



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 19:1-10

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## Making Amends

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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A drunken man was stumbling through the woods one day when he came upon a pastor baptizing some folks in the river. The man walked into the water and bumped right into the pastor who turned and asked, "Are you ready to find Jesus?" The drunk answered, "Yes, I am." So the pastor grabbed the drunk and dunked him in the water. When he pulled him up he asked, "Brother, have you found Jesus?" The drunk replied, "No sir, I haven't." The pastor, who was now a little confused, dunked him in the water again, but longer this time. Then he pulled him up and asked, "My brother, have you found Jesus?" The drunk again answered, "No, I haven't found Him yet." The pastor didn't know what more to do so he dunked the drunk one last time for good measure; held him down until he began to kick his arms and legs. When he pulled him up the pastor again asked, "For the love of God have you found Jesus yet?" The drunk wiped his eyes, caught his breath and finally said, "Are you certain this is where He fell in?"

Fortunately there are better ways to find Jesus. And, for the majority of us here this morning, we know it's an incredible thing when God moves in and transforms a life. The 18th Century Christian said it well: "It is not that I did choose Thee, for Lord that could not be. This heart would still refuse Thee, had Thou not chosen me. Thou from the sin that stained me has cleansed and set me free, of old Thou did ordain me that I should live for Thee." This morning we are going to look at a miracle that God worked in an individual's life. In Luke 19 vv. 1-10 we get a great picture of God's power at work, and the changes in both attitude and behavior that give it testimony in the life of Zaccheus.

Let's pick up the story starting in verse 1. Luke tells us that Jesus **"was passing through Jericho. And behold, there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; and he was a chief tax-gatherer, and he was rich. And he was trying to see who Jesus was, and he was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. And he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for Jesus was about to pass through that way."**

We meet this man Zaccheus. His name actually means "righteous one." How ironic, for Zaccheus was an unscrupulous tax collector who was far from righteous. Tax collectors in Jesus' day were little more than

government sanctioned extortionists. In the Gospels they are mentioned in the same breath with sinners and prostitutes. And the town of Jericho, where all this was taking place, was considered the "tax capital" of Palestine. So if tax collectors had a cartel, then Zaccheus would have been the kingpin, for Luke tells us that he was "the chief tax collector" in that region. Not surprisingly, we are also told that he was wealthy. We can imagine him with a home in Atherton, dressed in the finest Italian suits, driving a black on black Hummer down Santa Cruz Avenue in Menlo Park. Now, if it was harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, what of him who had gotten his riches by such means? Think of how the common citizens must have thought of him as they looked at his fine wardrobe, his gold chains and plush home. They knew the pennies he squeezed went to make him wealthy. It's also likely that Zaccheus had come to that place in his life where his wealth and lifestyle weren't satisfying any more. Like all who live apart from God's grace he was living within an existential vacuum. There was an itch in his heart no amount of wealth could scratch. A sense of disease made every pleasure unfulfilling. Nothing seemed to last. It's also likely that Zaccheus had become burdened by the utter contempt of his own people. The deep scars of rejection left an indelible mark that couldn't be salvaged through any natural means.

But then we are told that Jesus came to town. Zaccheus had probably heard stories about Him; that He was a friend of tax-gatherers; that He had come to administer hope to those broken beneath the wheels of living. Perhaps he had even heard of Levi's conversion, or Matthew as we know him, who was now one of Jesus' followers. Perhaps he had even known Levi; after all, Palestine was a small place and tax collectors would have hung out at the local pub together. And because Jesus had ministered to Levi and others of his crowd He evidently had a soft spot for people like him. So he probably thought, "Man, I've got to take a look at this guy." So he determined in his heart to see Jesus, "but was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature." We can imagine Zaccheus standing on his tiptoes in order to see over the crowd. The crowd probably enjoyed boxing him out. "Oops, sorry about the

elbow little fella, you're awfully hard to see. Oh, that's your foot? I'm so sorry." Zaccheus was vertically challenged. If I were making a movie about this story, I'd probably cast Edward G. Robinson or Danny DeVito as Zaccheus, with those shifty little eyes and conniving character – the perfect little big man.

