

Zaccheus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 January 2009

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] sermon into two parts and the first part isn't going to be very traditional. The second part will be a little bit more traditional where we're going to be looking at just some of the lessons from this section about Zacchaeus. But what I want to do first of all and then I want us to have a psalm of praise in between a short psalm, Psalm 117, and just in response to the testimony, the way that Zacchaeus's life has been changed because we're going to look back at Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel chapter 19 and we have the account given to us in Holy Scripture of the amazing change in his life from verses 1 to 9. But what I want to do to begin with this morning just to maybe change things a little bit from our own mentality and make us think about the story and bring it alive is I'm going to be Zacchaeus for 10 minutes and I'm going to give the testimony I'll embellish that story a little bit because there's a lot of details that aren't given but the the facts that we have in the Gospel will be included. So for 10 minutes I want you to imagine that I'm Zacchaeus okay and I know that's going to take a big feat of imagination for you because you're going to have to imagine that I'm much smaller than I am, that I'm much more Jewish looking, that I probably have a beard and I've got a robe on okay so that you just need to imagine for a few more. Use your imagination this morning and imagine that I'm

Zacchaeus and I've been asked to come up to the front of this church and share with this congregation how I became a Christian, how I changed from what I was to what I became. So I'm going to tell you my story right from the beginning I'm going to tell you that I was I was born in Jericho, I've been a Jericho kid all my life and that's been my hometown and that's just what I grew up and I knew everyone around in Jericho and really from a very early age I had an unhappy upbringing. I wasn't a nice kid, I wasn't a particularly popular kid and I was always small. It was a disaster because in school I was small and I was picked on and I was shoved about and when it came to choosing the games I was always last because I was small and I was kind of geeky and I liked mass and I liked sums so that I wasn't a popular kid and I was lonely right from an early age didn't have many friends, didn't get on well in school, well I got on well with mass but I didn't get on well in the sport and the other things that made people popular and my mum and dad believed in God they were Jewish and they wanted me to believe in God but I was fed up with his God because well I was unhappy and he'd made me miserable and he'd made me small and he'd made me ugly and he'd made me unpopular so I just wanted to be cut free from this God altogether so I don't have many good memories of my childhood but then I left school and amazingly got a great job absolutely suited me down to the ground because I was good with figures, I was good with maths and I could become a tax collector and it was a great job because well nobody wanted to be a tax collector if they wanted to be popular but I wasn't popular anyway so it didn't make any difference and I was a tax collector so that I took all the taxes and I worked for the Roman occupying forces so they didn't really like me either but I could make lots of money and I was good at the job from very early on I could see I was good at this job I could get much more money than I was expected to and when I gave my cut to the Roman occupying forces then I could keep the rest for myself I became very rich but I still wasn't popular and I was still kind of lonely although I had a great big house and servants and I could go out to work and make lots of money and what's more I had great payback all these people that never picked me for the school team I could charge them more in taxes and I was great because I got my own back and I could make lots of money very good at the job and before long I became in charge of all the tax collectors in the district I became the chief tax collector so I got promotion but I was still lonely now tax collectors don't have as I said already we don't have many friends so we kind of tend to stick together and we can a pal about with other tax collectors you know how it is and we even hear from tax collectors in other places it's not great friendship because we're kind of anti-social people anyway and but no one else is going to be friend us so we hear what's going on one day I was I was out with some of the other tax collectors and we heard about a tax collector up in Galilee I met him a couple of times at tax collector's conventions look Matthew or Levi as we call them and I heard the leave I'd left the profession he'd given up this money earning profession to follow a guy named Jesus and that Jesus had completely changed his life unbelievable he'd given it all up to follow Jesus this preacher guy that was going around the country and yet I've heard that Levi's

life has been transformed and he's utterly and completely contented and happy and delighted at what he's done now that really hit me hard that really hit me hard because Levi's story made me when I heard of Levi's story I didn't say anything at the time but it was like a mirror in my own soul and I could feel exactly the same as Levi must have been feeling there was a deep seated arm unhappiness in my heart it's a deep seated loneliness I had all the money I could if I could buy happiness I mean I lived hundreds of years before the Beatles but if I could have made that song money can't buy you love I would have made it first because I knew that in my own experience I was completely alone I was just like a leper although I didn't have any disease I was just like a lip people looked at me like I was a leper I just had a feeling about this guy Jesus I had a feeling that I ought to meet him and that he would change my life and that he was significant and important but anyway I didn't think much more about until a few months later I heard that

