

If I Could Live My Life Over Again

Luke 19:1-10

By [Tom Cheely](#)

August 22, 2010 – Morning Sermon

Prayer: God our Father, how thankful we are that we gather this day as a part of the body of Christ. We have come together that we might bear one another's burdens. We have come together that we might be fed by Your Spirit through Your Word. We have come to join the nations as they worship the holy living God. Lord, You know each one of us and the things we have need of today. We ask that You come in the power of Your Spirit to minister to us, to teach us as we seek to bless Your holy Name and its in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray in praise and thanksgiving, Amen.

Our text for this study is in Luke 19 and we are using the English Standard Version translation. I want to read this passage to you and I do not apologize for reading from the Bible because it is the Word of God. The Bible does not contain the Word of God and it does not become the Word of God. It is the Word of God and when we read it and hear it we have the opportunity to understand the heart and mind of God. When God speaks you should listen very carefully. Don't miss what God would say to you. Luke 19:1-10 says

1 He (Jesus) entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

May God who authored these words and have now spoken them in our presence, help us to understand how they impact and affect our lives as we seek to live for Him.

Not many people living today have the opportunity of hearing Methuselah. I hope my voice remains strong enough so that this comes through for you. I have decided to help us think along the lines, with this being our 50th anniversary year at Briarwood and this being our day of celebration, of if I could live my life over again. Suppose you could go back to the beginning and you could start your life with everything you know now and with the understanding of what's coming next. How differently would your life be?

I don't do a lot of movies and it's not that it's not a spiritual religious thing, I just don't have the time to do that but the movies I do I do mostly on airplanes and I don't listen to them. The thing across my head gives me a headache. I just watch them or sleep through them but I don't listen. Most of my life centers around observation and so I've learned to get the gist of most every movie just by watching. Several years ago there was a Bill Murray movie titled Groundhog Day and Mr. Murray played the part of a weather man that had to go to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania for Groundhog Day and it was the third or fourth year consecutively he had to do that. He wasn't overly excited about it but that was his assignment so he was there. His attitude was "let's get it done and get out." The day proceeded along with all of the ceremonial things of the city happening. The groundhog appeared and they were trying to get out of town and interestingly enough with Mr. Murray being a weatherman, the weather went bad and they couldn't get out of town and had to spend the night. So when he awoke the next day, thinking he was going to leave town, Phil Connor discovered it was Groundhog Day all over again and he had to live through the same events another day. The weather went bad and he had to spend the night. He woke up the next morning and it was Groundhog Day all over again. It didn't seem to matter what he did during the course of the day, whether it was the same or differently than what he had done the previous days. For three or four days he had to relive Groundhog Day.

As I have thought back over my life in planning and thinking through this morning. I have come across the fact that there are several things about my life that I would just as soon not relive. Let me quickly say because my wife is listening to this on the radio. If I had the opportunity I would go to Wheaton College again. I would once again marry Cathy Perez and make her a Cheely. I would have three children again if I could have the same ones but there are some things which I'm not even going to tell you that I just soon not go through again but we don't live it over again. We have lived and now we are at this point in our life and it's forward that we must think and go. I want us to look at this passage of Scripture in that light.

The passage begins by saying that Jesus is entering the city of Jericho and He's planning to pass through. If you were to read back a little bit in the Gospel of Luke you would find that He has begun moving toward the city of Jerusalem. The previous paragraph indicates that He's just outside the city of Jericho and there He meets a blind man and restores his sight. This passage says He has entered the city and moving through it. A couple of paragraphs later it indicates He has left Jericho and is just about to arrive in Jerusalem. So you see that Jesus is on the move. There is a purpose and direction of His life and here at this stage He is entering the city of Jericho in an attempt to move on in His journey.

In this particular city the passage tells us there is a man named Zacchaeus and he is a tax collector. When the Romans conquered lands they exacted taxes from the people and it was the Roman practice to appoint one of the local people to be the tax gatherer. This person would be regarded by us if we were to project ourselves into this, as a traitor. One of the local Jewish people in this situation had sided with the foreign government and had taken a government position to gather the taxes and forward them on to the city of Rome. He had the opportunity of making his own living by increasing the tax rate. He was also conscience of the fact that when he passed on the revenue he collected that his officials leaders were going to skim off some of it and the rest would be sent on to Rome so that what he exacted had to cover what he wanted, what would be skimmed and then what Rome wanted as well. So you can understand why he was not a very popular person. He lived a lonely life. He had very few if any friends at all.

A number of years ago I met a man who has become my friend. He lives in a part of the world where he is not accepted. When I first met him his eldest son was 12 years of age. Every year for 12 years his family had a birthday party for their son. That's not uncommon. We are familiar with that kind of activity but every year for 12 years as they would have this party for their son, no one had ever come any year to the party. They were unacceptable in the community in which they lived. They were not looked on with great favor. Even the child who had gone to school on a regular basis, had played in the neighborhood in his yard seeking his best to meet and make friends, could make friend because no one would have anything to do with him.

