

Series: *Jesus the Master Evangelist*

Title: "A Traitor Comes to Christ" (part 2)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/17/2009

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In our last message, we began our consideration of the account of Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19, beginning at verse one. And today as we turn there again and finish our study of this account, I want to read it again for you. Luke chapter 19, beginning at verse one:

1. 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.
4. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.
5. 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."
6. So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.
7. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."
8. Then 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."

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9. And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house,
because he also is a son of Abraham;

10. for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was
lost."

As we began our study last time, we noted four things about Zacchaeus. We noted that he was a publican, a tax collector. We read here that Zacchaeus was "a chief tax collector." He was part of that small group of men among the Jews who were considered the worst kind of traitors by other Jews. These were the men who collected taxes for the hated Roman government. And they made themselves rich by overcharging their own countrymen as they collected the taxes. And so we read that Zacchaeus himself was rich. We also read that Zacchaeus was a short man – small of stature. And we also come to understand that Jericho was the city where Zacchaeus lived.

But we saw that Zacchaeus wanted to know who Jesus was. And he did two things that were considered undignified for a man of his wealth and position. Because he was a short man, he ran ahead of the crowd, and he climbed up in a sycamore tree so that he could see Jesus as He passed by. And that is the point where we pick up our study of this account today. We are now at Luke chapter 19 and verse five.

We noticed last time how Jesus responds to Zacchaeus. As Jesus is coming along, He looks up and sees Zacchaeus up in the sycamore tree, and He says to him, verse 5 – "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must abide in your house." The

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force of the original language is that Jesus is saying, "Zacchaeus, it is necessary for me to stay in your house today." This is necessary in the plan of God. So make haste, hurry, get down out of that tree, because we are going to your house.

And we also noticed last time how Zacchaeus responds to Jesus. We read in verse 6 that Zacchaeus did make haste, came down, and received Jesus into his home joyfully. The idea in the original is that Zacchaeus receives Jesus into his home with delight.

You would think a man who was such a hated sinner might have feared to have the Lord come into his home. You would think such a man might have been embarrassed. But not Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus receives the Lord Jesus Christ with humility and joy. Zacchaeus genuinely receives Christ. And here we see another contrast with the pride of the rich young ruler. With the rich young ruler, you almost get the idea that he thinks that Jesus should be especially pleased that the rich young ruler has come to Him.

But not so with Zacchaeus. Just the opposite. Zacchaeus is pleased – he is delighted – that the Lord Jesus is willing to come to him. Clearly, the Spirit of God is already at work in his heart.

But what did the crowd say? Verse 7 – "There He goes again – Jesus has gone in to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Instead of going into the house of a good law-keeping man like the rich young ruler, or like the Pharisees, Jesus has gone into the home of this publican, this traitor, this hated man. And the people murmured about it.

They don't understand that Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Jesus did not come to call people who insisted on clinging to their own self-

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righteousness. He came to call sinners – He came to call those who would admit that they had no righteousness of their own. And Jesus came to call them to repentance.

And repent is exactly what Zacchaeus does. We see that in verse 8 – Zacchaeus stood up and said, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”

Notice two things here. Notice, first, the form of address – it is “Behold, Lord.” Not “Behold, Good Master.” Unlike the rich young ruler, Zacchaeus makes no attempt to flatter Jesus. No, he says, “Behold, Lord” – a term of submission. And there is something else interesting in Zacchaeus’ statement. The force of the original is not merely that Zacchaeus said, “if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation,” but rather, “since it is true that I have taken from people by false accusation.”

Zacchaeus is not merely stating a hypothetical case, that he may have sinned, and he is willing to make restitution if someone shows him that he sinned. No, Zacchaeus is making a confession of sin. Since I know that I have broken God’s Law, he says, I am going to make the restitution that the law calls for. To every one I have stolen from as a tax collector, I am going to restore four times what I have stolen. That was what the Jewish Law in Exodus required when any man had stolen from another man. If a man had stolen a sheep from another man, he was required to give him four sheep in restitution.

Unlike the covetous rich young ruler, the rich man Zacchaeus bestows half of his wealth to the poor, and he admits that he has violated God’s Law, and he declares

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publicly that he is going to make restitution to the victims of his past dishonesty. Unlike the rich young ruler, Zacchaeus admits that he has sinned. He admits that he has broken God's Law. And he repents.

And notice what Jesus said that this meant. Why did Zacchaeus do this? Jesus makes it clear in verses 9 and 10: He says, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he is also a son of Abraham."

What is Jesus saying? Jesus is saying this: "Zacchaeus has received Me into his house, he has admitted his guilt, and he has agreed to pay the price of restitution to all the people he has cheated and stolen from, *not* in order to be saved, but because he *is* saved – "Today salvation has come to this house," – Why? – Notice – "because this man is a true son of Abraham."

"This man is a true son of Abraham." Who are the true sons of Abraham, according to the Word of God?

In John chapter 8, the Lord Jesus said this to the Jews. He said, "I know that you are Abraham's physical descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My Word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."

And the Jews to whom He was speaking answered, "Abraham is our father."

