

**Telling the Transformation Story**  
**Luke 19:1-10**

Brothers and sisters, without picking a story from the bible what is your favorite story about someone experiencing a personal transformation?

Because in any good story, the main character has to undergo some sort of transformation or character development along the way, the story can't end with the main character having stayed exactly the same as they were at the beginning.

So do you have a favorite story about someone who is mean and nasty becoming a kind person, a story about someone who is timid and fearful finding boldness and bravery, or a story about someone who is self-centered and selfish being transformed into a kind and generous giving person?

And some stories illustrate this kind of transformation better than others – so what is your favorite transformation story?

Personally - after being able to reflect on this question for a much longer period of time than what I'm giving to you this morning - I had to conclude that if transformation is the main focus of the story, than I'm hard pressed to find a better example of that than Charles Dickens' classic tale "A Christmas Carol."

This is the story about Ebenezer Scrooge – a most selfish, greedy, and miserly human being as there ever could be who hoarded his wealth and exploited the poor – but Ebenezer undergoes a transformation and at the end of the story he is a changed man. He becomes generous, kind and loving – the exact opposite of what he used to be.

And we love to watch and read and hear about stories where things are not right, and they haven't been for a while, and the situation seems impossible or insufferable, but yet somehow... something happens and a change takes place and things are transformed.

We find these kinds of stories incredibly encouraging and inspiring and motivating – that’s why a “Christmas Carol” is a classic story – because people want to watch and read it again and again.

Reality TV producers have picked up on this desire in the past few years and created shows like “The Biggest Loser” where they feature incredibly overweight people – at 300, 400, 500 lbs – who are given a personal trainer and a program and accountability and over a period of time we watch as the discipline and exercise and diet transforms them into healthy people and they lose all that excess weight – it’s a transformation.

Or “Restaurant Makeover” where someone like world renowned Chef Gordon Ramsay helps struggling restaurant owners identify the flaws and failings which are bringing their business down and driving away customers - so that they can make the needed changes to revitalize their business – and we watch them transform the restaurant from a run-down tired hole-in-the-wall into a fresh attractive eatery with great menu.

Friends, stories about transformation appeal to us.

So as we are focusing on learning how to tell our stories, it is helpful to know that telling our story of how Jesus met our need and satisfied our spiritual thirst as a transformation story... makes it very appealing to people – and they will be much more open to having us share it with them.

So the next question for us to consider this morning is *“how was your life transformed when Jesus satisfied your spiritual thirst?”* or perhaps we can widen the scope a bit and say *“how has Jesus transformed your life?”*

Now I realize the challenge in this question is that when it comes to transformation, the bigger and better or more drastic and dramatic the transformation is – the better.

So often times we overlook the small but significant changes and transformations that Jesus has brought about in our lives and we fail to appreciate them, or share them with others because we think they are insignificant.

But that's why I broadened the scope of the question a bit for us because when Jesus first met our spiritual thirst it may have seemed to be only be a small change but that small change can have a large impact over time.

For example – adding only one letter, the letter “i” and making a small change to the word “run”... makes a huge difference in what happens if you ask someone to run your business or ruin your business.

So don't downplay any small or subtle changes that Jesus brought about in you – they can have big results in the long run over time, as no doubt was the case for Zacchaeus...

You see Zacchaeus' story is a transformation story – but it's not as dramatic or drastic as say Paul's story of going from persecuting and killing Christians to becoming one – so it's probably more relatable for us in that way.

And as we look at what happens in Zacchaeus' story this morning, we can gain some insight about how Jesus brings

about transformation that will help us better understand what happened in our lives and enable us to better share our stories – as stories of transformation.

So the story begins with Jesus arriving in the city of Jericho where Zacchaeus lived – and the bible says that Jesus was intending to just pass through.

There were no plans to linger, to visit... to do some shopping... or even to do some ministry of teaching and healing for the many people in this city who most certainly were in need of it.

Jesus was in Jericho because it was on the way to Jerusalem, and Jesus intended to be in Jerusalem for the upcoming Passover celebrations, and there He would fulfill God's plans to offer His life as the sacrifice for sin.

But word of Jesus had spread far and wide and even though Jesus intended to just pass through the city, the people of Jericho still crowded along the streets to see Him – and perhaps He would stop and heal someone who was sick, or take the opportunity to do some teaching..

