



at the table

MEALS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

WHEN SALVATION COMES

Sunday 13 March 2022

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

The tag line for this series is 'Meals that Transform' because in each story that's what we see: Jesus said to the sinful woman in Luke chapter 7, "*your faith has saved you.*" And all the stories of lost sheep and coins and sons in Luke chapter 15 were about being found and saved: "*But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*" Today's story of transformation is again a story of being saved and it ends with this declaration of Jesus in Luke 19:9 - *Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

And today I would like us to think about being saved, which I suspect we might think on when we first say yes to Jesus but then move on to other things. I remember several years ago attending Andrei's citizenship ceremony. It was such a great day - a moment when he became an Aussie citizen. I felt his joy and pride. Perhaps you have had one yourself. One minute he was not an Aussie - then he was true blue, meat pie eating, cricket loving, stubby wearing bogan... Ok, that's really not a typical Aussie; but you know, you are now caught up in a new national identity. And salvation is like that. Salvation does have a beginning, a point of change in citizenship, a change of identity and allegiance - of surrender, humble repentance of will to Jesus. But really, that's a change that keeps on happening every day thereafter...

You were saved, you are being saved, and you will be saved.

And I want you to think about your salvation today, what it is to be saved and how it changes you. Let's do that through the lens of a person Jesus declared salvation over - and of all the people, Zacchaeus is perhaps the most unlikely of them all.

When the Roman Empire conquered your land, their goal was to conquer you enough that it was economically profitable. You don't kill the people you want to tax - that's just bad business. No, you just bleed them slowly enough to extract all the resources you need to keep extending the Empire - customs, levies, tributes, and stipends. And they did this through a largely unregulated system of local Tax Collectors or publicans contracted to collect money from landowners, families, and stall keepers any way they saw fit - and skim whatever profits above the agreed revenue contract. This was money people didn't want to give and it was extracted through fear and intimidation. In this 'occupation', opportunities for theft, fraud, and corruption abounded. The sinful woman was a person people ignored or avoided but Tax Collectors were people everyone loved to hate. They were rich criminals.

Just like the chapter before, Jesus tells a story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector going to the temple to pray, because this is the ultimate contrast. The Pharisees were zealous for God and nation. But the Tax Collector was seen as morally bankrupt and a traitor to the nation. They would be seen like someone fundraising in Kiev for the Russian war effort to finish the invasion of Ukraine. And then imagine that you must give these taxes, which subjugate your people, whether you like it or not.

Now Zacchaeus was next level because he was the Chief Tax Collector - the mafia boss, the kingpin, the Russian oligarch - running all the tax collectors in the region. So, if you hate the Tax Collector the Chief Tax Collector in your area is in a whole new category. Do you ever think someone is too far gone? I think the crowd saw a Chief Tax Collector as that person. Jesus was criticised for eating with sinners and Tax Collectors - they had their own category, the most despised. And yet, Jesus loves them, and one of Jesus' own Disciples Matthew was a Tax Collector.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. (Luke 19:1-4)

Now we read that Jesus was passing through and there was a buzz in the town. Jesus was a celebrity and people were crowding to see him wherever he went. Zac also wanted to see who Jesus was. He may have been stumpy but he was smart, so he ran ahead and scurries up a tree to get a good vantage point.

(Who is someone you would climb a tree for, to catch a glimpse of? I can't think of too many people - apart from a bear or a lion stalking me. I suspect my daughters may have a few celebrities they would happily risk it for.)

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. (Luke 19:5-6)

I picture Jesus with a huge grin on his face looking up at Zacchaeus and as he breaks into a deep laugh says, "Zac, I'm must stay at your house." You know, everyone wants a piece of Jesus, everyone is fascinated by His teachings, the miracles... But Jesus, passing through, sees Zacchaeus and changes His plans. I wonder if the guy almost fell out of the tree when Jesus publicly declares, "I must stay with you." As we have been saying: to be the guest of someone is a clear expression of friendship. And how does Zacchaeus respond? **He welcomed him gladly.**

Friends this is salvation: Jesus holds out the invitation to extend His life into ours with all the risk that comes with that - and we welcome Him gladly into our lives. Jesus doesn't say, "Look Zacchaeus, if you would just stop being a traitor to our nation and if you would clean up your business practices, then I'll come to your place." No: "I'll come in and then let's see about how being saved changes your life.:

Being 'saved' is a process of becoming more like Jesus in your whole-of-life - but it is an event that begins with welcoming Him gladly and freely, apart from your works. As Paul in Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.*" And that gift cost something for the giver. For Zacchaeus it cost Jesus the criticism from the crowd: *All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."* (Luke 19:7) For you and I, it cost Him far more - it cost His life.

Friends, are you saved today? Not "have you nailed discipleship," "have you attended church," "are you living a moral, upright life?" All those things are good, but secondary... Have you heard Jesus say, "I must come into your life," and did you gladly welcome Him? Revelation 3:20 says, "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*"

Now something happens to Zacchaeus, in this moment. He was saved. Salvation had come to the house and what did salvation do to the man? *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)

"Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus declared, but not because Zac had an outburst of generosity or restitution. We know it can't mean that. But that excited response of generosity and restitution did mean something and, perhaps, reveals something important about the nature of salvation. You know when salvation has truly come to a person when there is a heart change around who or what you serve. Not just a prayer, not

just mental agreement. You know you have been gripped by grace when you are changed... And in Zacchaeus' case, it reaches your finances.

