

**Marks of New Life**  
Luke 19:1-10 (06-21-2020)  
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Turn to Luke 19. Have you ever seen a camel threaded through the eye of a needle? You're going to see God do just that this morning. In Luke 18:25 Jesus said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. But then He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God." A rich man is going to enter the kingdom. What a story this is!

**A Wealthy Town**

*Luke 19:1 He entered Jericho and was passing through.*

Jesus is on His final trip to Jerusalem. He'll be heading up the 18 or so mile trek to Jerusalem to lay down His life for the sheep. Jericho is the oldest continuously inhabited city in history and the lowest city at 850 feet below sea level. Jerusalem is 2575 feet above sea level. The road from Jericho to Jerusalem is very steep and treacherous at places, taking a healthy person 8-9 hours to walk the 15-18 miles. Jericho was six miles west of the Jordan River and six miles north of the Dead Sea.

By Jesus' day, there were two Jericho's, the old Jericho and the new one recently built by Herod the Great with a great summer palace, an amphitheater, a theater, swimming pools, groves of palm trees (Jericho was called the City of Palms), and vacation villas built by wealthy people from Jerusalem. Jericho means "fragrant" or "perfumed" and Balsam groves perfumed the air. It was a wealthy town with lots of trade from all over the Middle East, making it the ideal place for collecting taxes.

**A Rich Tax Collector**

*Luke 19:2 And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich.*

We all remember that Sunday School ditty, "Zaccheus was a wee little man!" We sang that he was short, but what we didn't sing about was that he was rich and hated by the Jews. He was a chief tax collector, which means he had a tax business going, of which he was the boss or CEO. He had collectors working under him, getting out there collecting exorbitant taxes for the Roman government. Zaccheus could make as much as he wanted, as long as he gave the proper amount to Rome.

This verse begins with "behold!" (ESV). This is a literary marker to get your attention and tell you something significant is coming, so pay attention. Sure enough, Zaccheus is the camel that God is going to thread through the eye of the salvation needle. We can learn five marks of new life in Christ from this account of a striking conversion story.

**First, you'll do whatever it takes to get to Jesus.**

*Luke 19:3-4 Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way.*

Zaccheus was rich. He sat on a pile of money. But apparently, his soul was empty. He had come to realize that life has to be more than wealth and possessions. He had heard about Jesus. He knew about Levi, the tax collector from Galilee. He had heard that Jesus often dined with the despised tax collectors. Luke refers to tax collectors eleven times. And now Jesus was coming through Jericho. Zaccheus knew this was his opportunity to at least see Him. So out he goes with that goal in mind. But when he got to the place, a wall of people was standing in the way. He was short and even though he weaved in and out of the crowd, he couldn't find a place to see over them. He was the hated chief tax collector so they refused to let him get through to the front. But he was a resourceful little man and thought of another way. He had no qualms with running ahead and finding a mulberry fig tree with low hanging branches he could climb. He quickly clambered up the branches to get a good view of this Man he had heard so much about. He

was willing to do whatever it took to make sure he could see Jesus, even if he did act like a kid climbing that tree. Jesus said you have to become like a child to enter the kingdom, right?

Do whatever it takes to get to Jesus. Don't let the crowd or your human situation keep you back! But I want to ask a question. What was drawing Zaccheus? Something beyond his personal curiosity was at work. Was God drawing him? I think so. Has God already done a work of grace in his heart, unknown to him? I think that is possible. Men don't naturally in their sinful condition come to Jesus. We may be seeing here in Zaccheus an illustration of the doctrine of the effectual call. Before a man or woman can believe in Jesus, God must give them a new heart. Regeneration always precedes faith. God is sovereign over your soul. If Zaccheus is going to believe in Christ and be converted, his dead rebellious heart must be changed, and it may already be changed! God in His good providence brought Zaccheus to this place on this day up in a tree.