Like, Zacchaeus, I'm sure because he was a wealthy man so the Scripture says, had thrown parties on many occasion but you would get the understanding and the impression that few people had ever responded. Obviously those who came were those who were looking for something from Zacchaeus, no because of any kind of friendship. Zacchaeus has heard about Jesus and that He was passing through Jericho and he wanted to see this man, Jesus. He wanted to know more about why every one is so infatuated with Him. Why had there been such a crowd to turn out and follow Him as He moves through their city? The Bible tell us that Zacchaeus is short and is not able to see over the crowd but understanding the flow of what is taking place he is able to climb up into a tree.

Now the translation I read said that Zacchaeus climbed up into a sycamore tree. There are some aspects of the study of the Word related to the kind of tree that this is that you could get the impression that this was a fig tree. In my mind that doesn't help a whole lot from what I know of figs. The fig trees of my life would be difficult supporting someone climbing up into the tree. Other places reference the tree as mulberry and that didn't do a whole lot for me either because when I hear that I think of the song "here we go round the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush..." so that didn't help me a lot in trying to get the sense of urgency from Zacchaeus. I do have several sycamore trees in my backyard which look a little sturdier to hold someone but I don't really think you need to be too exercised over the kind of tree. What you need to understand here is that Zacchaeus' curiosity was so strong that he went to considerable length to find out what was going on. He had climbed up into the tree and made himself a perch where he could observe the things that were taking place.

Zacchaeus thought no one knew where he was. He was not interested in joining the crowd. He was just curious about what was happening. As the group made their way toward him in his direction the Scripture tells us that Jesus stopped and Jesus called him by name and told him to hurry down because He was going to his house. The Lord Jesus knew him. The Lord Jesus knew where he was and He took the time to seek him out.

Now notice Zacchaeus' reaction. The Scripture says he hurried down. If I had been there I would have said "Now wait a minute, I don't want to be a part of what's going on I just wanted to see. I'm so short I couldn't get over the crowd and this was just my place so go on and leave me alone." I could sense myself saying that if that were me.

Do you know how hard it is for a little guy like me to climb up in a tree? I just got up here and now you want me to come down? Just go on, I'm not interested. Keep on going. But Zacchaeus, the Scripture says, hurried down to Jesus to take him to his house but notice the reaction of the crowd. They were exasperated and put out. They had wanted Jesus to themselves. They didn't want to include someone else and especially not Zacchaeus. This was a disruption of the plan of moving through the city. Now they are having to take the time to go over to the house of this sinner. What's wrong with Jesus? Why would He go with this guy? He even had to call him out of a tree to go with Him. This is not the kind of person we want. They were frustrated about what was happening.

Then there is the testimony of Zacchaeus but before we look at what Zacchaeus stood and said, think a minute about what happened between Luke 19:7 and Luke 19:8. Don't look because it's not there but something happened between those two verses. God hasn't seen fit to record everything of history in detail. He gives us what we need to know and understand but if you will allow me and I don't think I'm doing anything dangerous here, you'll have to understand that was

conversation that took place between going to the house and the testimony of Zacchaeus. They ate together and conversed together over the meal.

We have been studying the Sermon on the Mount together and how Jesus has taken the commandments that God gave through Moses and has expanded them to our understanding the heart and mind of God. Surely the Lord has made reference in this time over the meal with Zacchaeus to talk about the commandments, the instructions, the way God has wanted people to live. Surely in the course of that conversation Jesus said, "You have heard it said 'thou shall not covet' but I say unto you it's not just wanting something to accumulate for yourself, you need to be careful that you don't let those things distract you from God. You need not to allow the things of life to become the idols of your life and that your whole life is focused on getting more and wanting more." Or maybe in the conversation the Lord Jesus reminded him, "You have heard it said 'thou shall not steal', you understand taking that which is not rightfully yours especially when someone else may need it even more than you, it is wrong to desire and gather for yourself." But obviously as the Lord Jesus discussed with Zacchaeus over this meal the Giver of the Gospel and revealed Himself to this man for he stands and makes testimony.

In Zacchaeus' testimony he says "Half of what I have accumulated I will give to the poor. Those whom I have defrauded I will not only give back what I have taken wrongfully plus what the Law requires of me to give but I will increase what I give back fourfold as well." He gives testimony to the work of God's grace in his heart. He explains and expresses the new heart and the new life he has been given. Jesus affirms what Zacchaeus testifies because Jesus says "Today salvation has come to this house not because of what you're doing but what you have testified you will do is evidence of the salvation you have received."

