

## **What Would You Give to Have This?**

### ***Have You Ever Made a Sacrifice You Regretted?***

When I went to a Christian college in Missouri, I needed Bible classes to get my degree. I remember taking New Testament at seminary and believing I would ace the class because I had already read through the Bible several times and I paid careful attention in my Sunday School classes. I received a rude awakening though on the first quiz I took in New Testament. I missed this question, the simplest on the test. "How many wise men came to Jesus?" The answer is easy right? I got it wrong. It is not three which I thought. The correct response was, "we don't know". I discovered that even then I had much to learn about the Bible. I had always appreciated the Bible and respected it as God's word, but it was my eschatology professor in college who made it come alive for me. His in-depth analysis and love of the scriptures himself inspired me to be a serious student of the Bible. Have you had someone inspire you to reach greater heights in your life with God? Today we will look at one such person who few would have guessed would make a dramatic impact on the nature of church life.

Probably the most famous tax collector in history was well-known in his community for his business acumen. Zacchaeus was wildly successful but universally despised. Roman tax collectors were given complete autonomy. They had to collect a specific amount of money from the citizens of their region, but they were free to set how much each person had to pay. The offshoot of this was that they could make a boat load of money if they were dishonest, and Zacchaeus apparently was. Jesus was passing through Jericho and a great crowd gathered to see Him. Because Zacchaeus was famously too short to see above the crowd and most likely no one there was all too eager to let him push through to the front, the tax collector climbed a tree to watch the spectacle. Shockingly, Jesus and His entourage stopped right at the tree where Zacchaeus was perched like a sparrow, and He called up to the despised fellow. **When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."** (Luke 19: 5 NIV) Christ told him to "hurry" and he hurried. Zacchaeus quickly came down and welcomed Jesus joyfully.

Most people, in fact a large percent, rather than hurry to Jesus when He calls them, piddle around and make excuses for waiting, waste time thinking about it or being busy with other things. There is a cost to waiting. I think of someone who knows he should stop drinking but puts it off. Meanwhile, the damage done to him and those he loves is exacerbated. Or someone who is given a job opportunity and ponders and thinks and asks for time to decide and loses not only the income she could have had if she had accepted the job offer right away but also there is the strong possibility the employer will decide to give the job to someone else. Imagine holding off on cancer treatment that could have saved you or choosing to wait on the advice of a marriage therapist that could end the pain in your relationship. Zacchaeus was no fool. He quickly came down from the tree and welcomed Jesus joyfully. He wanted what Jesus had right then and came for it. If you know something can turn your life around, why hold off on it?

What is unique about this snapshot encounter is the extravagant response of Zacchaeus to connecting with Jesus. It is in fact the reason this story is so memorable and shared so many times. A jingle after all was composed to tell it. When the people all around started muttering among themselves about Jesus going to hang out with such a rotten person, Zacchaeus reacted quickly. **But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "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) This is of course over the top repentance. It shows just how wealthy Zacchaeus had become. How can you give half your possessions to the poor and then have enough left to pay back anyone you cheated four times the amount? His greed must have been insatiable, lacking a moral compass. Yet the past was the past and now an unfathomable transformation was in place. Zacchaeus was making a ridiculously bold right turn in his life. Do you think Jesus just "happened" to show up in Jericho?

As soon as Zacchaeus signaled the new life he had, Jesus made an astonishing statement, one that had to have sent shock waves through the crowd. **Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.** (Luke 19: 9 NIV) Let's pass on giving time to the revelation this was to the haters who despised Zacchaeus and never would have dreamed God would ever accept him. Turn instead to the immensity of this declaration. As I began to prepare for what I would share in this message, I made an assumption that turned out to be very wrong. I know that eternal life is just that, eternal. It continues forever from the moment you receive it. That is the gist of Jesus' commitment to you. **I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of**

**my Father's hand.** (John 10: 28-29 NIV) Faith in Christ brings you eternal life that is not taken away from you and lasts forever.

I did a careful study of this passage because I was certain the tenses used in the original Greek would reiterate the permanency of eternal life or as Jesus puts it, "salvation". Either the present tense or the perfect tense would have done the trick. Both tenses in the Greek describe something that goes on forever. Present tense means an action has no beginning point or ending point. Perfect tense describes something that takes place in a moment in time and the effect of the action continues on forever. In other words, one of those tenses should have been used when Jesus said, "**Today salvation has come to this house...**" Jesus should have, in my mind made it clear that when salvation came to Zacchaeus's house, it came and stayed. Like eternal life, it lasts forever. I was wrong. Jesus did not make that sort of declaration. Instead the aorist tense is used when He said salvation had come, a tense that describes something that happens in a moment in time, but no lasting effect is implied. It just happened that day, that salvation arrived in Zacchaeus's house. My question was, "Why?".

The mistake I made was simple. I forgot that salvation is not an experience or a concept of something. It is not a change in circumstances although that may take place. Salvation is a person, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came that day to Zacchaeus's house. Salvation is not something you get when you become Christian, it is a person who becomes a part, the biggest part of your life, Jesus. You see, Zacchaeus was not responding in his profuse manner to some change in circumstances he gained or a gift of some material substance like a future inheritance, he was reacting to Jesus becoming a part of his life. It was Jesus Himself who made Zacchaeus a new man. The Greek word translated salvation is "soteria" and it means a deliverance, a rescue or a healing, a setting free. All of that came to Zacchaeus when Jesus entered his life. Jesus is salvation. He said of Himself, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" (John 14: 6 NIV) Salvation is so misunderstood. Many see it as heaven, or the end of suffering or a good life or the removal of sin or some sort of super blessing. Those things will come through salvation, but salvation is none of that. It is Jesus Christ Himself. It is you having Him!

Salvation is a person and therefore it is relational. It is not an AI generated set of expectations and experiences. You have actual Jesus taking you into His life and as such you cannot program salvation with what should or should not happen in it. Let me give an example to make the point. Marriage is not a concept or a view of things. It is not a certain set of guidelines and expectations. It is a relationship between two real and unique individuals and it cannot be programmed by how it should be. Anyone who has been married knows this is a fact. Whatever you expected your marriage would be before it started got thrown out the window because it became something you could not plan or anticipate any more than you can be certain of how anyone will be at any moment. A marriage is wild and unpredictable and dynamic...it is not a formula or mechanical with buttons to push to work everything. That is why marital advice based on your own experience is so flawed. What you have in a marriage is not what someone else has and never will be.

Turn now to salvation. Salvation is your life with Jesus Christ and how that goes with you is not how it will go with anyone else who has ever lived or will live. The transformation of salvation is just this. You now have Jesus Christ, a person joined with you and what He does with you and through you is unpredictable and unique to you. You don't have Job's experience in salvation any more than you have Solomon's. Don't look for something to get out of Jesus. Be with Him. Love Him. Be led by Him in adventures you cannot plan or create. It may not be easy having Jesus as your Savior and you may be dumbfounded by what He does with you. He is though, the One who makes your life good and in the end perfect in every way.