Jesus was going to be coming through Jericho my hometown that was tremendous news I'm sure I would get a chance to meet him I'm sure he would I would be able to listen to him maybe he would do something to change my life so on the Friday Thursday morning that he was due to come in I got really early I couldn't sleep much during the night I got really early and thought I'll go down to the gate that he's bound to be coming in from where he's traveling and I'll stand there in front and I'll follow him right through Jericho and I'll hear what he's got to say and maybe he'll do a miracle so I got up early and what do you know there was a massive crowd there already and I wouldn't get near Jesus because no one would let me through because no one likes me and I'm too small I wouldn't be able to see anyway there's a nightmare what was I gonna do this would might be the only chance I would get to meet Jesus so I know the path they'll take he's gonna go right through the center of town and I know that up there there's some trees so I'll go up ahead of all the crowds and I'll climb one of these sycamore trees and I'll get a great view and you know that's what I thought I would do and I didn't really care what people think I was I was a chief tax collector but I didn't mind being seen climbing a leg in it up a tree because I was gonna get a great view because if Jesus came through I would have a grandstand view of everything that was gonna happen of course when I got there there was a few people hanging about I started climbing the tree hey shorty what are you doing what you climbing the tree for there's no money to count up there I didn't care I just went up anyway because I was keen to see

Jesus definitely keen to see him so I stood there or I perched there for quite a while and slowly saw this crowd coming up the main street and it was like bees following a moving pot of honey as Jesus walked in the center of them I couldn't really tell my part he didn't look very dramatically different he didn't have a hail around his head and he wasn't glowing he just looked the same but there was this crowd around about him and it was significant crowd coming up to words where I was in my tree and then he stopped right under the tree when I was tremendous I had a grandstand view I was gonna see whatever was gonna happen maybe he'd heal a real leper or maybe he would touch someone and make them speak if they'd been dumb or maybe we just do some amazing teaching couldn't believe it he just looked up in the tree where I was and he said Zacchaeus he knew me I never met him before he called me by name and he said come down from the tree I must come to your house I just couldn't believe it no one wants to come in my house even when I invite them they don't come to the house but someone to ask to invite himself and not just in kind of casual terms but he says I must come to your house I couldn't believe it and you should have seen the faces of everyone around about me you could see you could with their chins just fell they couldn't believe it and there's all kinds of muttering going on I just scrambled down the tree I didn't care I undignified it I was I was full of even from that moment I was full of amazing joy that Jesus wanted to come to my house my lovely house that no one is ever in it was tremendous he wanted to be with me he wanted to speak to me he knew my name no one ever knew my name except as a tax collector or as a term of abuse so jumped down the tree and walked with Jesus and we went to my house I could hear all the people grumbling just like they usually do look at him what's

[10:45] Jesus doing he's gone to this house this house of this man is a sinner I was used to all that abuse and I knew that I was a sinner and I felt guilty inside but Jesus wanted to be in my house and I knew Jesus was something special and someone important and I knew somehow even from the moment he looked at me that he was looking not just as a case but he was looking right into my heart I could tell even from that point that he wasn't ordinary he was gone and he was looking straight into my heart and yet he was befriending me is that not remarkable he came to my house and my servants gave him food and his disciples food and we sat and he talked and he shared about his calling and his good news and what he would do and how he would change my life and forgive me if only I would put my trust in him and follow him and I said to him Jesus my life has already changed you've already transformed my life I know that you're