Or perhaps we would offer some inspiring and encouraging words to give them hope that He was on the way to Jerusalem where He planned to proclaim Himself the Messiah and rally the people of Israel to Himself and overthrow those hated Romans!

So here we have some of the first indications about what is not right in the story – Israel is suffering under the oppression by foreign rulers, they are not free – they are governed by Rome and they must submit and obey Roman laws and pay Roman taxes!

Now brothers and sisters, you might not be familiar with this story but I'm certain that you are familiar with the dislike and hatred that people have had for those who collect taxes, and even more so when that person is one of your own countrymen who has betrayed you and is getting rich by working for the occupying enemy.

So we are introduced to Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector for the Romans in the city Jericho.

Now I believe that Zacchaeus was a bit of an opportunistic fellow who believed that if you couldn't beat Rome... you might as well join them and make some money while doing so.

And perhaps we can relate to being like that in our own lives as well – we just went along with the status quo regardless of how right or wrong it might be and just tried to make the best life for ourselves that we could. We weren't terrible people - but our loyalty was to ourselves and what we could get out of life for our own benefit – we looked out for numero-uno!

That was Zacchaeus before He met Jesus as well.

Now, if you are familiar with the story then you remember how it goes with Zacchaeus being a short man and wanting to see Jesus and climbing into a tree in order to do that.

But I've always been curious as to why this story played out this way – certainly if Zacchaeus was eager to see Jesus, being a short man he would have made sure he pushed his way in through the crowd to get to the front – I'm sure he could have

employed some of his collection agents to clear a path for him.

But I believe that Zacchaeus hadn't really paid much attention to the rumors about this Jesus - who was travelling in the countryside teaching and doing miracles – you can't tax teaching and miracles, not at least outside of his own jurisdiction anyways.

But what would have got Zacchaeus' attention were the whispers and rumors that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Now Zacchaeus might be a traitor but he was still a Jew and he was familiar with the prophecy of a messiah, the Son of Man, and the expectation that He would come to deliver Israel from Romans.

And as a wandering Rabbi who was teaching and doing miracles out in the country-side, Jesus wasn't really a political issue for the rulers and their bureaucrats or any threat to Roman power.

However, now Jesus has entered into a major city center – and He is on His way to Jerusalem, the capital city – so now He's got the attention of people like Zacchaeus.

So I believe that Zacchaeus might have wanted see Jesus, to take stock of him and determine for himself if this so-called messiah had the goods to lead a rebellion and drive out the Romans. There had been a lot of false-messiahs who had attempted to do just that - and failed.

But if Jesus had the goods so to speak... then Zacchaeus might need to reconsider where his loyalties lie, and figure out how he might switch sides to look after himself.

Because those who have worked for an occupying enemy and profited from it – they will face a nasty fate should political power change hands.

So – since he was a short man and he could not see over the crowds of people along the road, Zacchaeus quickly moved ahead on the route through the city and found a low growing

tree with sturdy branches which he could easily climb on to and have a better vantage point to take stock of this Jesus.

However, instead of Zacchaeus taking stock of Jesus, Jesus stops and takes stock of Zacchaeus.

Instead of Zacchaeus being able to determine if Jesus has the needed qualities to pull off a rebellion, Jesus determines that Zacchaeus is someone who needed to be drawn back from his own rebellion – from his self-centeredness and greed and what it has done to him spiritually and socially.

Jesus pauses for this greedy, unscrupulous, traitor and insists that He fellowship with Zacchaeus right then and there.

Zacchaeus doesn't need to worry about switching sides – rather Jesus has recruited him, in fact Jesus' has done more than that.

Jesus' willingness to associate with him changes Zacchaeus' heart, and when the crowds of people start to protest this action by Jesus pointing out the truth about Zacchaeus, Jesus

does not deny his sins – rather He has very skillfully given Zacchaeus an opportunity to admit to his sins, and make restitution for what he had done wrong.

And by the mysterious grace of God he does.

And lest anyone charge that Zacchaeus is simply being pragmatic here and is taking advantage of the opportunity to switch sides and avoid recrimination from the Messiah who will judge all traitors when He comes into power in Jerusalem, Zacchaeus goes above and beyond in his restitution.

He gives half of his possessions to the poor – an act of generosity which reveals his heart was no longer controlled by greed.

Instead of the minimum 1 and 1/5 which the Law of Moses required to be paid back for cheating and swindling someone, Zacchaeus willingly offers to pay back four times the amount.

