



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

REDISCOVER CHURCH

Heart of the Matter:

The Transformative Power of Christ's Love

Matthew 27:37-40 & Luke 19:1-10

Phil Chapman | October 22, 2023



Today I want to talk about a man named Zacchaeus. I know you are excellent students of Scripture and excellent former Sunday School attendees, so you already know the entire story of Zacchaeus, but I'm going to test you. [Plays song.] Reggie told me you wouldn't know the song. I told him you would...but I have the words, just in case: He's a wee little man. There are ten verses in the very beginning of Luke 19 where we find his story and we're going to talk all about this Zacchaeus character.

To set it up, we're going back ten chapters in the Bible to Luke 9:51. Let's do a little gymnastics with our Scripture reading, yet we'll primarily stay in Luke 19.

Luke 9:51 says, *"When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."* Before Adam and Eve were around, before anything of the world was around, Jesus knew that at that particular time He needed to start heading to Jerusalem, because Passover was coming. I don't know exactly where He was at this point, but we know it was going to take Him quite a while to get from there—through Jericho to Jerusalem—so He could be there for Passover.

Moving ahead a couple chapters, Luke 13:22 reiterates this for us: *"He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem."* He was focused on getting to Jerusalem when He knew He would be giving His life as a ransom. Next, in Luke 17:11, we read, *"On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee."* Luke really wants to make sure we know that Jesus was on the path to Jerusalem for the intended time.

I have a slide that shows you Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, along with His disciples. I've circled an approximate location where Luke 17:11 takes place. This is about 50-100 miles from Jericho, the place we're going to be talking about. While Jesus is going to these villages, He's healing everybody. He's not just healing one individual; rather, anyone who came to Him during this journey was healed, according to the Scriptures. So the report of this Rabbi, this mystery Man, is rippling through the countryside. People are learning more and more about Who this Man is, although they still don't really know Who He is. It's interesting that people are starting to think, "Wow, who is this guy?" We see in Luke 18:25-43, right as His parade of disciples is coming into what we'll call the suburbs of Jericho, He heals a blind man who calls out to Him. There are so many interesting stories along His path as He makes His way to Jericho and that brings us to our story today about Zacchaeus, the wee little man from Jericho.

Jericho is a lush oasis by the Dead Sea, famous for its fertile ground. It's by the Jordan River and Elisha's Spring. It's known as the City of Palms. It has a beautiful scent to it. It is fortified with strong walls. And Jericho is a very diverse city, bustling with people from all over, as it's situated on a trade crossroad. Many people would have been there at this particular time because Passover was coming up the following week. Our story takes place approximately on the Thursday before Holy Week. The

city is crowded and lots of things are happening. Somewhere within the city boundaries lived a man named Zacchaeus. He was wealthy, but he was unpopular because he was a tax collector.

According to the Scriptures, which I know you know, tax collectors are always identified as bad. In fact, Jewish people could buy a franchise from the Romans, after which they could tax their own people in any amount, even more than Rome required. Not only that, in a place like Jericho, people would also come in with their goods to trade. Perhaps a man would come in with a cart of grain. Zacchaeus and his helpers might tax the cart, the wheels, and the grain. All that money was theirs to keep. It's easy to see why they weren't well liked in that community.

I've found five different passages in the New Testament that talk about how bad tax collectors were and what the people thought about them. Notice especially Luke 18:11, where it says, *"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'"* Oh my goodness—even this tax collector, Zacchaeus. They were the scum of the earth because of what they were doing to their own people.

In addition to Zacchaeus being a tax collector, the Scripture tells us that he was a cheating tax collector. He was a lead sinner among other sinners. He was a bad, bad guy. Do you know what else Luke tells us? Zacchaeus was rich. Let's read the first four verses in Luke 19:

Matthew 9:11 - "And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"

Matthew 11:19 - "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

Luke 15:1 - "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him."

Matthew 21:31-32 - "Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.'"