God and I know you're my redeemer and I know that I will follow you all the days in my life and I was so bursting with joy that I just saw things different all of a sudden and for once my money just it didn't seem something terribly important to me not something to be hoarded and kept and locked in a safe but something as a gift to be given out and I'd been miserable and mean and horrible with my money so that well the first tangible practical thing I can do I can give my money away I'll give half of it to the poor and when I've cheated people I'll give them back now the law says I have to give them back what does it say in restitution twice the amount I've stolen well I'll give back four times the amount because well it doesn't really matter to me that much it's God's gift and and I'm free and I'm loved by God and I'm forgiven by Jesus Christ and I'm the guilt has been taken away and I feel like a new person I have been changed absolutely completely and entirely that is a testimony of the first day of my new life first day of my life as a Christian as a believer and I hope that you will think about the Jesus Christ who changed my life it's been the one who if your life hasn't been changed can change your life today as well now there's a great reason for us to praise God is there not to praise God and Sam 117 sometimes we were not good at returning praise or responding to God or being spontaneous in praise but I want us to sing Sam 117 together before starting the second half of the sermon and it's just an amazing testimony and all of us as Christians here should be able to sing this with real meaning and with real praise because his love towards us is absolutely great as we know he's gone all the way to the cross to die for our sins and to gift us salvation and it's not just a commitment from then it's a commitment that lasts forever and we have much reason to praise him and that word hallelujah simply means praise the Lord so we're gonna sing through this twice and let us do so with our hearts and through the spirit of God let's stand together to sing praise praise the Lord all your nations all you people sing his praise for his love his praise to the Lord it's a commitment that lasts always he is simple now or never hallelujah praise the Lord well done it's nice to praise him on a Sunday morning when the sun is shining as well isn't it good to praise God and we look forward to praising him in an

ongoing way together lots to give thanks for in our Christian lives now I just want to say a few more things about this passage from a maybe more traditional point of view as we kind of unpack it briefly together before the baptism and we do remember that God speaks to us through the Bible and through his word and we can clearly see that for ourselves in this passage as well God's testimony to us we've looked at Zacchaeus testimony to the world when he became a Christian and now we're looking at God's testimony to us in his word and some of you may have seen probably one of the greatest animated films of all time Shrek and that film has a great line in it where Shrek is talking about himself like an onion and saying that he's got a lot of layers and donkey gives him a hard time for being like an onion smelly when you leave it in the

Sun it grows green sprouts and things like that he doesn't seem to understand the significance of Shrek being philosophical and deep and saying that he was a man of many layers well in this in a similar way we find that when we come to God's word that it has many layers as well and it's not necessarily simplistic and yet we do see in this passage when we look even beyond Zacchaeus and look to what God's pattern is here we see different layers and what we see in the first place is the layer of God himself as the architect of this passage where it's placed in scripture is very significant in his guiding of Dr. Luke to write this account this orderly account that Luke is writing we have this passage exactly in the right place because if you remember in our previous study from the last chapter we had the gospel being presented as something that was impossible from human terms that God needed to intervene in our lives and that what is impossible with man for example a rich man becoming a Christian like a camel going through the eye of a needle was not impossible for God and then we have him speaking to a blind Bartimaeus a blind man a beggar who nobody to whom this was written would have thought had any significance at all yet Jesus recognizes the importance of this man and here we have in Zacchaeus we have someone who's a mixture a fusion of these two improbable and impossible characters that become Christians that become believers we have as a case as a rich man so he's a rich man and remember it's impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God Jesus says in the last verse so he's rich yet he becomes a believer but more than that he's like the blind beggar because if you remember the blind beggar was a marginalized person someone on the edges of society someone that nobody had any time for someone that was unimportant unnamed insignificant well here Levi sorry is a case he was rich yes but he was also marginalized he was of the despised class he was a tax collector nobody had any time for him and so we have beautifully dovetailing these previous sections we have Jesus pressing home and God is the architect pressing home the radical nature of the gospel that the gospel is for all people but it's particularly for those who are in need those who are marginalized those for whom it's impossible you would think for them from a human point of view to ever become Christians and we need to recapture that in our own understanding of the gospel and as we share the gospel can I say provocatively today that the gospel is not for respectable people and it's not a respectable gospel gospel it is for those who are lonely and alone and marginalized and unpopular and as Jesus says poor in spirit poor in spirit that might include actual poverty but it might also include a sense of need whoever we are the gospel is for those it is for all those who recognize that they are poor at that level poor in spirit that they need a savior and the gospel therefore is for a rag tag bunch of people like you and me that's who it's for it's not for anyone who's respectable and self-satisfied and