But Jesus said to them, "If Abraham was your father, if you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. Abraham is not

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truly your father. You are of your father the devil, and you are doing the will of your father the devil."

That was the condition of the rich young ruler. He was not a true son of Abraham. But Jesus said that salvation had come to the house of Zacchaeus, because Zacchaeus was a true son of Abraham.

Who are the true sons of Abraham? The Holy Spirit gives us the answer in the words of the Apostle Paul. In Romans chapter 9, Paul tells us, "They are not all of spiritual Israel who are of physical Israel. They are not all children of God and heirs of God simply because they are the physical descendants of Abraham." That was the position of the rich young ruler. He was a Jew outwardly, but he was not a true son of Abraham inwardly.

But in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 29, Paul says this: "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and you are heirs according to the promise." That is the position of Zacchaeus. The rich young ruler was merely a physical descendant of Abraham. But Zacchaeus was a spiritual descendant of Abraham who believed God, Abraham whose seed we are, the Apostle Paul says, if we are in Christ. Zacchaeus called on Jesus as Lord, and he did the works of his father Abraham, because Zacchaeus was a true son of Abraham. He was a saved man.

In conclusion, I'd like for us to consider some of the implications of this passage regarding our own witness for Christ.

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First, a question: In this account, who did the seeking? From a human perspective, it would appear that Zacchaeus did the seeking. He wanted to understand exactly who Jesus was. He ran head of the crowd. He climbed a tree. And then he got down from the tree and hurried to his house to welcome Jesus.

That's the human perspective. But who did the seeking, according to Jesus? Verses 10 – "Today salvation has come to this house" – notice "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

This puts the spotlight on one of the problems in the evangelical church in our time. And that is the problem of seeker-sensitive ministry. Too often today, evangelicals think that the church has to meet the lost on their terms. The church needs to re-shape and redefine itself in terms that will be acceptable to seekers.

Zacchaeus was, to the human eye, a "seeker." But by that way of looking at things, the rich young ruler was also a seeker. The problem was that the rich young ruler sought Jesus on his own terms, not God's terms. The rich young ruler sought to redefine Jesus according to his own way of thinking. And the rich young ruler wanted to define the terms of salvation for himself, rather than understand God's terms.

But Jesus did not respond to the rich young ruler in what the modern evangelical church would call a seeker-sensitive way. Jesus did not redefine Himself. Jesus did not redefine His message. Jesus did not compromise His proclamation of who He was. Jesus did not dumb-down God's holy requirements, so that the seeker would feel good about himself although he was still hopelessly lost. Jesus brought the rich young ruler

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man face to face with his desperate need. Jesus brought the young man face to face with the fact that Jesus Himself is the only way.

Dear friends, we need to remember Who it is who really does the seeking – “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” God is the One who is really doing the seeking. And He is seeking those who, by the working of the Holy Spirit, will follow Christ on His terms, not their terms.

Notice something else about the work of God in bringing people to repentance and faith, and notice something about the new life in Christ. In the accounts we have been considering in this series, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. And He is on His way there for one purpose: to give His life a ransom for many. The Gospel accounts tell us that He “set His face” to go to Jerusalem. The disciples tried to talk Him out of it. But He would not be diverted. He would not be deterred. “I must do my Father’s will,” he said. And so He is going, inexorably, toward Jerusalem and the Cross.

And as He is going to Jerusalem, along the way, God the Father brings His Son Jesus into contact with those whom He will. Some remain in their sins, and they go away from Jesus just as lost as when they came. But others are gloriously saved, and they follow Jesus. Everything is changed.

So it is with us. We are on our way to the heavenly Jerusalem. We aren’t on our way there to die – we aren’t on our way to the Cross. We are on our way to glory. We are on our way to Jerusalem to live forever. And Jesus told His disciples, and He tells us, “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel.” The force of the word “go” in the original is

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“as you are going.” Jesus says to us, As I was going through Israel on My way to Jerusalem to give My life a ransom for many, I was proclaiming the Gospel to all those with whom My Father brought Me in contact. And as you are going through this world, on your way to the heavenly Jerusalem, you also proclaim the Gospel to those with whom the Father brings you in contact. Let your attitude be, as Jesus’ attitude was, “I must do my Father’s will.” I’m not going to let anything stop me.

And that is what the disciples did, after Jesus’ death, and resurrection, and ascension. They had no grand strategic vision except this one thing: “Go and preach the Gospel” – “You shall be witnesses unto Me.” They had no complex tactical plan. They had no big financial backing. They had no elaborate organization. They just went where God told them to go – and did what God told them to do. And God direct them. And He brought people and opportunities across their paths. And we read in Mark chapter 16, verse 20, that “they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word.” And we read in Acts 2:47 that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

Do you want to see people added to the church? Well, here is the key. “As you are going,” share the Gospel with those the Lord brings across your path. Ask God to bring you those opportunities. Ask Him to guide you. Ask Him to give you the words to say. Use the Scriptures, because as Paul tells us in Romans, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” And trust in the Lord, as we read here in Luke chapter 19, verse ten, “to seek and to save that which was lost.” And trust in the Lord to “add to the church those who are being saved.”