Luke 18:11 - "The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'"

¹ [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

Now if I can take a little liberty here, I'm imagining Zacchaeus is hearing all kinds of stories about this Rabbi. I'm guessing he even heard about the blind guy outside the city gate whom this Teacher healed. I think Zacchaeus began to be a little curious. "Who is this guy? What's his story? Why is everybody following him? Is he really healing people? That doesn't make sense." I think he wakes up the next morning and as he is getting dressed, he hears the crowds outside. It's a beautiful day. He steps outside, he looks down the dusty road and sees an entourage of men and women. Then he sees a crowd of kids. He thinks, "I'll bet that's where that Teacher is. I heard somewhere that He lets all the children come to Him."

Zacchaeus was a smart man. I'm guessing he looked over the situation and thought, "Okay, let's see. The parade is over there. They'll go down that street, take a left. Yes. They can't go right. I'm going that way. I'll head them off, because I want to get a glimpse of this guy as he walks by."

Have you ever thought like this? Maybe you're at a concert or a sporting event, you want to get into the right position, so as the celebrity walks by you can see them. I was at a political event one time where a guy was running for President. I started guessing, "Okay, where's he going to go when he gets off the stage?" And I guessed right! He walked right past me.

A life transformed is Longing for connection.

When I think about Zacchaeus, I think he was longing for a connection. I don't think I'm overreaching in this. There was something going on. He was definitely curious, but he also wanted to somehow connect with this guy—if not directly, at least indirectly. Just to be in his presence, in his area code. Zacchaeus, however, had an issue. He was short. Plus no one really liked him, so he wouldn't be able to cut through the crowds. That meant he had to figure out something else, some way to

see this Jesus. So he climbed up a sycamore tree. Big old leaves. Imagine a grown man, a wealthy man, wiggling his way up into that tree. I don't know exactly how it looked. For some reason he didn't care how it looked. He didn't care what people would say. He just wanted to get up that tree, so he could get a view of Jesus. He was determined not to let this opportunity get past him. Something about his determination struck me; I love that he was determined to get to the right place at the right time.

What if we had that kind of determination to connect with people, to be in someone's presence for some reason? What if we do everything we could to figure out who the people are we're sitting near us? Do you even know the people next to you now? I hope you know your family, but down the row a little bit, do you know those people? How about that family behind you? Do you actually know them? We give you a whole 50 seconds to get to know people. It's tremendous. What are you doing to really talk through to find ways to connect with people? How are you strategizing? There are people here who strategize on how to meet and connect with people. There are other people who strategize how to not meet or connect with other people. I'm challenging you to do the former. There are all kinds of ways we can get to know the people around us, to find out how unique God has made them. I wonder how much that would change us as a church if we intentionally get to know new people every single week—not just know their names, but know who they are.

Zacchaeus shows us that where there's a will, there's a way. If we genuinely want to know the people we worship with, we're going to do something about it. We're going to figure it out. It might not involve tree climbing; maybe it will. Or maybe it just means joining a new ministry, participating in a small group, asking somebody to join you for coffee. This wasn't intentional with this sermon, but there's an insert in your bulletin about volunteering. That provides a perfect segue for connecting with other people, learning about them and coming to love them. There are so many gifts you have and we'd love to have you partner with us in these various ministries; that would enrich the entire body of Christ. So let's be determined like Zacchaeus was. Let's get rid of the obstacles, whatever they might be. We see how our youth group leaders make a difference in people's lives. We hear those testimonies all the time. They're just volunteers who are serving Jesus and serving us.

Let's go back to Luke 19 and look at verses five and six: *"And when Jesus came to the place"*—to what place? He's in Jericho, on the road, at the exact spot in front of that tree. When Jesus came to that place, *"he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully."* This wasn't a casual invitation; this was a divine interaction. It was absolutely divine. And Zacchaeus didn't hesitate. He immediately opened his house to Jesus, this stranger he didn't even know. He had to be in complete shock. He could not believe that this Teacher stopped where He stopped. Not only that, He looked up. Zacchaeus' head was probably poking through the leaves. He's talking to himself because no one wanted to be near him. "He's slowing down! Wait a minute. He's looking up at me. What's happening?" Then Jesus says, "Zacchaeus." He called him by name! That's just amazing to think about.