Zaccheus had never measured up. He was probably never asked to play kick ball with the other kids during recess at school. His entire life had, most likely, been a struggle to overcome the stigma associated with his height. He had to prove in more ways than one that he was a force to be reckoned with and a person not to be underestimated. He was probably like the guy who went to the doctor's office one day for a physical. The nurse asked him how much he weighed and he proudly said, "185 pounds." So she had him step on the scales and then exclaimed, "You actually weigh 240." She then asked, "How tall are you?" He said, "Six feet, two." She measured him and said, "You're five feet, nine inches." So she started to take his blood pressure but before she finished he said, "How can you expect my blood pressure to be normal? I came in here tall and slender, and you've already made me short and fat!" How we love to fancy ourselves more attractive than we are! But when it comes to God's standards, we all fall short don't we – spiritually speaking. Romans 3:23 says it well, "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**"

At some level Zaccheus was beginning to recognize this. So he ran on ahead and climbed a sycamore tree since Jesus was about to pass that way. Here is Zaccheus, a rich and dignified man, yet he runs down the road to get in position. Desperate people run. When I was a kid we used to climb trees. But adults don't climb trees unless they're being chased by a dog, or trying to escape a tsunami or something of that nature. Climbing a tree is an act of desperation. So we get this touching picture of a tiny, rejected man, sitting totally alone in a tree, conveniently hidden so as to catch a glimpse of the Lord as He passed by. He would have a private view all to himself. The crowd would pass by and he would remain unseen, like an orphan peering through a lighted window on a dark cold night.

But in vv. 5-7 the unexpected happens. "**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."** And he hurried and came down, and received Him gladly. And when they saw it (talking about the townspeople), they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Notice that Jesus seeks out Zaccheus personally. He comes walking through the town, and one can easily imagine all the sick people -

the lepers and outcasts - strewn everywhere in the hope that they might be healed. And in the middle of this mob scene Jesus says, "Zaccheus come down, you're having a guest for dinner." Notice that he calls Zaccheus by name. It seems so odd! But as we look at the Gospel accounts, Jesus often did things like that. He always demonstrated a sense of purpose and mission. And His purpose on that day was to break bread with the most hated man of Jericho. So what we begin to see at this point in the story is that Zaccheus' seeking of Jesus and Jesus' seeking of Zaccheus were both sovereign acts of God. The crossing of their lives at the sycamore tree was a work of divine providence; a meeting ordained before the mists of eternity. The camel was about to pass through the eye of a needle!

We are told that Zaccheus came down and received him gladly. Here he is, a tax-gatherer, one who rips off his own people. Many in that crowd were probably expecting Jesus to deliver a crushing rebuke. They were probably whispering, "Oh boy, Zaccheus is finally going to get what he deserves! This righteous teacher is going to let him have it with both barrels!" But what's intriguing is that Zaccheus doesn't cower, or climb higher like a treed cat, but rather hurries to the Lord. We consistently see this response from sinners in the presence of Jesus. Though Jesus stands for purity and truth, sinners race to be at His side and doubters find the courage to believe. In fact, the worse a person felt about themselves the more they would be drawn to Him as a safe harbor and refuge from the storm. How wonderful it would have been for Zaccheus to look into a face and not see hatred and disgust, but respect and understanding. How long had it been since that little man had seen anything but prejudice and hostility? And when Jesus spoke to him, Zaccheus received Him. Something resonated within his heart and he responded. And the people who were looking on were scandalized by the radical love that the Lord freely gave to sinners.