Do you remember God's good providence bringing you the good news? Why were you where you were when you heard the gospel? And why didn't you laugh or just turn away? Why was I in that farm house that day in Pennsylvania when the Baptist preacher came with the gospel? Why do people suddenly desire to hear the Bible? Back in the 80s, a man suddenly wanted to hear God's Word. He and his wife came to our church the first Sunday but just circled in the parking lot. The second Sunday they came in. The following week I visited that man and his wife in their lovely log home out in the country. When we began talking about being saved the floodgates of tears burst from his eyes. He trusted Christ that day and he loves and serves his Lord to this day. What drew him initially? The same reason Zaccheus is sitting in this tree. God does great work in hearts.

We've all probably heard of Spurgeon's conversion that snowy day on January 6, 1850, when God drew him to a primitive Methodist church on Artillery Street where he heard the gospel. He never tired of telling his story of conversion. I'm sure Zaccheus told his family and relatives many times about that day he went out to see Jesus.

### **Second, when Jesus calls you'll be quick to respond.**

*Luke 19:5-6 When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." 6 And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly.*

A totally unexpected event happened to the tax man that day. Jesus stopped and looked up at Zaccheus. With a simple, loving but authoritative command, He called on Zaccheus to come to Him. Notice who is taking the initiative here; Jesus is the one who stopped and called out his name. There was an "I Found It" campaign back in the 70s about "finding salvation in Jesus." The title was wrong. We don't find Jesus. Jesus isn't lost. We're lost and He finds us. Jesus' words of grace go up into that little man sitting in that tree. Jesus picked him out of all the others around and even called him by his name, urging him to quickly respond and come down, "I have a divine reservation to abide and remain at your house this very day!" Jesus says "I must stay at your house." Unbelievable!

Zaccheus doesn't dilly dally. Down from that branch he scampers and gladly receives Jesus. Again, somewhere in there God has given him a new heart. He didn't decide for Jesus and get a new heart. This isn't even a polite invitation by Jesus. "Zaccheus, I must stay at your house today." I love this. Jesus is in control! Imagine Jesus calling your name and informing you He must stay at your house today!

The little rich man did nothing to earn this call. He didn't go to confession or take a course in religion or clean himself first to become presentable to Jesus. This camel coming through the needle's eye is saved by pure grace alone, not by anything he did. We can clearly tell people, come just as you are.

Notice the last word in verse six, "gladly, with joy." He is so happy! His life was on the skids. His gold had lost its gleam. He may have felt his guilt like that tax collector in Jesus' parable. He knew he was a sinner. He knew he didn't deserve God's forgiveness. And yet, here was Jesus, drawing him with the cords of electing grace and love. And this sheep tumbles down from the tree, right into the arms of his Shepherd.

Jesus...gladly...joyfully. These are marks of new life. Remember the message to the shepherds when Jesus was born? "I bring you good news of great joy!" Do you know joy in your Savior? Has the Covid and the riots robbed you of that joy in Christ? Never forget, "the joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8:10. But the lesson here is that when Jesus calls you, be quick to respond!

**Third, you won't let the world or negative people affect your following Christ.**

*Luke 19:7 When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."*

Here we go again with these grumbling, self-righteous religionists and others. It says "they all began to grumble." A wave of grumbling surged through the entire crowd. The word grumble is "diagongudzo," meaning the grumbling went through the crowd. Their thoughts condemned Jesus actions. "This isn't right. He's going to a sinner's house, and as a guest, no less. This is just wrong. Can you believe it? We all know this guy. He's worse than a loan shark. He clobbers us with outrageous taxes. Who would go to this despicable sinner's house? And this Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. So much for Him! What kind of imposter is He? We always thought he was a fake, and this proves it."

Zaccheus was a hopeless, useless, worthless sinner in their eyes. But he was an eternal soul in God's eyes. "But do you know what he has done? Look at his awful record." Listen to this! No matter who you are or what you've done, God's grace is sufficient. God isn't looking at your past; He's looking at your need. And you need forgiveness. You need a new heart. You need powerful grace to thoroughly change you and make you into a new creation. That's what God gave to Zaccheus.

