

Sermon Series: “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”
“# 4 Repentance: A Great Example”
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Who was your example you wanted to follow when you were growing up? It seems whenever we want to do something well, we need an example to follow, don't we? E.g., last month we lost one of the great rock'n roll drummers out there, Charlie Watts of the Rolling Stones. He influenced a lot of drummers, and one of them was a guy named Max Weinberg, the drummer for Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. He first saw Watts play at a Rolling Stones concert in 1965, and he was very impressed with Watts. I read Weinberg once said about him that when he was trying to play a song he started thinking, “How would Charlie Watts play this?” Weinberg also said when he was growing up in New York City, he recalls reading in the “Want” ads something like, “Looking for a Charlie Watts-type drummer”. We have all had examples, or role models, growing up— parents, athletes, relatives. Today we have a roll model for people who want to follow Jesus well, and this person helps us in a crucial area of the faith.

READ Luke 19:1-10 (p. 82)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just encountered the rich ruler, predicted His own rejection by the religious leaders and death, and healed a blind man as He entered Jericho. Now Jesus has entered Jericho and is about to pass through it when he encounters another person of interest.

READ vv 1-2. “Zacchaeus was a troubling combination of being loaded, unscrupulous, and lost. Cf. 3:12-13.” That is a pretty difficult combination. Have you ever seen someone very wealthy, not have any hesitation about the ethics of doing something, and lost to the Lord? E.g., I recall reading about a famous football player from the 1960s who would get up at 8:45 AM, go to 9:00 AM practice until noon, eat lunch and watch film until 3:00 PM. He would come home, make a pitcher of martinis, go out to eat with his friends, and bring a different woman home each night. This later caught up with him in his life. Tax collectors had a reputation in Jesus’ day for being unethical in their collection of taxes, where they would keep some of what they charged and make a very nice living off of it. READ 3:12-13 on what John the Baptist told tax collectors who came to him to be baptized. Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector—he was a chief tax collector! People today are wary of others who are unethical with the money they receive, whether it be a politician or religious leader or a businessman. E.g., I recall when Katrina hit there was a gas station that had a reputation for charging too much for gas and making a huge profit at the expense of others’ desperation after the storm; this went on the news and there was some outrage about it, and the business owner explained that he was charging a fair price, and that the charges from his gas supplier were higher than normal. E.g, we also see this in the religious realm; I recall once we sent out a letter from the church asking people to pray about our financial situation at that time, and one of the people who received the letter was so offended she decided never to return to the church; I

spoke with her husband about it, and he said, in an apologetic way, that his wife was very sensitive to anyone in the religious realm taking advantage of others in asking for money. While we need to acknowledge that we live in a world where money is needed to make things happen— paying electric bills, insurance bills, staff salaries, etc., we must always be good stewards and fair in our dealing with money. People in Jesus' day were very sensitive about this as well.

READ vv 3-7. “But Zacchaeus was also curious, and Jesus responded to that, to the dismay of those present! Cf. 5:27-32; 15:1-2.” Zacchaeus saw Jesus coming into Jericho and he wanted to know who Jesus was. Unfortunately, he was short, so he could not see Jesus because of the crowd, so he climbed a sycamore tree to get a better view. So Jesus obliged him, and came up to him in the tree and told him to come down— today He was going to reside with Zacchaeus— literally, “for today in your house, it is necessary for me to remain”. Have you ever seen someone so curious about something that that person was willing to go to great lengths to see it— like climb something? E.g., I recall seeing at Mardi Gras parades parents often have their special ladders for their children to get in so they can be at adult height level and they could then see the parade and get more of the throws. E.g., I recall when Norwood was a toddler when we lived in Monroe, he was fascinated with basketball goals; so after church each Sunday we would have to walk with him to the basketball goals in the parking lot and look at them, and pick him up so he could examine every angle of the basketball goal. I am not quite sure what was going on there in his head! But he was clearly curious, and had a need to know. Now today he loves to play basketball! Zacchaeus was curious about Jesus, and people today are still that way. E.g., I recall when I lived in Monroe, there was a Jewish synagogue a couple of blocks away, and our congregation had somewhat of a relationship with the Jewish people there. One day a group of them asked me to teach them about

Jesus, and we met for about six sessions where I prepared Bible texts for us to study together, and it amazed me that they were so curious and asked really good questions. No one to my knowledge came to know Jesus through that study, but I know the seeds of the gospel was planted in their hearts. The fact that Jesus was criticized for going to stay with Zacchaeus shows that the crowd did not really get the message Jesus was bringing. Sometimes churches today can be like that. E.g, I recall a church that had a different ethnic group that wanted to rent out the church for their Christian services, but someone in the church worried because one of the leaders of the church did not like that particular ethnic group and he would voice his displeasure when he found out about their possible use of the church. Again, these church people did not get the message of Jesus— it is open to everyone curious about knowing Him, whether rich or poor, no matter skin color. We see this clearly in Jesus’ ministry where He called the unpopular and received criticism for it— as when Levi the tax collector to follow Him in 5:27-32; READ.

READ vv 8-10. “In response to Jesus’ kindness, Zacchaeus lived out repentance in an appropriately extravagant way! Cf. 15:21-24; 17:14-17.” Today we rarely hear, even in conservative churches, the need for clear repentance upon accepting Christ. E.g, I recall attending a worship service in a conservative church and the pastor gave an altar call and asked those desiring to follow Jesus to pray a prayer with him, and in the prayer I did not recall the word “repent” or even the idea of repentance— it was more about accepting God’s forgiveness and love in their lives. I am convinced that, biblically speaking, this is a serious misrepresentation of the gospel. Zacchaeus gives us a great example of what repentance looks like— giving half of his ill-gotten wealth to the poor and paying back generously those whom he defrauded. We are reminded of the prodigal son parable where the son comes home to the father after spending all his inheritance in wasteful living and he tells his father upon his return, “Father, I have sinned

against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (15:21). That is what repentance looks like— a conscious break with a life centered on oneself and now centered on Jesus. And what does God do? He embraces us, like the father in the prodigal son parable, he puts a fine robe on us, shoes for our feet, rings on our hands, and throws a celebration for us! E.g., I recall a man who came to Christ and realized he had a lot of things for which he needed to repent; his language needed to be cleaned up, and he took that seriously; he had been unfaithful to his wife and gone to prostitutes, and he confessed that to his wife; all these areas, and other areas, he attacked with the Lord’s help, turning to the Lord and running away from his rebellion against God. And God blessed him personally and in his marriage.

“Do we resemble Zacchaeus or his detractors?” That is the question I want us to explore this week before the Lord. Are we like those who sit on the sidelines and criticize others in their lifestyles and weaknesses, putting ourselves above them because we are not like their problems, and thus doing nothing to spread the gospel and be a blessing to others. Or are we like Zacchaeus, who is our example of someone who cared nothing about saving face because he knew he was a sinner, and cared everything about what the Lord Jesus thought of him. Perhaps we need to apologize to someone and make things right in a relationship where we said something we should not have or did something for which we need to apologize. If we need to change to be more like Zacchaeus in our understanding of repentance, beloved, please know that Jesus’ response to you and me is, “Behold, a child of Abraham— for I came to seek and save the lost!” And it is this kind of repentance we are to share with others who don’t know Jesus.