



About Turn!

Luke 19:1-10

Last week we saw how sin gets in the way of us having a relationship with God but as a result of God's love and mercy for us, He provided a way by which, through the death of Jesus, He could offer us forgiveness and new life, if we are prepared to accept it by faith.

We also saw how those who are believers – Christians – can destroy their relationship with God and never realise their potential in Christ because of un-confessed sin in their lives. I challenged you to deal with it and receive the forgiveness that God so richly offers. I'm going to continue to explore just what it means to receive forgiveness, new life and to follow Jesus this morning.

I don't know how good you are at following instructions. Look at these – they're all instruction books for things I have bought. They all have something in common. They're in pristine condition. Never opened, never read! Why, because like many of you, I just get on and use stuff without reading the manual. What's interesting is that although I get things to work, I often find some unusual feature or way of doing things that make what I am trying to use more effective.

Actually there was a report out the other day about how people often come to grief because they never read the small print in contracts when they sign up for something they are buying, or insurance or a loan, or something they are getting over the internet.

Reading the instructions is obvious really – it stops us coming to grief at a later date – or immediately for that matter.

PP Take a look at this picture. It's not a picture from some new ballet, but Russian soldiers doing a form of march called the goose step. It looks ridiculous doesn't it? Learning how to square bash and for that matter learning daft marches like the goose step, is all part of military training. A disciplined and effective army needs people who obey orders. On the parade ground they may seem silly, but discipline and the ability to obey orders is critical on the battlefield.

One instruction that is essential on the parade ground is the command "about turn!" If they didn't shout it the men would end up on the grass!

God wants us to get out of the mess we get ourselves into called sin and achieve the potential he created us for. At the centre of that is that we need to follow His instructions. If we come before Him and ask for his forgiveness and desire to follow Jesus, then we need to do that – follow Jesus, which means following His instructions. And that means an about turn in our lives.

PP The problem is, that all human beings are born with a desire to do their own things. To follow the song "I did it my way". But what's God's response to My Way? PP *Prov 14:12 (NIV) There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.* It's rather like ignoring the signs and rushing down this road – you're going to come to grief.

PP Talbot Bridge, Dublin. Life isn't like this where you have no choice. You can do it God's way, or you can do it your way.

Going our own way led to death. If we want life we need to follow God's way.

PP Take a look at this picture. It's more familiar to us. It's the A14. PP. It's the road we love to hate. A few weeks ago we had gone into Ipswich and were driving back towards Felixstowe. Like a fool I went off down the slip-road and realised as I got onto the road that I was heading towards Bury. Now as much as Bury is a nice place, it isn't where we live. The only way I was going to get where I was supposed to go and wanted to go was by going to the next exit, turning around and going back the other way. And the longer I would have stayed on the A14 going the wrong way, then the longer it would take to get back to Felixstowe. I had to turn around.

The same idea comes when we are faced with faith in Christ. Jesus doesn't just say, come and receive forgiveness, but calls on use to about turn and follow Him. The Bible has a special word for this – it's called repentance.

PP Repentance

A lot of people think that the word repentance just means saying sorry to God, but it isn't just this. The Greek it is translated from is a word called *metanoia*. It means to have a change of mind, a change of thinking, or change of conduct as a result of something significant happening in your life – like becoming a Christian. It's an about turn in your life from going in your direction to going in Gods. So repentance isn't about just being sorry, but realising how bad sin is before God is and how amazing God is to be willing to forgive us, we say I'm going to live God's way and do things God's way.

Perhaps the best way of illustrating this is looking at this story of Zaccheus we had read to us this morning. The tax man who trusted Jesus.

PP My first jobs - Inland Revenue - yes, I worked in a tax office. Tax Officers are not popular people - because they are responsible for getting our taxes out of us which we don't want to pay. None of us like paying tax, but we like all the benefits which public funds bring us. PP

As the tax man woke up after surgery, he said, "Why are all the blinds drawn?" The doctor answered: "There's a big fire across the street, and we didn't want you to think the operation was a failure."

