**Gospel Transformation – Luke 19:1-10**

WCP

**Intro**

We began a series last Sunday entitled **Purpose: Why are we here?** And one of the key things I wanted us to get from last Sunday’s message called “Purpose” was this: that we all have one! That God has created all of us with a purpose; and that, although we lost our ability to live out that purpose b/c of sin – in Jesus – we have gained it back again. The other key piece from last Sunday was seeing that, although God’s purpose for us certainly included benefit for us, it was not *primarily* about us at all, but about knowing God more, and making Him known to the world around us.

Today, I want us to look at what really is the core of our purpose statement, as well as our whole existence as Christians, which is – unsurprisingly – the gospel. Our purpose statement/”why” as a church says this: **We exist to renew our city and world by demonstrating and declaring the transforming power of the gospel.** So what we’re saying there is that the gospel is the thing that has transformed us, as well as the only source of power we have to see our city and world renewed.

And if no one has ever explained to you before what the gospel is, I can tell you in a single word: the gospel is news. News about what God has done for us in Jesus to rescue us from God’s just judgment against sin and to restore us back into a relationship with Himself as our Father.

Now, I trust you can appreciate that for me as a pastor, talking about a subject as vast/epic/beautiful as the gospel tends to create a bit of a “log jam” when it comes to expressing myself; not *at all* b/c I’m not sure what to say, but b/c there is simply *so much* that wants to come out at once, that it’s a bit like asking me to pour a bowl of Rice Krispies through a McDonald’s sized drinking straw.

So, in order to try to simplify the task, I’ve narrowed that vast subject down to what our purpose statement narrows it down to, viz. **gospel transformation.**

Now, what does gospel transformation look like? Well, it can take innumerable different forms b/c – ultimately – the gospel transforms every part of our lives over time. But as I thought about trying to give you one simple picture of what gospel transformation could look like, I immediately thought of this YouTube video I saw a year or so ago. The purpose this video was made for has nothing to do with the gospel transformation; and yet, it still contains a beautiful picture of it. So let’s watch this and then let’s talk.

**(SHOW VIDEO)**

Someone hearing sound for the first time; or maybe seeing for the first time – as you can see from the reactions of these people – must be this overwhelming mix of fear and hope; joy as well as longing fulfilled, that I think just pictures so beautifully what happens in the human heart when we are awakened to the reality of the immense love of God for us demonstrated in Jesus. It’s a revelation of both the purpose of our existence, as well as of our value as persons created in the image of God.

But, I want you to imagine a scenario for a moment with me: imagine you’d had this cochlear implant surgery yourself; that you were hearing for the first time in your life and were just overwhelmed at the beauty and the gift of something that the majority of us simply take for granted. But then, as you looked around and saw all kinds of other men and women; friends and family members, etc. who’d *also* been deaf all their lives, you chose to never tell them about this surgery; you didn’t tell them that *you’d* had the surgery and that you could actually hear now, nor that they too could have this surgery and hear as well.

Now, why would you do something like that? Why would you keep something like this from those you love, particularly when you know their struggle firsthand? Well, you could have all kinds of reasons: from not wanting to crush a friend who’s already been deeply struggling with not being able to hear, with the disappointment of a failed surgery. Or, on the other hand, maybe you’d simply tell yourself that, ultimately, that person is doing really well; and that they may actually be offended or insulted at the suggestion that they should want to hear like you do. But -whatever the reason is – you keep the message about this transforming hope to yourself.

Well, the way this relates to us today is that we can often do this exact same thing when it comes to sharing the transforming message of the gospel with others.

And although we nod our heads and say ‘amen’ to an outward purpose that’s about seeing our city and world renewed/transformed, functionally, we actually restrain our efforts and even work against the transformation of others for many of those same reasons, viz. we worry that we may offend/damage relationships with friends and loved ones who seem to be managing just fine without God thank you very much. Or, God help us, we actually worry that although the gospel has transformed us, it might not “work” for them and we’ll look foolish for having brought it up. The problem with both of those scenarios is that – just like we said last week - thinking that way still makes our purpose in life all about us.