The Old Testament requirement for Israel was giving 10% back in worship, but grace has so moved Zacchaeus that he gives 50%. The Old Testament requirement if you cheated was to give it all back plus 20% (120%), but mercy has so moved Zac he wants to give 400%. In the culture of the Middle East, this public declaration or promise was as binding as Herod's promise to deliver the head of John the Baptist on a plate. Once spoken aloud, it had to be done. Zacchaeus is serious about his commitments here.

Now I know that money is a powerful dimension in our lives, and many get uncomfortable when our faith and our finances intersect. I know there is a variety of circumstances in a room like this: from utter freedom to do anything you like - you earn a huge income or you've retired with a large nest egg - through to broke students and people going through property settlements after marriage breakdowns and everything is beyond a stretch. So please know I know that. Our capacity is all different, but the principle is all the same.

Giving God 10%: yes, it's the Old Testament and old covenant, but Jesus affirms the tithe several times. And the Sermon on the Mount takes it to a higher standard that flows from the deeper revelation of Grace, the gift of the Spirit, and you could say that 10% is the baseline of giving.

And Zacchaeus wants to give away 50% of his possessions to the poor!

It begs the question: why so much? An old sermon by Tim Keller on giving has always stuck with me. In it, he talks about the relationship between money and power. Money and power go together. Intact money is power and the more money you have, the more in control you are in life. You are less vulnerable and have more freedom to do what you like, buy what you like, live as you like.

And what Zacchaeus is doing here is not simply giving away some excess money to make him feel good - he is giving away his power. He is going to right any wrongs by giving four times the amount! So he has just rewritten his business plan: to become an ethical Tax Collector, no more corruption. And he is not going to simply give 10%. He is very wealthy and 10% would not make a dent in his lifestyle, in his power. So he gives 50% of his wealth away. The late Kerry Packer was known to be an extravagant tipper. He once tipped a waitress \$80,000 and his caddy \$75,000. It sounds like a fortune to us, but for Packer, I guess it was spare change. It was no different to \$100 bucks for us.

There is a radical and very counter-cultural principle here I want you to see flowing *from* salvation (not *towards*). There is a point at which you can give that doesn't change your power: it's spare change, it requires no faith, no sacrifice, and often I think it could be

more about self-gratification. And there is a point where when I give – perhaps its 10%, maybe for you it's 20% – then I am starting to give away power, choices, becoming more vulnerable, less in control, more dependent. I think Zacchaeus realises that for very wealthy people like himself, 10% is no sacrifice at all – it's spare change.

I think we all bristle a bit when churches talk about money and, frankly, a little part of me feels apologetic about raising it partly because I don't want to be THAT church that always talks about giving; but also because money is so often the functional-god of our lives because it is what gives us power, security, and status. It is what society worships, and so often we can look at it the same way. And yet salvation means we are citizens of a new world, not driven by the same affections.

To the woman who poured out the costly perfume, the father who throws an extravagant party, the Tax Collector that gives away half his wealth: you give to the degree that grace is affecting you. Maybe you are saved, maybe you aren't sure. You will know if you are by how you are learning to live in response to grace. If you want to skip talking about generosity and money, then perhaps you understand the gospel message but you are resisting its implications. Perhaps you believe Jesus but you are devoted to the power in life that money offers you.

When God meets us and stuns us with His grace, we embrace His grace in a way that transforms our lives. To be sure, we do this imperfectly. But a life of repentance means that we continue to turn to God, again and again, seeking Him and seeking to honour Him by how we live each day in the most basic areas of your life. Such as your work, Zacchaeus is not walking away from his business, but he is doing some major changes to its ethos – less graft and intimidation and, as a result, greater flourishing in his community. If you own or work in a business, have you thought about how your salvation changes the way you do business?

And other areas, like your finances. They are not ignored as though evil, nor obsessed over, but carefully stewarded. Your tithe – maybe it's 10%, maybe more – is not paying for church, it's not ticking a box, it's not so you will get a blessing, or more money... It's a life of giving back to God just a fraction of what He has given you. It's knowing that He has the power you need. *"Today salvation has come to this house,"* and Zacchaeus was fundamentally changed by his salvation such that the old citizenship, the old identity, and the power that come from his possessions, was now like the Russian rouble – not worth much, a devalued currency – because he had welcomed Jesus in.

Are you willing to not simply give away money to make yourself feel generous but to lose power? Is that, after all, not what Jesus did? He gave away His power so that we might have His power. He gave up His life so we might take up life. He took on the condemning words of the crowd so we could be freed from condemnation.

So, may we all be gripped by this grace once again. May you be saved with your mind, heart and will. And may His salvation come to you every day as an invitation to trust, to let go, and to offer up all of yourself for others to His glory.