Well, how wonderful it must have been for Zaccheus to host Jesus in his home. Though we have no record of what was said, Zaccheus was never the same after that day. Do you think that Jesus told him to sit still while He preached a sermon on the sin of gluttony? Maybe Jesus slapped him on the forehead and said, "Demon of greed, come out!" But Luke tells us that Jesus went to Zaccheus's house to *stay* with him. They broke bread together. In that culture this was a sign of fellowship and intimacy. We can imagine them sitting there sipping wine and dipping pieces of pita bread in the humus sauce like Jews still

do today. At some point, Jesus may have spoken to him about his life and his need of forgiveness. Perhaps, even as Zaccheus was entertaining the Lord in the beauty of his home, the eyes of the Lord pierced his soul in such a way that the presence of his wealth became an indictment in his life, because of how it was gained. Perhaps at that moment Zaccheus recognized what a terrible mistake he had made and grieved deeply. Whatever was said, right then and there Zaccheus confessed he had cheated and committed to change his life.

The evidence of this change is seen in verse 8, **“And Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my possession I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.”** Can you imagine? Zaccheus didn't respond like the shoplifter who wrote to a store one day and said, “I've just become a Christian, and I can't sleep at night because I feel guilty. So here's \$100 that I owe you.” Then he signed his name, and in a little postscript at the bottom added, “If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest.” No! Something had happened to the heart of Zaccheus; he had become a different person. His identity had been radically changed from that of a swindler to a person who knew that God loved him. That's what made the difference!

The author John Grisham paints a portrait of one man's surrender to God's will. Nate was a disgraced corporate attorney who had been plagued by alcoholism and drug abuse. After two marriages, four detox programs, and a serious bout with a life threatening fever, Nate acknowledged his need for God. Grisham describes the transformation in this way: “With both hands, he clenched the back of the pew in front of him. He repeated the list, mumbling softly every weakness and flaw and affliction and evil that plagued him. He confessed them all. In one long glorious acknowledgment of failure, he laid himself bare before God. He held nothing back. He unloaded enough burdens to crush any three men, and when he finally finished Nate had tears in his eyes. ‘I'm sorry,’ he whispered to God. ‘Please, help me.’ As quickly as the fever had left his body, he felt the baggage leave his soul. With one gentle brush of the hand, his slate had been wiped clean.”

This is what had happened to Zaccheus. With the Lord's grace shining upon him, he had been able to take stock of his life, had both confessed and forsaken his sins. And his actions from this point onward reflect this dramatic change. Zaccheus knew that since he had received something he didn't deserve; that because God had handed him a clean slate in the spiritual realm, it was now necessary for him to right his wrongs in the physical realm. So deeply impacted was he that

Zaccheus was willing to give 50 percent of everything he had to the poor. This went far beyond the normal requirement of 20 percent of one's income. Then, from the remaining 50 percent, he pledged to make amends to the tune of four times the amount of what he had extorted. He had cheated a ton of people. But now he was willing to place his entire fortune in jeopardy to make things right. In effect, he was living out the command that had earlier caused the rich ruler so much grief. If you remember, Jesus had told this rich young man, “Sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Zaccheus was now walking through the eye of a needle and living to tell about it.

You know, there must have been many skeptics when word got around concerning this radical change in Zaccheus, and rightly so. I'm sure we've observed that just because someone claims to have found God doesn't necessarily make it so. And yet, who can argue with the power of a changed life? Is there any evidence that would be greater than this response from a rich man? Because nothing short of the power of God could make an arrogant rich man, who had worshiped wealth his entire life, give his money away by way of making amends. That's evidence of an authentic conversion. Then Jesus says a very significant thing. In v.9 He says, **“Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.”** Jesus is saying that salvation had come to this house, not because he was willing to give his money away but because Zaccheus exercised the same faith and works of Abraham, the father of faith. In the Scripture, changed behavior always follows a changed heart. And we can see that Zaccheus had been transformed from a taker to a giver not because he said so, but because his actions demonstrated outwardly what had already taken place internally.