Do you guys know who Reggie Jackson is? Reggie Jackson was a baseball player in the '70s and '80s. He was a 14-time All Star, five-time World Series champion, two-time World Series MVP, one-time AL MVP and four-time home run leader. In 1993, he received about 97% of the votes. He was a Hall of Famer on the first ballot. He was a good baseball player. His nickname was Mr. October. His last game was played on October 4, 1987. There was a little guy at that game, a 12-year-old named Phil Chapman. Along with my brothers, my dad took us to Comiskey Park, and we watched Reggie Jackson's last game. My dad would always buy us brand new baseballs. We'd have our baseball gloves with us too. We'd get to Comiskey real early. We went down front and we would have those new balls. We would just hope somebody would come by and sign our ball.

Well, that particular day Reggie Jackson was signing baseballs. And do you know what Reggie said to me? He goes, "Phil, can I take that ball? Can I sign that? Do you want me to make that out to you, Phil?" No, he didn't say that. He did sign my ball and he signed my brother's ball. He didn't even look at me. He was talking to somebody else. I looked at the chicken scratch. It wasn't even his name. But that would have amazed me if Reggie would have said, "Hey, Phil." He didn't know me. I didn't know him.

So what do you think Zacchaeus was feeling in that moment? I mean, "Oh, my goodness. What is happening here? I'm in shock. Ask me anything You want." I mean, Reggie Jackson could have asked me to run across the field. "Yeah, sure!" This is an amazing moment in time. I'm guessing Zacchaeus had no way to imagine this guy would want to come to his house. Nobody wanted to go to Zacchaeus' house. He was a chief tax collector. He had a beautiful house. High tech. Upgraded all

the appliances. It was a gorgeous house, but no one wanted to visit, not even his family. They were probably embarrassed by him.

I think Zacchaeus knew the Scriptures. His mom and dad named him Zacchaeus. The Hebrew origin of that name meant pure or innocent. Man, they had to be so disappointed in who Zacchaeus became. He was all about possessions, all about money.

Because of that, Zacchaeus had a whole bunch of walls built up. He knew people really didn't like him and he didn't care. He just wanted to make more and more money. That's how he got to be where he was. He kept those walls up, but for whatever reason, literally and metaphorically, when Jesus spoke to him, the walls came tumbling down.

Let me assume you're a Christian, just for this conversation. You and I, as believers in Christ, have put up a bunch of walls. Maybe it's because of things that have happened in the past. Maybe it's because of things that are going on in our life. Maybe it's because we have some prejudice. Maybe we think you think you're too good because of the car you're driving. Maybe we think, "Well, we're a little bit older, so that teenager doesn't want to talk to me. They're too young."

Sometimes you have walls built up because you're sinning. You're engaged in some habitual sin you're trying to get out of. You think you have to deal with that before you can engage in anything else. Or maybe you don't even want to deal with that sin, so instead you put up walls. You don't want anyone to come in.

That's the beauty of Jesus. He's calling you and He wants those walls to come down so He can connect with you. He wants you to connect with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Mark 3:35 says we are all brothers and sisters and mothers in Christ. These are not things I just make up. These are things from Scripture, friends. Our job as brothers and sisters in Christ is to encourage one another, to spur one another on, as we'll get to later.

We've got to break down these walls. We've got to break down whatever it is that makes us scared to talk to or engage with others. You know what we do here at Village Bible Church? We have three services, so we have a lot of people who come to the three services. When we see somebody new, we automatically say, "Oh, they must go to the second service." Or, "I haven't seen them in a while; I remember their face, but I don't know who they are." As a staff, we try to figure out, "Okay, they've been coming here for a couple weeks. Or they've been here four months." We break it all down. If you don't necessarily recognize somebody, just greet them and say, "Hey, how long have you been coming to Village?" It just breaks down the wall. Who cares? We just love people; that's our whole thing. We are to love one another, to build one another up and encourage one another.

This is where the rubber meets the road in a sense. Jesus didn't wait for Zacchaeus to break down a wall. When we take Jesus' point of view, He reaches out and says, "Zacchaeus, take Me to your home." Now, after church today, I'm probably going to invite myself to multiple people's homes. Someone actually told me today that they're coming to our house for lunch. Hon, sorry about that. They invited themselves.

Jesus took the initiative. That's my point. And we need to take the initiative in getting connected to people around us, those sitting near us. Not just for the 60 seconds of greeting, but beyond of that. Find places where you can serve with other people and connect with each other.

A life transformed is Opening the door.