self-contained it's not for anybody who's comfortable and complacent and cozy because Jesus has no place in our lives if that's what we're like if we have no need no emptiness no sense of guilt no sense of longing if we are content with our philosophy of living without Christ or our maybe a kind of middle-class lifestyle that is utterly comfortable and cozy then we need to consider what we're thinking about and maybe that's what we're at sometimes in a little bit of a danger of being we're a little bit in a danger of being cozy and comfortable and middle-class and happy and fulfilled and well-rounded and well-grounded we don't really need a savior and all this stuff that Jesus told a rich man who he sends away empty and then a blind beggar and then a tax collector these are the ones that Jesus is choosing but I'm so important and I'm so rich in all my gifts and in all my talents and my intellect and in my understanding and in my gifts I'm not sure if I really need this Christ or if I need this gospel it's a very important message as we think about God as the architect of this word and of what he's hoping to teach us but we also see in the passage unfolding Christ on the loose Christ being allowed to go where the

[22 : 44] Spirit is leading him in his tasks in his work as the Savior because Jesus was clearly going to Jericho we know that that comes through from the previous chapter and it comes through in this chapter he's definitely going to Jericho now Jericho is like Glasgow the city of culture or whatever particular term that you would give to Glasgow or Edinburgh or any important city it was a it was a significant city it was a cultural city it was a historic city it was full of important people was Jericho but Jesus on the loose wasn't going to admire the architecture wasn't going to meet with dignities well not at least the dignitaries that we would think he's going specifically to meet a blind beggar and Zacchaeus the tax collector we man up a tree that nobody had any time for and this is who Jesus was going to see he stops at the tree he looks up and he says Zacchaeus I know you I'm coming to your house salvation has to come to your house today I'm already working in you and have been you're ready for this

I'm calling you by name and I'm going to associate with you Zacchaeus I'm going to take the time out of my journey towards Jerusalem where I'm going to be nailed to a tree for your sins and I'm going to come to your house and I don't care what people say about me Zacchaeus I don't care that I'll be branded a friend of sinners I don't care if people will think I'm unclean and disrespectful to the city fathers I'm coming to your house I'm going to eat with you I must come to your house it's not optional Christ is on the loose and he is bringing to Zacchaeus belonging and friendship and association tremendous story and it's tremendous what Jesus is doing careless about what lots of people around about were thinking he had I was on the loose because he had business with blind Bartimaeus or the blind man he's not named in Luke he's named in one of the other gospels and also with Zacchaeus and that Christ on the loose is also I think a great example for us there is Christians we can become very content in the friends generation this is the friends generation isn't it it's a generation where friends the program is being always repeated endlessly right on into eternity for everyone to watch a million times in episode we're all friends of friends friends is the big pro friends is the great philosophy and thinking of our day and generation and we love to be among our friends and rightly so of course we do but here is Jesus who goes out of his way to associate with the marginalized and with those who society rejects the lonely rich and the struggling poor oh but I don't know them well he's committed to them anyway and he associates with those who is unlikely for Jesus to associate with and maybe he's asking us to to look outside of our circle of comfortable and cozy friends to see who we might associate with who may be lonely who maybe sits at the next booth from us in our workplace who everyone calls a geek who's lonely and unsociable and he's asking us in Christ's name to befriend that person and to share the gospel with them outside of our own particular warmth and acceptable group befriending them going to their home inviting them to our home you know that's a that's a great thing to do today we spend a lot of time in hospitality in St. Columbus but it's not just so that we can rub each other's backs when we've had another steak or when we've had a Sunday roast of course that's part of it as we share and fellowship with one another and share with those maybe who are lonely or in need in our own congregation but it's a mentality thing it's an attitude so that we are willing to open our homes because when we open our homes we're opening our hearts we're opening our lives we're opening our privacy and when we go to other people's homes we're saying I want to be part of your life I want to be in your home I want to belong to what you are beyond what you are in church beyond what we are for the hour we're together can you see the significance of home and Jesus going to

