

Salvation and Your Work

Casting a Tall Shadow:

Luke 19:1-10
January 27 2008
Wesley J. Gabel
Bethany Church

Did you learn this song in Sunday school?

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man
And a wee little man was he
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see
And as the Savior passed that way
He looked up in that tree
And He said, "Zacchaeus, you come down!
For I'm going to your house today
For I'm going to your house to stay"*

Zacchaeus was not only a wee little man; he is also a key man. He is a gigantic figure revealing the gospel and its power. Here's how! There are three fundamental questions in life. First, can I have a personal and intimate relationship with my Creator? Second, how can I have a personal and intimate relationship with God our creator? Third, how do I know that I have a personal and intimate relationship with God? Zacchaeus illustrates the answer.

Over the next three weeks, we'll see through his life *that* we can have an intimate relationship with God, *how* we can establish and develop that relationship, and *how we can know* we have it through the impact it makes on our work, home and community. Let's look at Zacchaeus.

First, Zacchaeus was a Jew. He was an heir of God's promise to Abraham. He was a participant in the covenant community of God. He bore a sign of that covenant on his body. He received his name in a ceremony of faith; yet there is a second fact: *Zacchaeus was lost.* He was

estranged from God and his people. I believe greed led him to fraternize with the enemies of Israel. He was a chief tax collector. He didn't just collect taxes for an occupation. I think he enlisted others to do the same and got a cut from what they collected. *Third, Zacchaeus was short.* He was unusually and obviously short. He probably found himself fighting for respect when on occasions others tested him, picked on him, or took advantage of him. I think he was driven to prove himself and would step on others in that quest. I suspect that occurred in his work because it is obvious from the crowd's murmur that he was seen as a greedy sinner.

When Jesus visited Jericho, Zacchaeus wanted to see him. However, he could not see over the crowd, and they would not let him through. If he were a king, they would have let him through. If he were a respected wise man, someone would have said, "Come here, Zacchaeus, you can stand in front of me." There were no such good feelings or sensitivity toward that man. That is a pretty good sign that Zacchaeus was alienated from God and people, not just because of his business, but because of the way he conducted himself in his business, home and community.

Zacchaeus was no slouch. He thought ahead. I imagine that thinking ahead is how he became a chief tax collector. Maybe Zacchaeus had already run ahead once and got pushed back. Whatever the case, he now scouted the route he expected Jesus to take and climbed a tree. Do you think that the devil was involved in the crowd's reaction to prevent Zacchaeus from meeting Jesus? Zacchaeus found a way to see him, and Jesus stopped and addressed Zacchaeus:

Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. (Luke 19:5, NIV)

Jesus said, "I must stay at your house today," because God had an agenda for Zacchaeus. Jesus didn't just hang with Zacchaeus. He had a purposeful mission with him. That

is true for you, isn't it? Doesn't Jesus have a purposeful agenda with you? How is he going to get it done with you?

Did you know that at one time pastors called from house to house? They did so not to just be friends and hang with their parish. They did so because God had an agenda for the person, and the person believing that God was working through this established leader wanted to know what God's agenda was. Chit-chat was not enough. It left everyone dissatisfied. "What's God's agenda for me, Pastor? Why has God sent you?" The pastor might share something, or say, "I know I was sent, but I'm not sure why. What's going on with your soul?" The conversations were serious and purposeful. If that was the agenda and attitude among the church in America today, any pastor would be eager to call.

Although we are not privy to the relationship that Zacchaeus developed with Jesus in his home, we can see the impact. During that time, Zacchaeus declared:

Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.
(Luke 19:8, NIV)

Jesus responded to this declaration saying that salvation had come to this home today. In Zacchaeus's words and commitment we were seeing salvation unfold. If you walk with a holy God, holiness ought to result. Jesus' told a murmuring crowd that he had come to seek and to save what was lost. That was God's agenda with Zacchaeus. That is the divine agenda with us.

Think of what was lost. If we turn to Genesis 3, we see that we lost intimate fellowship with God. Just like Adam told God in Genesis 3:10, we've become afraid of God and hide. We don't face things honestly. We deny, dismiss, diminish, excuse, and rationalize. We've lost fellowship with God. We've also lost fellowship with one another. When confronted with sin Adam blamed Eve and intimated that it was God's fault. In Genesis 3:12 he says that the woman

you put here with me gave me the fruit. We are at odds with one another because we sin. We've also lost fellowship and favor with creation, which includes our work. There is a curse on our work. The ground is cursed and thistles and thorns tear at us. We encounter hostility in our work. If it wasn't so tough to make a living, no one would look forward to retirement. Today, I want us to consider the salvation that came to Zacchaeus in the area of his work.

Our school-age daughters once began a project of growing seedlings in small pots. They sat them on window sills in a porch. When mother stepped onto the porch and found the potted seedlings utterly destroyed and the girls' preschool brother holding a spoon laden with dirt, she saw the boy's eyes flash with fear. He cried, "Mom, I just a diggin', I just a diggin'!" Our little boy did not have a "death wish" for seedlings. Instead, he had a delight in working the soil. I think that must have been like Adam. According to the book of Genesis (2:8, 15), after God formed Adam he placed him in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it. This was before sin. This was before any imperfection, any aching backs, any cuts and bruises, any tears, any pain or hardship, any discouragement. Before that, God placed Adam in the garden to work it. I think he must have been eager to embrace the work. King Solomon wrote, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. (Ecclesiastes 2:24, NIV)

My little boy found rather quickly, however, that "just a diggin'" doesn't always bring good rewards. Indeed, we need knowledge, skills, health, and favor; and without passion for our work, we'll give up. With passion, we may and often exploit others. The second half of Zacchaeus's declaration was: "*if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.*" I think Zacchaeus's primary opportunity to cheat people was in his work.

Brothers and sisters, when Adam and Eve sinned, theirs and our workplace was lost. When Zacchaeus promised to pay back four times the amount of any one he had cheated, he became a blessing to all those he touched with his work. Jesus' presence did not lead Zacchaeus to just acts of restitution. It led him to go beyond restitution and become a blessing. Salvation visited his work and workplace. The love of God was calling the shots.

Is that happening wherever you find yourself employed? Is salvation visiting your workplace? Are you walking with Jesus? Is his holiness impacting the way you think and act as you earn a livelihood or as you maintain your living?

The official seal of our redemption is not our baptism. The official seal of our redemption is not our confession. The Bible teaches that the seal of our redemption is the Holy Spirit. God's sign to you and the world that you are redeemed is the presence and work of this *Holy Spirit* in your life. Is your communion with him saving your workplace? Is it bringing God's holiness and blessings to your work? Is your passion for work being restored? Do you approach your work with expectation and awe believing that what was lost is being saved and restored? Are you permitting the Spirit of Jesus to bring God's agenda to your life? Am I one of his conduits for you?

Brothers and sisters, you don't all work outside the home, but you all work. God's salvation brings holiness and favor. If you are broke, indebt, and discouraged, you need favor. If you feel resentment and alienation, you need holiness. It is time for Jesus to stay in your home.