As I studied this story of Zacchaeus, this familiar story I already knew, I began to dig into it for hours and hours. I wondered who Zacchaeus was and how Jesus connected with him. Then all of a sudden it hit me that I'm Zacchaeus. I know a whole bunch of God's Word. I've got a whole bunch hidden in my heart. But what am I doing? How am I serving Jesus in ways that are real and consistent? I need to yearn for that conversation with Jesus on an ongoing basis. Jesus says in Revelation 3:20, "*I stand at the door and knock...*" Jesus is already there and He wants you to welcome Him in.

The radical thing about this story is that Jesus didn't just go to his house because He was hungry. He probably was hungry. Jesus was at times hungry. It shows His humanity. But He came to confront Zacchaeus. Now, we don't know exactly what that confrontation was like. Scripture doesn't make us privy to what happened.

A life transformed is Venturing into grace and truth.

But based on everything we know, Jesus would have confronted Zacchaeus in love, grace and truth. He would have talked to him about his lifestyle, about his choices. He would have talked to Zacchaeus about his sin. It would have been confrontational grace, the grace that says, "I see you, Zacchaeus. I understand what you're going through. And I'm going to challenge you to be better."

I think it's crucial for us to apply this to our lives. I don't think this happens too often at church anymore, when we're intentionally confronting a brother or sister in Christ, but with tremendous grace. "You know what? I saw you last night and that wasn't your wife. What were you doing? Hey, you know what? We were doing that job over there and I heard you telling that joke to the other guys. That's interesting. We go to church together. Are you following Jesus? Are you looking to Him?"

You see, these are hard things for us to do, but that's part of loving each other, loving people who are different from us. It's really confronting them in love, but always heavily in grace. We don't have to assume the worst about people. We need to assume the best because we love them. But we still should challenge them. This is where real transformation starts happening in us as people of God.

In the final segment in our first passage today, as we look at the life of this rich tax collector, we see his transformation. It's the moment in time when Zacchaeus' life completely changes. Everything about him, his entire legacy, changes. That's the only legacy I care about, frankly. You can put on my tombstone: "Phillip Chapman, a follower of Jesus Christ." In the end, that's all that matters.

The Bible tells us that after this encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus didn't just offer apologies, he went out and made restitution. He didn't just welcome Jesus into his home, he welcomed Him into his heart and into his life. Then at the end, Jesus declared to all the public, "Zacchaeus has been saved. He's given his life to me." Let's look at these last verses:

⁸ 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." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

A life transformed is Embacing transformation.

Transformation is an unbelievable thing. If you've given your life to Jesus Christ, you are a new creation. You are transformed. But sometimes you need a verse that moves you forward. Brian said in his testimony, "Hey, that verse kicks me really hard." Sometimes we need to be reminded of that transformation, so we can start making some changes in our lives. We need to adjust some things, some priorities. Maybe we can move from focusing on possessions to focusing on relationships, stepping out of our comfort zone, embracing the transformation God gave us as people who love Jesus. Do you know what this ends up meaning? When we are really transformed, it's like my friend Aaron Wagner, who's teaching our class here in the evenings on apologetics, says: "Our entire lives should be filtered through the Word of God. Everything we think, everything we do, everything we say, every decision—including where our money is spent—should be filtered through God's Word." That's how we serve our King with great pleasure, with great honor. It all starts with a decision to follow Jesus, to let Him in to our homes.

Zacchaeus did that. Transformation inevitably happens when you welcome Jesus, not only into your home, but you welcome Him as a resident of your home. Zacchaeus put his faith into action right away, just like James tells us to do. I mentioned earlier that I am guessing Zacchaeus was a student of the Scriptures. When Jesus entered his life, he had to be thinking, "Oh, boy. I've got to do something here. I've got to change. Let me think. Leviticus 6:5 and Number 5:6-7, they tell me if I do something to somebody, I take something from someone, I should give it back to them in full, plus 20%. So 120%. No, that's not enough." Then maybe he was thinking, "Oh, Exodus 22:4, 7. That's what I'll do. I'll give them double. If I robbed somebody, I'll give them double. No, I don't think that does it. I've got it. I really did wrong. I'm going to go to Exodus 22:1, where it says I should give fourfold, 400%, back."