Luke then ends the account of Zaccheus with the great summary of Christ's mission, **“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”** When Luke uses the term “Son of Man,” he is speaking of God in his humanity, and God's willingness to relate to us at the depth of our brokenness. The truth is that God seeks out the lost, and has His heart turned towards the one who desires to find Him. But from everyone else's perspective Zaccheus was beyond saving. He had turned his back on God's Word and His people. He was a participant in Roman oppression, a traitor. Like a pimp he made his money off the backs of his own people. For Zaccheus to change was impossible. Except for one

thing – he was sought out by the Son of Man. It was through God’s initiative that he was prompted. The crossing of their lives at the sycamore tree was divinely managed. Zaccheus was caught precisely because in his seeking he was sought.

So what can we take away with us from this wonderful story? Well, there are two kinds of people here today. Some of you are like Zaccheus. You’ve been searching for something; window-shopping for a “higher power” as we like to say in recovery ministry. Perhaps you’ve attached yourself to the things of the world and yet found they can’t satisfy the deeper thirsts of the soul. Let me just encourage you to trust Jesus for who He is. He is the One who is drawing you. It’s no mistake you’re here this morning. He’s calling you by name. And He is the only One who is able to save your life when you are “up a tree.” In a sense Jesus is saying, “I want a relationship with you. I can see in you the person you can become – and that person is beautiful.” So the question is, will you come down from your tree and let Him change you from the inside out?

But most of us are what I would call former Zaccheus’s. We’re recovering. We’ve already had our treetop experience. And, for us, this story teaches us about the cost of discipleship. It’s an illustration of what the Lord expects in regards to making amends for our mistakes. A transformed faith will always respond to wrongs differently than our natural instincts do. Our instincts tell us not to admit wrong and to cover up any signs of weakness. When I was growing up, this attitude was romanticized by the saying “Love means never having to say you’re sorry.” As sweet as this may sound, it avoids a fundamental issue, namely, the honesty to bring the integrity of admitting error. Marriages are severely damaged by an unwillingness to admit wrong; so are a host of other relationships, either personal or professional. One of the most painful things we can do is to commit a wrong and then pretend it never happened or that it didn’t create any damage. Such denial builds up resentment; one that eats away at the relationship’s core. Admitting wrong, asking for forgiveness, and making amends is like a spring shower that can open up the possibility of a fresh start. This is why Zaccheus’s willingness to make amends meets Jesus’ approval, not as a requirement of his salvation, but as a demonstration of its reality.

An “amends” is compensation for a loss, damage or injury of any kind. In making amends we are doing some repair work on the relational side of our lives. But before we can have healthy relationships we have to clean up the wreckage that has littered our failed relationships. Otherwise that which is unresolved will land smack dab in the middle of our present relationships, with the same results! Like Zaccheus, when we are forced to admit the affect we have had on others we will also

accept responsibility for the harm done. Seeking amends is the only way out of the guilt and remorse we may be feeling. We need to approach those to whom we are offering amends humbly, honestly and sincerely. We also need to be careful not to offer excuses or attempt to justify our actions. In other words, we need to focus only on our part, “clean our side of the street” without expecting anything in return. This is the secret to making successful amends. We are making amends not for reward, not with the expectation that we will receive anything in return, but for freedom.

This not only requires willingness and good judgment but a careful sense of timing! Much anguish has resulted from premature and hastily made amends. Philippians 2:4 tells us, “**Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**” God calls us, as His people, to be willing to make amends. But when that disclosure would injure others we have to weigh our options carefully. This is especially true in cases of infidelity. In such situations, irreparable damage can occur as a result of premature amends. Refusing to continue the behavior and concentrating sincere affection on those to whom we have made loving commitments can make partial amends for infidelity. Then over time, once the relational supports are in place, full disclosure is not only appropriate but necessary if the relationship is to be restored to grace. We should never be deterred from making amends through fear of injuring ourselves, but only through the possibility of causing injury to others. If we choose to delay merely out of fear for ourselves, then we will be the ones to suffer. In situations that require deferred action, seeking additional counsel is always helpful in assessing our judgment of the situation. Abruptly approaching an individual who still suffers deeply from the injustices we have done is seldom wise. In situations where our own pain is still deeply embedded, patience might be the wise choice. Timing is important to gaining and growing from the experience and in preventing further injury.