And so in order to help us correct that course, the bible gives us this snapshot story of a “wee little man” named Zaccheaus, to show us, both, the immense power of the gospel to transform people, as well as, to reveal to us the ways we can often unknowingly work against that power b/c of our own fear/pride/etc.

So as we look at this passage today I want to talk about just two things in particular with you: I want to talk about **The transforming power of the gospel,** and then **The restraining power of the transformed (x2).**

So, if you’ve closed your bibles, please open them again to Luke 19 and we’ll dig into this together.

Ok, so let’s look first at:

1. **The transforming power of the gospel –vss. 2-3,5, 9**

Now, if you grew up in church at all, the story of Zaccheaus is likely pretty familiar to a lot of us. If not, let’s quickly look at a few details so we’re all on the same page here.

Luke tells us in vs. 1 that Jesus is passing through this town called Jericho, and then in **vs. 2**, look with me there, Luke says this **(READ vs. 2).** Now, we’ve covered this before, but it’s worth repeating; tax collectors in Jesus’ day were not the same thing as a modern day accountant/CRA employee. And even though our blood pressure goes up a notch or two whenever we get one of those notorious brown envelopes in the mail, I’ve never met someone before who said they despised accountants or who saw CRA employees as despicable traitors. And yet that is exactly how tax collectors were seen in Jesus’s day: they were seen as extortionists who used the power of the occupying Roman military to rob their very own people; as I’ve said, they would be exactly on the level of Jews helping the Nazi regime kick their own countrymen out of their homes and move them into the ghettos. And vs. 2 just told us that this guy, Zaccheaus, wasn’t just any tax collector; he was the chief/boss of all the other tax collectors; and he was wealthy, which, for a Jew in this context, meant he watched the Olympics on the 60” flat screen TV that was “taxed” from his neighbour while living in the house that was “taxed” from his other neighbour. Which is just to say Zaccheaus didn't go out for a lot of evening strolls by himself!

And yet if look with me at **vs. 3** now, here we see this despicable man – a man who would have been see as one of the lowest of sinners in this culture – desperate to meet this Jesus that everyone’s been talking about. Now, why would someone like that want anything to do with Jesus? Now, you could chalk it up to celebrity I suppose; Jesus is going around healing people, casting out demons and winning all these epic debates with the religious leaders of the day. But, if you look closely again at vs. 3, we see that Zaccheaus wasn’t just wanting to *see* Jesus/get Him to sign an autograph and get a selfie with Him. No, Luke tells us Zaccheaus wanted to see “who Jesus *was.*” Lit. to know who Jesus is. And I believe that what was going on was that the call of God was on Zaccheaus’ heart to find Jesus and be transformed by Him, *even before* Zaccheaus even knew what that meant. All he knew was that he *had* to see who this Jesus was and he needed to do everything he could to make that happen. Maybe that describes where you’re at today?

Now, **vs. 3** also tells us Zaccheaus had another problem to overcome; he was a short man (we might have to say “height challenged” today) and – b/c Jesus was such a big deal and people were always crowded around Him - he knew there was no chance he would get to see Jesus as He passed through town. And so that’s why **vs. 4** tells us, classic to this story, that Zaccheaus climbed up in a tree beside the road where he saw Jesus was about to pass by so that he could see above the crowds.

But here’s where the story goes off the script for Zaccheaus. B/c – I don't know if you’ve ever been in a situation before where someone talks to you, but you weren’t

expecting them to; where you thought you were just trying to shop in the same aisle as some celebrity to see what kind of breakfast cereal they eat, only to have them start talking to you?! It’s not in the text here, but I’ll bet you Jesus actually had to call Zaccheaus a few times before it actually registered that Jesus was talking to him.

And what we see in **vss. 5-6** now is this amazing/beautiful moment of gospel transformation where – although Zaccheaus thought he was seeking out Jesus – he finds instead that Jesus was the One seeking out *him*! Look at **vs. 5** Luke writes **(READ vs. 5).** Two things to notice there in particular:

1. Did you notice that Jesus didn’t say, “I want to come to your house today” He says, “I must stay at your house”? That’s significant actually b/c there are only a few times in the gospels where people are trying to tell Jesus to do/not do something and Jesus says, “No, I *must* do this/*have* to do this.” One of them is at His baptism by John the Baptist; another is when Jesus is about to wash Peter’s feet. And in each case, Jesus is saying that there is a **divine necessity** to His actions.
2. Did you notice as well that Jesus does not ask to come and stay at Zaccheaus’ house? He just says, “Zaccheaus, get down from that tree, I’m coming over for supper.” And this, as I understand it from the bible, is the way it *always* works with our salvation: however it is that we see the chronology of events, rather than us seeking Jesus it is always He that is first seeking us; rather than inviting Jesus to come into our lives, He seeks out and saves us of His *own* divine will and authority!

