretation of the ancient Judaic law, Zacchaeus promises that he will repay four-fold those he has defrauded. Zacchaeus' repentance and generosity demonstrate that he is a "son of Abraham" (v. 9) He was lost, but now is found.

Notice that Jesus does not ask Zacchaeus to give up all he has. Nor does it seem that Zacchaeus abandoned his life to follow Jesus. Rather, Zacchaeus is redeemed *in* his life. He is transformed within the life he is living. By God's grace, Zacchaeus points his

¹ This is another of the "both/ands" of the Christian faith, similar to our claim that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. One of the best books I've found on this is Roger Olson's, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity*. The book is organized into fifteen "both/ands," such as salvation being *both* gift *and* task and the kingdom of God being *both* "already" *and* "not yet."

² Christians have used a lot of vocabulary to talk about salvation and the Bible has many images of what we mean by salvation. For example, Christians will sometimes use "salvation" to describe the event and "sanctification" to describe the process. But the Bible takes a very large and expansive view of salvation and trying to cut the lines too exactly can diminish our ability to embrace the larger picture.

transformed life toward repentance and away from exploitation. He will be generous to the poor. He will make amends to those he has wronged. He will stay a tax collector, but he will now conduct himself with honor and justice. He will heed John the Baptist's teachings to tax collectors: "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you" (Luke 3:13). Zacchaeus will "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). Even after giving away half of his wealth and making reparations, Zacchaeus would have still been a wealthy and powerful man. But now, he will use his wealth and power and talents for God's purposes. He will be a force for good, pointing others toward just and generous lives.

Metamorphosis

In his book, *Finding the Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg helps us to understand what we are really talking about when we speak of "spiritual growth" or "spiritual formation." It is not as if we lead a "spiritual life" that is compartmentalized from the rest of our life. Rather, when we speak of our spiritual life, we are speaking of the very center of who we are. It is the sum, not a part, of the person God created us to be. There is no authentic spiritual life that is lived on the margins, no Christian spirituality that can be dabbled in. There are no cookbooks or formulae that comprise this life. Rather, it is about a complete metamorphosis³, a transformation from our self-centered selves to Christ-centered selves. It is no less a transformation than the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly (you might check out St. Andrew's rose window). It is transformation that Paul speaks of in today's passage from Romans, which you might take a few moments to read again. N. T. Wright observes:

The key to it all is the transforming of the *mind*. Many Christians in today's world never come to terms with this. They hope they will be able to live up to something like Christian standards while still thinking the way the rest of the world thinks. It can't be done. Paul's analysis of human rebellion against God in 1:18–32 included a fair amount of wrong *thinking*. Having the mind renewed by the persuasion of the Spirit is the vital start of that true human living which is God's loving will for all his children.⁴

Similarly, Paul's mission to the Gentiles is to preach "the Gospel of God" and "bring about the obedience of faith" (Romans 1:1,5). This obedience is not about following a bunch of rules, nor forcing ourselves to be kind or just or humble because that is what Jesus said to do. The obedience of faith is about doing as Christ would have us do because we want to. We have been made so that we can truly love from a desiring heart. We seek genuine transformation so that we will no longer have to try to reflect the light of Christ to others, but so that we will simply be the light. A light bulb doesn't have to try to make light, it simply does so. Are we a light for others?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

John Ortberg asks us to consider whether we are settling for "pseudo-transformation" or seeking the real thing. Are we staying on the fringes, dabbling, or are we getting to the very center of our spiritual lives – which is our whole life! He offers five questions we can ask ourselves. How would you answer these?

1. "Am I spiritually 'inauthentic'?"
Do I try to sound spiritual or seem spiritual to others?
2. "Am I becoming judgmental or exclusive or proud?"

³"Metamorphosis" comes from the Greek, *metamorphoo*: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed (*metamorphoo*) by the renewing of your minds, . . ." (Romans 12:2). *Metamorphoo* is derived from the Greek word, *morphoo*, which means "to form" or "to fashion." It is used once in the NT (Gal. 4:19) where Paul compares our growth in Christ to our formation in the womb. In his *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* entry on *morphoo*, G. Kittel writes, "This growth is an ongoing process, both open and secret, both gift and task, with maturity as the goal."

⁴ Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 2: Chapters 9-16* (pp. 69–70). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

There's a reason that pride is often described as the sin from which all other sins flow. How often do you try to raise yourself up by lowering others?

3. "Am I becoming more approachable, or less?"
4. "Am I growing weary of pursuing spiritual growth?"

Ortberg quotes Steven Mosely: "Tragically, conventional religious goodness manages to be both *intimidating* and *unchallenging* at the same time." What do you think Mosely means? Do you agree? How have you seen this played out in your own life?

5. "Am I measuring my spiritual life in superficial ways?"

It ought to be deeper than having said a prayer today or reading your Bible. What would be some more meaningful measures of spiritual growth?

Daily Bible Readings

Monday, Exodus 3 The beginning of Moses's transformation

Tuesday, Habakkuk 1:1-4, 3:1-6 Habakkuk, a man transformed. (You might just go ahead and read the entire book!)

Wednesday, John 18:15-18 & Acts 2:14-36 The transformed Peter – before and after!

Thursday, Luke 7:36-50 A sinful woman pours perfume on Jesus' head.

Friday, Acts 9 The beginning of Paul's transformation.

Saturday, Galatians 1:11-24 Paul tells the story of his transformation.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Acts.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

This class will not meet on July 9, and 16.

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the story of Jonah.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

This class will not meet on July 10

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.