Here are a couple of lessons from the passage. I think it is important that we hear and understand that through this Word that we as believers apart of the family of God, need to consider and understand the matter of restoration and restitution. Zacchaeus says that half of what he has and owns he will give to the poor. Now there would be two ways in which he could do that. He could take what he owned, his possessions, and take it to the temple and give it to the priest who are responsible for doing the mercy ministry among the people but I don't think that's the indication that you get here from studying and reading this passage. I think he went about it the other way, or other approach, in that Zacchaeus was indicating that he personally was going to be involved in the distribution. I think he would take half of what he had and he would distribute it to the poor, meaning that he would focus on the relationships that had been damaged by his life and he would seek to restore those relationships.

We as believers today need to be very conscience of and very aware of the relationships in our lives and how we have broken and how we live in such distorted ways with people who live around us. We have left many to the side as

we have plowed our way along. It is important that we restore relationships with one another and with those outside the church. We need to be conscience of how we have lived and how we are living and the hurt and pain that so often is caused, sometimes deliberately and intentionally, sometimes without knowing maybe too often without caring. We need to purpose in our hearts that as God has sought us out, restore the relationship between ourselves and Him. So we should seek to restore relationships with one another.

There is also the matter of restitution. Zacchaeus is saying that he has defrauded people. He has so deliberately and intentionally so worked events to be such that he would get and accumulate and he saw and understood the wrongness of that, that he was going to make it right. The Law required that if you defrauded someone and that came to the surface and you were going to make restitution you would provide what you had taken and half again as much for Zacchaeus has been so changed and touched by the Spirit of God that it's not just what plus half again, but he says "four times I will return where I have defrauded." Jesus says "That's evidence of a new heart. That's evidence of a new life and a new purpose in the way we live." There may be those of us who should and need to think through the matter of restitution in the way we have lived and how we have harmed and damaged others.

Here are a couple of principles to take with you to think through today and the rest of this week. We began by talking about living your life over again and that's not possible. Groundhog Day, notwithstanding, that's not possible but I want to encourage you. If you are living with the heart attitude of "if only I had..." or if your life seems to be centered around the process of your struggling with "if only I hadn't..." then I want to encourage you not to live that way anymore. You can't back up and redo it and you can't back up and undo it but you are here and in the now the Lord Jesus Christ is here to lead and guide you forward.

A couple of weeks ago in our challenge Sunday school class Larry Childs reminded us of something from one of the great philosophers of my day whose name was Yogi Bera. The great philosophical statement was "When you come to a fork in the road of life, take it" and you have. You can't go back and redo it. We say "If only I had gone the other way" or "I wish I hadn't ...". Don't live with that kind of tied up knot in your system. Come to Jesus and say "Lead me forward from here." Don't get messed up in what might have been.

Secondly, he who has been forgiven much should forgive much. I was born into a Christian home. My mom and dad were believers. We lived about five blocks from the church. My dad operated under the principle that every time they turned the lights on we were supposed to go and I have just been a part of the people of God all my life. My mother carried me to church when she was carrying me and so there's a sense in which as I look at my life and as I look in the lives of other people that I know, I have been saved by God's grace from a lot. I just never got there. I just never got into it. I was saved from all of that. How can I then harbor

such tiny things against someone else when God has saved me and forgiven me from so much? Zacchaeus had understood how badly his life had been and how great God's grace was to him. Having been forgiven much Zacchaeus wanted to reach out to those around him that he had wronged. He was so overwhelmed by God's love for him that he could not help but love the people he had wronged.

Thirdly, don't get caught in the trap of thinking that you can do enough that God will just overlook your life. This passage teaches us very clearly that good works demonstrate our position in Christ, our good works don't put us in Christ. It is because of what Christ has done for us that we are accepted in His presence and our sins can be forgiven. It is not that I could ever earn and do enough to persuade Him to just let it by.

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

Whatever your name may be Jesus Christ knows you and loves you anyway. He has called you and said "I would come to you and live with you," will you hurry down and receive Him or will you take the road Zacchaeus could have taken – 'I just got up here and I'm not interested so just go on your way'? Life is lived to its fullest when it is Christ who lives in you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Great God our Father, how thankful we are for Your love for us and it really doesn't matter whether we are tall or short, small or big, male or female, rich or poor, red, brown, yellow, black or white. You love us because You are a God of love. You forgive us by grace when we come to You in faith. Lord Jesus there are some reading this today who have said "yes" and have received the free gift of life that You offer. Help each one of us in the search light of Your Word to examine where we are at the present, how we live by the power of Your Spirit whether it is unto ourselves in our own power or whether it is by the Spirit for Your glory. Father if You help us to see and understand restoration or restitution that should be made then walk with us that we might do so. Then there are some reading this who have not yet opened their life to You, would You be pleased to minister to them in that special way of Your grace today? Open their life and enable them to say "yes" to Jesus. Give them the confidence of knowing that You walk with them every day and You will guide, strengthen and encourage them to live in a way that is pleasing and honoring to You. In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord, we pray, Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our Theological Editor.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, [subscriptions are free](#). To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).