And, Luke isn’t giving us minute details of the story here, but, for all accounts and purposes, the transformation of Zaccheaus is immediate. **Vs. 6** tells us he leaps down from the tree and receives Jesus gladly; I believe both into his home as well as into his heart.

And **vs. 8** then simply shows us the fruit of that transformation as now – a man who was once as miserly and wicked as they come - begins handing out his wealth and making restitution *way* beyond what the law required of him; seriously, think Ebenezer Scrooge Christmas morning after the three spirits have visited him. And I want to stress, this was the *fruit* of Zaccheaus’ transformation, not the cause of it. When Jesus says in **vs. 9** that, “today salvation has come to this house” He was not saying that b/c of Zaccheaus’ generosity, He was saying Zaccheaus’ generosity was simply an evidence of the fact that Zaccheaus had been transformed.

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And there is just way too much to say here about this story already. But two things I want to point out in particular as it relates to our purpose as a church:

1. What Luke is showing us here is a living parable; a living example from history of what gospel transformation looks like in the heart of an individual. And although gospel transformation absolutely does bring about renewal of systems and laws/governments and programs, I think

Luke is showing us that there’s still an order to things, and that that transformation always centers around the transformation of people first. *As* people are transformed, corrupt systems are transformed like Zaccheaus’ wicked tax collecting practices. So, although we might work to bring about change/renewal in our laws and corrupt systems, the focus of our efforts to bring renewal should always start with seeing people renewed, not laws and systems. B/c I think what Luke is showing us here is that when people change, then so do the systems.

1. To see that Jesus is the One who is sovereign in saving Zaccheaus. Sure, Zaccheaus *thought* it was him seeking Jesus, but what we see here is that it was just the exact opposite. And I point that out b/c I want us all to know the freedom that comes when we take the pressure of saving our loved ones/friends off of our shoulders and place that role back into the hands of the only One who can actually accomplish it. It is both humbling and amazing the way God uses us in the lives of others; the way He invites us to take a front row seat to the transformation He accomplishes by the power of His Spirit in the lives of men and women every day. But we must never mistake His invitation to join Him as He works, with the responsibility to accomplish that work. The first is a joyful act of obedience for us to be used in the lives of others, the second is a crushing burden that you were never intended to bear.

The gospel has the power to transform and renew. It always starts by transforming people; but once that transformation happens, so too do the systems and laws and governments that need renewal as well.

Ok, so that’s **the transforming power of the gospel.** The second thing I wanted us to look at is:

1. **The restraining power of the transformed – vss. 3, 7**

One of the really cool things that I encounter all the time; I’m sure you’ve found this as well, is the way you can read a story or a passage in the bible one day, and you read and apply it in one way; and then read the exact same story another time and have it hit you in a completely different way. This is one of the reasons that the bible is such a timeless book: b/c the Spirit is constantly speaking through the bible in different ways according to how He want to continue to grow us.

And, I’m sure I must have read/heard the story of Zaccheaus like 20-30 times over my lifetime, but *never* have I read this story before and noticed how God’s transformed people can actually try to restrain God’s work.

Where do I see that? Look first of all at **vs. 3** again. **(READ vs. 3)**

Now, I’m not a super tall guy, but if I’m at a parade somewhere, or watching super-dogs at the PNE or whatever, and someone who’s shorter than me – a kid or

whoever – is trying to see what I’m watching, what does it cost me to move and let them stand in front of me? Nothing! So, saying that Zaccheaus *wanted* to see Jesus, but that he couldn’t b/c he was short + crowd, is *really* implying an intentionality to the crowd, isn’t it? Like they’re purposely not letting this guy in, even though they could still easily see over him!