This is no legalistic calculated move on his part – it is a genuine act of repentance – in fact Jesus considers it to be an act of faith in God’s Covenant promises to be a gracious and forgiving God because He calls Zacchaeus a son of Abraham – the one who lived by faith in God’s promises, and He reminds everyone who can hear that the real purpose of the Messiah is to seek and to save the lost.

What a story of transformation – someone who was lost has been found and brought back, someone who was greedy has become generous, someone who was living in sin was repenting and turning away from it, someone whose loyalty lay only to themselves has become loyal to God.

Those are some of the ways to describe the transformation from before Zacchaeus met Jesus to afterwards.

And apart from Zacchaeus’ willingness to give more than was required by the law – there is nothing extra spectacular or dramatic that occurs – just a subtle shift whereby Zacchaeus’ loyalty changes over to Jesus instead of to himself.

But, starting with that willingness to go beyond the letter of the law, that small change in loyalties is going to lead to a world of differences and transformations for the rest of his life – and beyond.

We don’t see or hear anything further about Zacchaeus in the rest of the scriptures – but if trust that the changes made in him by Jesus were truly there then we shall see him one day in the New Heavens and the New Earth – where the full results of that tiny change will be displayed in his person, in a New Creation that has Jesus Christ has transformed from the way in which it is currently afflicted and affected by sin and evil – but I’m starting to drift into the big-picture story again.

So brothers and sisters having looked at Zacchaeus’ story... what have we learned about transformation and how to understand such transformation in our own lives?

First we needed to have come to some awareness of whatever was wrong in our situation or in our lives.

Maybe we just implicitly knew something was wrong because we felt bad or we were struggling with something... or maybe we became aware that something wasn't right because other people told us, or we were familiar with God's law and what is right and wrong according to the scriptures.

However you identified it there was some awareness that something wasn't right.

It could be something dramatic like being addicted to alcohol or drugs or being involved in a gang or it could be more commonplace like being a nasty gossip or a liar, or something more spiritually subtle like simply not having any love or loyalty for God or being uncertain if God really exists.

So when you are reflecting back on your story to tell it as a transformation story – what was it that you can identify that wasn't right, or was wrong and thus needed to be changed?

Secondly we need to be able to identify what was preventing that change from taking place.

For Ebenezer Scrooge the love of money had replaced his love for other people, and for Zacchaeus it had also replaced his love for God.

Now we might want to take the easy way out and say it was our "sin" that kept things from changing, but be specific and do the work of self-reflection so that you know how your sin was expressing itself; maybe as unbelief, or rebelliousness, or selfishness, or greed or lust or sloth or gluttony or pride – the list of the seven deadly sins can be quite helpful here.

Then, thirdly, we need to explain how we encountered Jesus in such a way, or how He met our spiritual thirst - that something changed for us.

For Zacchaeus it was Jesus' reaching out to him in spite of his having betrayed his own people and being willing to associate with him. The Holy Spirit worked through that to change Zacchaeus' loyalty from himself and money over to Jesus.



What was it for you? Did you experience Jesus through the actions of one of His followers? Did He speak to you through the scriptures? Did He meet you in some experience in your day to day life?

And finally, fourthly, what sort of transformation has resulted – either right away or over a longer period of time from the change that Jesus brought about in you?

Maybe what Jesus changed in you allow you to be certain and sure that God existed and that began to transform how you looked at being a Christian – because you knew it was all true.

Maybe you started to experience love for God and your relationship with Him was no longer about duty but about gratitude and thankfulness?

Or perhaps it was dramatic – you no longer desired to drink or do drugs and go party and you were able to have real joy in your life and you left that whole scene behind and settled down.

So how do you describe the transformation – sudden or gradual that has taken place in your life?

So to summarize what we've learned about telling our story as a transformational story; we need to identify what was wrong and what needed to be changed? What identity what was preventing that change and how did Jesus encounter you and change it and then describe what transformation has resulted in your life because of that?

So, helpful pointers on how to put together your story with the focus on transformation, but I know that it's all still a bit academic at this point – so what better way to close off the message on transformation than to have someone come and share their transformative story with you...

And we'll pray that the Holy Spirit uses that to help show you that it is possible for someone to be transformed in a way that also includes sharing their story with others...

Because if it happened to them... then it can happen to you!