Zacchaeus home for nobody when near Zacchaeus home because it was the place where he was utterly alone and so we have this great work of grace which says that we look out for those who are outside of our circle of friends outside of the common bonds of love and brotherhood and sisterhood that we have in Christ those who are needy those who are lost those who are alone those who need Christ Jesus tangibly as well as those who need Christ because we all need Christ intangibly or tangibly so we see Jesus Christ on the loose and it would it's good to let the radical nature of Jesus breathe into our lives again stop us becoming dull and in a rut and complacent and cozy and careless as if you know we've deserved our salvation and we're in our own group and we rub each other in the back and just say there there it's great that we are what we are let's not get our hands dirty with those who are unclean and then lastly and I've spoken about God the Father and his testimony through scripture and Jesus Christ God the Son being let loose but we also see the

Holy Spirit in this passage as an agent for change doesn't he because whatever else we're made clear that salvation is the core message of the change in Zacchaeus life it's not just socio-economic it's salvation Jesus says salvation has come to this house yes had socio-economic implications but it was salvation today he says salvation has come to this house it had come to Zacchaeus and when Jesus says in John 3 16 that we need to be born anew that's the good news of the gospel by the Spirit God so loved the world that he gave his son who ever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life and that it's being born anew by the Spirit so the Holy Spirit is quietly also the agent for change in Zacchaeus life and it's great because it's an immediate change is actually the change probably comes before we even have the account in many ways certainly the desires there but the change is immediate he jumps down the tree and he's full of joy and then we see of course that he changes in other ways as well but there's joyful spontaneity now I talked last week about the chapter before having a lot of smiling in it and I believe that and I believe the smiling keeps going in this chapter this is a smiling chapter there's a lot of really good things that this is a happy story and we should be happy when we read it because this life of this lonely poor guy not poor and spirit was radically reformed by Jesus Christ there was immediate change and you know there's nothing like conversions to Jesus Christ to stimulate change in our lives when people come from darkness to light when people say yes okay I know that I need to meet Jesus and when we do meet with Jesus and they confess him as

Savior and Lord and their lives change that stimulates praise and maybe that's what we need to stimulate the praise of it don't need me nagging you from the front we need a spirit to really be working more and more and more to stimulate our praise and you know there's a spectrum in this chapter isn't there there's praise there's smiling you know to case my life you Jesus is smiling as he tells him about salvation but there's also sneering at the other end of the scale there's two things isn't there there's two extremes in this scale because there's the people who said oh look he's gonna be the house of the case and that man's a sinner so there's smiling and he goes did it all the way down to sneering and you need to ask the question where where are you in the scale where am I I read this point where we're nearer the sneering edge well I didn't know if I like this don't like this message don't have a like this thinking never like this kind of dull old-fashioned gospel are we rejoicing because Jesus actually has changed our lives dramatically and we recognize the change that he has made this immediate change he's under new management he says

[32:17] Lord he recognizes Jesus is Lord and he says Lord I'm gonna change and I'm gonna look Lord here now I give half of my possession to the poor Jesus becomes number one in his life Jesus is his Lord and then it's radical because this guy is known for being tight known for being rich known for being lonely known for being unsociable immediately becomes the complete opposite gives his money away cares for the poor is interested in those that he's cheated and there's this massive transformation and the core of it is spiritual because he's given a new heart first and foremost he's made right with God first that's what motivates his generosity that's what motivates his social conscience that's what motivates his desire for change so there's no point in making a division between the two as if there's things that are spiritual and then there's things that are our other motives for change because the core affects everything so that social change and environmental change and economic change and political change is all important but it all stems from this gospel that changes individuals from the inside out yeah the old quote that I say again and again here communism aim to put a new a new coat on every man the gospel aims to put a new man in every coat the difference is that it's from the inside out that Christ wants to change us and then we change the world as a result that's what gives us hope for the marginalized and for the lonely and for the poor and for the dispossessed that we must have a concern for in our lives and in our thinking comes from ourselves being changed from death to life from being separated from God to belonging to God so the message is all about change isn't it in our lives and