It is important however to distinguish between amends and apologies. Though apologies are sometimes appropriate, they are not substitutes for making amends. A person can apologize for being late for work, but until the behavior is corrected, an amends cannot be made. Many, many years ago, after I had come to Christ and God convicted me of how I had mistreated my older brother, I had an opportunity to talk with him at length. I told him how sorry I was for neglecting our relationship over the course of 27 years of addiction history. I swept my

side of the street clean by calling to mind examples of my self-centered behaviors, the dishonesty, and the verbal and emotional abuses he had to endure. I asked for forgiveness and expressed my desire for reconciliation. He listened, and after a long pause said, "Steve, I appreciate what you had to say and realize how hard it must have been for you to say it. However, and this may be hard for you to hear, there may be some who are not willing to forgive you. We have heard 'I'm sorry!' before and simply need more time." Over the years that followed that conversation, God did a work, both within my heart and the heart of my brother. And today that relationship has been restored to grace.

But what I've learned is that the amends process never happens according to my agendas or timetables, that it is not about "I'm sorry, I'll never do it again." Most of us will indeed fail, again. And when these failures occur we have to accept them as signs that perhaps we have turned away from God and need to resubmit our lives to His care; or we may have neglected to identify some destructive aspect of our character and need to examine ourselves honestly; or we may be unwilling to relinquish our pride which now stands as a stumbling block between ourselves and others. It's in times like these that God calls us to make an accurate and exhaustive survey of our past life as it has affected others. In many instances we will find that although the harm done hasn't been great, nevertheless, damaging emotional wounds may persist just below the level of consciousness, very deep and sometimes forgotten. We should review the events that triggered these emotional responses and commit to healing those that still plague us today. You see, making amends is about changing unacceptable behavior. Our willingness to do the footwork and not our speech should stand as a testimony to this principle. The last thing we want is to take our unfinished business to the grave.

In the movie *Life as a House*, George, is a 40-something employee at an architectural firm who loses both his job and his health. When he learns he has only four months left to live, the shabby condition of his life comes into painful focus. George determines to spend the remaining weeks of his life building the house he'd always dreamed of. With the help of his teenage son and ex-wife, he tears down his shack and builds a beautiful home on the California coast. The restoration of his house is a metaphor of his life. During this process, George tells his son, Sam, about how his alcoholic father caused an accident in which a woman was killed and her small child was paralyzed. He aches over the injustice his father caused.

When George dies, he bequeaths the newly built home to his son. Sam knows in his heart what he needs

to do to honor his father's memory and make amends to someone who has been denied justice. He locates the paralyzed girl in a rundown trailer park. As Sam and his mother walk through the trailer park, his mother asks, "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yes," says Sam.

"You could keep it and rent it out," his mom suggests.

"This is what he wanted," Sam insists.

His mother says, "I read the letter. You read the will. He wanted you to keep it and live in it someday."

Sam says, "Maybe it's not what he wanted. But it's what he was hoping for."

As the scene ends, Sam and his mother encounter the woman in a wheelchair hanging laundry on a clothesline. In a voiceover, George's voice can be heard: "Twenty-nine years ago my father crossed a double line. It changed my life and that of a little girl forever. I just can't stop thinking about it." Sam says to the woman in the wheelchair, "Excuse me. Would you mind if we sit a moment and talk? My father built you a house."

I firmly believe that when injustices are finally made right, as in this story, all of heaven rejoices. The Lord of our salvation is well pleased by our attempts to bring things full circle. And so it goes without saying that we have choices to make today. We can either neglect to clean up the wreckage of our past and leave that legacy in the hands of our children or we can respond as Zaccheus did, "Lord, here and now I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will make amends." The choice is ours. And when we choose to follow the example of Zaccheus we'll hear a familiar voice behind us saying, "Today salvation has come to this house."

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