Don't let the opinion of the crowd, the world, even friends deter you from following Christ. Who cares what the world thinks anyway. What matters is what God thinks! Remember Christian in Pilgrim's Progress? He read in the book that he was living in the city of destruction and he began to run away with the book in his hands. His wife and all his friends tried to deter him. "Come back! You're crazy!" But he put his fingers in his ears and pursued God.

**Fourth, you'll be ready to make any changes needed to please your Savior.**

*Luke 19:8 Zaccheus stopped (stood - ESV) and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."*

With the roar of grumblers in their ears, they arrive at the tax collector's house and are about to enter when Zaccheus stops, turns toward Jesus, and makes an important announcement. The hateful mob is close by, but that doesn't deter Zaccheus. Perhaps he may even face the mob. His announcement reveals a heart turned toward God in faith, already in that process of sanctification, putting off his old ways and putting on new godly ways. His announcement demonstrates a changed life: "I'm giving half my stuff to the poor and to anyone I have defrauded or cheated, I'll pay back four times as much." He's fully acknowledging and radically repenting of his greedy, financial shenanigans and he is ready to pay back four times the amount taken. Exodus 22 gives instruction for restitution and the amount Zaccheus promised is way more than required in the law.

Did you notice Jesus didn't even tell him he had to do this? No law, not legislation. Zaccheus has a new heart. He is a new creation with new desires. He used to sit up at night counting his coins with that gleam in his eye and greed in his heart, but not now. He knows those things only left him feeling empty with pangs of guilt nagging at him. But now Jesus has brought him life more abundantly. Zaccheus went from a self-serving getter to a self-denying giver – a key mark of new life in Christ.

Did you ever have God deal with your conscience and you knew you needed to go and make something right, even if it cost you? Very shortly after I was saved I heard a message on the importance of a clear conscience. Is there anyone you have offended and not made it right? Well, before I was saved I had gone to a cycle shop to buy a gas cap for my Harley. The guy was so busy I got tired of waiting, so I gave myself a five finger discount right into my pocket. After hearing that message about having a clear conscience, I took money back to the cycle shop guy and told him I needed to pay for a gas cap. A clear

conscience purifies.

If there is anything you need to make right? Maybe you've mistreated your wife or children or swore at the guy fixing your car or stolen money from your dad's wallet or lied about that friend's watch you broke. Whatever the offense, be ready to make any changes needed to please your Savior. That's exactly what Zaccheus did! By the way, did I tell you his name means "righteous"? He was far from keeping up his namesake before Christ gave him a new heart. His name was a joke to the people. "There goes moneybags 'Righteous' again!" But the righteous fruit of his new life is already pouring out of him.

**Finally, you'll rejoice that Jesus accomplished His mission in your life.**

*Luke 19:9-10 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

Perhaps pointing to Zaccheus, Jesus stood there in front of his house and declared loudly to that grumbling crowd, "This is why I've come. Salvation has come to this man's house. He's a true son of Abraham as a believer in Me." He's a new man. He's more considerate of his wife. He wants to guide his children to know Jesus. His tax business procedures will be fair. Everything is going to change!

Verse ten is the theme of Luke's gospel. "For" means purpose or reason. And folks, let us never swerve from this purpose as a church. We want Christ's purpose to be our purpose and message. What is it? "I, the Son of Man, the God-Man came down from heaven and humbled Myself for the purpose of seeking and saving lost sinners." Jesus not only sought out sinners, but He actually saved the ones He came to seek. Luke will tell us of Jesus heading up that steep road to Jerusalem to do all that's required to save them. In a short while He'll endure the spit and beating and bruising and whipping and thorns and mocking and finally the nails and the cross to save His people from their sins.

We don't know when and how God worked in Zaccheus' life giving him repentance and faith, but clearly He did. One song came to my mind as I was working on this message.

*I know not why God's wondrous grace to me He hath made know,  
Nor why unworthy Christ in love redeemed me for His own.*

*I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart,  
Nor how believing in His Word wrought peace within my heart.*

*I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin,  
Revealing Jesus thru the Word, creating faith in Him.*

*But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able,  
To keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day.*

"I Know Whom I Have Believed' by Major Daniel Webster Whittle