I have to challenge myself and challenge each of you as well about the change that making Christ Lord of our lives will make to our comfort to our self-possession and our self-reliance and to where we are being led to and who is leading us so may Christ by his spirit challenges through his word amen this power has briefly in prayer before singing together Lord God we ask that you would change our lives and that the spirit of God would breathe freshness into the cobwebs and into the spiritual poverty that very often we feel and we think leaves us far from you and maybe find that in you that we have life and that we have direction and truth and hope and forgiveness and belonging and that we know a transformed thinking not just in our own hearts but as we look at other people and as we think about the people next to us in the pew as we think about the people that are next to us in our workplace or in our school or in our university or in our street that we see them as those who also have been made by

God made in his image and the sin that separates them leaves them spiritually lost as Jesus is needing to be found so help us God and bless our time now together in baptism also for Jesus sake amen now witness is going to be taking some photographs don't be put off by that because they'll be heading home to Africa some of these photographs for the family at home and don't worry also can I say in case I start making some strange noises to David because I was visiting David this week and and his mom and dad as well of course and when I made a certain noise he was very happy about that so if I feel he's getting fractious or unhappy at any point I will be making that certain noise to just make him feel at home yeah that's good isn't it and I have to say you look absolutely stunning in your waistcoat and shirt you're definitely the most beautiful child I've ever seen but I'm not biased and all the other children are as well the most beautiful children I've ever seen so we are very privileged and very happy today to be baptising David and as I've said in the sheet that goes with the notes for the sermon that we rejoice that the gospel it's not just for individuals but it's also for households and that we believe as a covenant God that God chooses to work through families and gives baptism as a sign not just for believers but for their children too and we're all going to share today in the vows that Robert and Fiona will take that we've done that as a congregation that I will ask you to say we do for those of the congregation who belong to the congregation when I ask a question of you and we have a great spiritual responsibility not just to

David but to all our children that we have witnessed in baptism and even those that we haven't witnessed in baptism we have a responsibility for them to teach them to lead them to guide them to befriend them to accept them and remember very often children are marginalized in our society they're to be what is it the old adage seen but not heard but we don't believe that and we love the noise of the children in the church because it's a noise of children and it's the noise of life and it's the noise of our heritage and so we delight in this baptism today so I'm going to ask if the congregation will stand together along with our baptismal party at the front as I ask them the vows in baptism then if David will allow me I'm going to take him in baptism and baptize him I will then pray and then together after the prayer we will sing the erotic blessing over David now Robert and Fiona you're both followers of Jesus

Christ as your Lord and your Savior and you've embraced God in this covenant of grace and you live your lives independence upon the Holy Spirit the triune God by grace is your God and do you promise to bring up David within the covenant of grace in the training and instruction of the Lord teaching him to abate everything God has commanded us good do you promise to love him pray for him guide him by preset an example in the ways of truth do you promise to worship and serve with him as he grows in the covenant family that is the church and recognize their part in his spiritual development and now I'm going to ask the congregation do you promise to pray for David as you have promised to pray for all our children and love him as part of this covenant community of God's people be a guide to him by preset an example good in the vows of the Lord are upon us all now young David yes I know you're gonna come with me aren't you now your parents will still be here so you can look them okay it's okay and

[40 : 06] I'm just gonna baptize you okay I'm not sure how easy this is gonna be David I baptize you David William Coloba in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit may God bless you and keep you and may God make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you may God turn his face towards you and give you peace let's pray Lord God we ask and pray for your blessing on our darling David we pray for him today we pray for him in the days that lie ahead we pray for Robert and Fiona his loving parents we thank you for the providence that has brought them to the congregation for the bonds of love that have grown up between us all and for all that he means to us we thank you for the family brotherhood and sisterhood we share with Christians all over the world from whatever culture and from whatever part of that world we thank you that we are one in him and for the love that we share we pray for the time that they're in Scotland that they will know blessing and fruitfulness and happiness even though they're so far away from their families and we remember their families today because we know that their community is so close and there's aunties and uncles and cousins all living close to one another and that they've been taken from that and it's difficult to cope with how different

Scotland is but we do pray for them and we thank you for David and for his health and for his strength and for his loveliness and for all that he means to us and we pray for your blessing on him and on all our children today for Jesus sake Amen now together we're going to sing the blessing