Now maybe we can overlook that, but when we get to **vs. 7** I think it becomes even more obvious what’s going on here. Jesus has just called Zaccheaus down from this tree and publicly invited Himself into Zaccheaus’ home – which might not mean as much to us today, but in this culture, going into someone’s home and eating with them was a sign of deep/close friendship and identification with that person. And, on top of that. Zaccheaus is transformed by Jesus in that moment and renewed to the level that he becomes radically generous and clearly a changed man … and then look at the response of Jesus’ crowd in vs. 7 **(READ vs. 7)**

Now, I don’t tell you this story to elicit sympathy or whatever but simply to make a point: in 1980 we moved from CR to Kamloops halfway through the school year. So I’m a new kid in a new kindergarten. And each day there was a random draw to see which centers we could play at for play time, but you could only have a certain # of kids at each center. And the center all the boys always wanted to get was the indoor sandbox. So one day, I get chosen first, and – of course – I choose the sandbox, only to hear 3 other boys call out “Nooooo!” And I was stubborn even then and held my ground. But, do you know what? Everyone chose their centers and not a single other kid chose sandbox that day.

Let me say plainly: when you can watch Jesus - the Son of God - in the flesh, standing there and saving someone; transforming this guy right in front of your eyes from Despicable Me to Daddy Warbucks … and your response is, “Noooo! Not that guy?” There’s something wrong. You have missed something pretty key, right?

And yet even as I’m just getting over that shock, I start looking around at the context of the story of Zaccheaus, and just having my mind blown up! If you look right above our passage in **Luke 18:35-43**, there’s a blind beggar on the road-side who hears Jesus is passing by, and calls out to Jesus to heal him, and look at the response of the event organizers here in **vs. 39 (READ 18:39).** Look a bit further back to **vs. 15.** People are bringing their little kids to Jesus to pray for them and heal them, and look what even the disciples are doing! **(READ 18:15).**

Now, what I love is that in every one of those instances, just like w/ Zaccheaus, Jesus just easily steps around the “traffic cones” His transformed people are setting up, and He heals, and blesses, and transforms every one of these people.

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But I think the prevalence of that attitude in the space of two chapters alone says that there’s something important that the bible is trying to point out to us; to show us that there’s something that can happen - even in the heart of the transformed child of God – where all of a sudden we start feeling like we’re the bouncers standing outside the Jesus-Club; deciding for God who should get in and who needs to stay out waiting in the line.

We love it when Bear Grils wants to do Alpha videos or Bono wants to meet with Eugene Peterson, but we’re not so sure how good for Jesus’ PR that recovering drug addict who just gave his life to Jesus at UGM last week is; or those youth who seem to know more about Super Smash Bros. than they do about their bibles, “just give ‘em a few years maybe and they’ll be good for the team.”; or maybe for some of us, we’ve been so hurt and are so done with someone, that we’d sooner send them to the very back of the line to rot, than see Jesus transform them.

And *every* time we do that, we forget the reality that we used to be standing in that same line too; and that when we had *no* hope of getting in, Jesus walked right past the people who thought *we* weren’t “fit”; weren’t “ready” to meet Jesus yet, and He found us, He called to us, and He changed us forever by His grace alone. And so we need to extend that very same grace now ourselves.

**Conclusion**

The apostle Paul said it like this in 1 Cor. **(READ 1:26-31)** The *only* boast we have is in Jesus ability to use weak, lowly jars of clay like you and like me; that’s it! We should never forget - as one of my favorite pastors out of Dallas likes to say - Jesus doesn't need us to be awesome to make Him look good to the world; He does that all on His own, He just needs us to be faithful to the purpose for which He created us. And that purpose is to know God more and making Him known to the world; so it’s not *ultimately* even about us.

But the question we need to answer for ourselves this: if God has chosen to invite us in to have a front row seat to the show as He accomplishes these amazing transformations in the lives of others, why would we *not* want to be a part of that? Why would we allow fear and pride to keep us from joining in with the King of the Universe as He transforms and renews people right in front of our eyes in the very same way that He transformed us?

So let’s get out of the way and get on with living out the purpose for which He made us; to know Him more and more ourselves and to make Him known to all those He is calling to Himself even today.