In reality, he gave away half of everything he had to the poor, then with the other half he said, "Okay, I've got to keep this, because I've got to pay back hundreds of people 400% of what I took from them. That's going to take a long time." Scripture doesn't tell us all that. It would be great to know the rest of story, but we do know he was convicted, then he was changed.

That's the beauty of stories like this. They're life changing. They're transformative. It's why we have those little episodes called "That's My Story." It's where they tell about life changes. That's why we have those baptism videos. It's about transformation. You were this at one moment; the next moment you were this—a new creation, transformed.

Just the other day we were painting in the hallway and a bunch of people were together. The stories we told one another made us laugh a lot. We also heard transformation stories, how they gave their life to Christ, or what happened in their marriage, how that guided them to come to church. That's the beauty of being at church. It's where we hear these transformation stories.

Verse ten says it all: *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* Jesus is the One responsible for all the stories. Let me say that again in case you didn't hear it. Jesus is the only One responsible for all the stories. Jesus is the One Who called Zacchaeus by name. Jesus is the One Who called me by name. Before the foundation of the world, Jesus knew that He was going to go to Zacchaeus' home. When He was teaching parables we were reading in Luke 9, 10 and 11, He knew right where He was going to stop on that road in Jericho. Think about this: When that sycamore tree was being planted, He's was aware, "That's the tree that little Zacchaeus is going to climb up." Perfect timing.

You see, we serve a sovereign God, friends. He's a sovereign God Who knows every step. We need to celebrate that more. We need to look backwards sometimes in order to understand and celebrate. That's why we're having a men's breakfast next Saturday. The whole focus is to celebrate the sovereignty of God, to understand what He has done. The more seasoned gentlemen in this church are going to share with the next generations about what God has done and is doing in their lives.

God's mandate: Guided by the commandment

That all brings us to the point that we need to serve God, following His mandates in Matthew 22. You see, our lives at church and everywhere should be guided by the commandment Jesus declares. We should feel the obligation that we are to love one another with great love, being eager to demonstrate our love on an ongoing basis.

God's mandate: Obligations to others

Our relationship with God is a vertical connection with the Divine. Because of that vertical connection, it's automatically horizontal. It's automatically pushing us out to love our brothers as ourselves. First Corinthians 12 tells us that being part of the body of Christ means we're all equally valuable. No matter what our role is, we all uniquely contribute. When one of us is hurting, all of us should be hurting.

I had surgery on my big toe a couple years ago. Man, I was down! If you get a toothache. Oh! You're in the corner crying. You see, little things can take us completely out, because they matter. Each little piece on our body, everything we do here at church, it all matters.

The commandment Jesus gave cuts through the complexities of the religious law to reveal that, in essence, our faith is all about one thing: love. It's not a human endeavor, but rather a divine one. First John 4:19 reminds us that we have zero clue about how to love people, zero clue about how to love God. It tells us, *"We love because he first loved us."* God's love is the foundation for all the other things we do, all the other things we say to one another.

We're told in Deuteronomy 6:5 that we're to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength—everything! Just as Paul said in Galatians 5:14, it's because all the law is fulfilled when we love our brother as ourselves. We're to love our neighbor. Who's our neighbor? All those around us.

God's mandate: Demonstrating love

How do we experience the depths of God's love? Romans 12:10 says, *"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."* It should be a competition. Guys, I got your attention. You love competition. Try to outdo your family, to love them in more ways than you can imagine. Outdo each other in loving each other more and more. Grandmas, outdo anyone in loving those grandchildren, showing them the love of Jesus Christ. Through simple acts of love, we fulfill what Jesus called "the law and the prophets." The apostle Peter captures it well in 1 Peter 4:8, where he says, *"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."* This is the epitome of our obedience to Christ, that we love one another with grace and truth.

So as we conclude our service, I don't want us to quickly forget this transformative story of Zacchaeus, because it's a great story. Remember the transformation that God did with you. Let's seek real opportunities to make connections with people who are sitting around us. Make it a goal to learn about a new family every single week. Just one. Get plugged in. Volunteer. Grow deeper in your relationships. Go to small group. Learn more there.

But above and beyond all these things, love the King of kings. That's what we need to do. We need to step away from this and be in awe of all that Jesus has done for us. He is the greatest. He's the One with the unconditional love—and I'm so thankful for that.

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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