Why don't sharks eat tax men? Professional courtesy

PP Some things never change and dislike of tax men certainly hasn't. Zacheus was a tax man He collected Roman taxes. This made him very unpopular because Jews saw him as a traitor because he collected Roman taxes. But it made him rich as he could be as corrupt as he liked and get away with it. And he got rich on it – and people hated him as a con-merchant, a cheat and generally a nasty piece of stuff.

How he felt about all that we don't know - all we know is that when Jesus came, he wanted to see him. Well, so did everybody else. I think that Zaccheus' response to Jesus indicates that he really had a desire in his heart to see Jesus because he as a person needed to do something about his life, but the best he could do was sit in a tree. A good vantage point but not particularly good for meeting Jesus. Seeing Him, yes but meeting Him, no.

PP But that's the amazing thing - Jesus stops and addresses him. , *"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."* 6 *So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.* 7 *All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."*

And what did the crowd say? Why HIM? He's a sinner. We're not. The implication is offence and insult. How dare Jesus do that. Tax men just ain't worth it!

Who is our faith for? Is it so that we can indulge ourselves? Or is it *to seek and to save what was lost.*" (NIV) The truth is that the Son came to seek and to save the lost.

We as His people I believe are called to seek and to save that which was lost. People, lost without Jesus and with no hope in this world.³⁰ *Some Pharisees and some teachers of the Law who belonged to their*

group complained to Jesus' disciples. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and other outcasts?" they asked. 31 Jesus answered them, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call respectable people to repent, but outcasts." That is the message of Christ. That's why He came and as His people we continue that work. And that is our challenge here in Felixstowe.

If we are to see conversions in this church then we must emulate Jesus in recognising He came to seek and save that which was lost. That's our call. Not to sit and watch Jesus in action, be a spectator. But to befriend and bring hope to those who need Jesus.

So how does Jesus deal with Zaccheus? PP

◆ He called Zaccheus by name

He called Him by name. How could he possibly have known? Well He did. And He knows you. He knows every part, every little bit. There isn't any sin we can hide or any thought we can conceal. But that isn't the end of it. For many people, their perception of God is one who is there just to judge and say the word guilty.

Jesus called Zaccheus, the tax collector, the sinner - he knew exactly who he was - and invited Himself around for tea! Actually more than that – Jesus wanted to stay there as his guest.

Jesus wants to know us. He wants to know the men and women of Felixstowe. Not because they are good, but because they aren't. And He asks to come in. He calls them by name. There are a lot of people around who think that they are not good enough to know Jesus. maybe they've ignored Him all of their lives. Maybe they look at Him and His moral perfection and say "that's not what I'm like". They don't feel that they could be worthy enough to know Jesus – but they still sit up trees as spectators feeling unworthy. Is that you?

Praise Him! He calls you because you're unworthy. In fact we're all like that! But the same call comes - I want to come into your house, into your life.

BUT this is not just a message to anyone who doesn't know Jesus, but a sharp reminder to those of use who have already had an encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ.. We are who we are BECAUSE we are sinners, because we can't reach God's standards. Yet he still wants to be in our house, despite the sin and despite the failures. Perhaps as a Christian you feel a long way from God this morning. Then Jesus is saying to you this morning "I'm coming to stay in your house".

PP There's a famous verse in *Revelation 3: 20 Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if any hear my voice and open the door, I will come into their house and eat with them, and they will eat with me.* It was written to the church in Laodicea, a church which had really plumbed the depths. Yet Jesus calls into that situation and says "The invitation is still there". Open the door, invite me in and let's get to know each other again.

We might feel that Jesus is a long way from us but Jesus is right there, knocking on your door Bang, bang, bang. "I want to come into your house!" How about it? PP

◆ He caused Zaccheus to turn around

Zaccheus became a changed man because of his encounter with the Saviour. True faith always brings forth repentance. In fact, a changed life is usually a pretty good indication that someone is trusting Jesus. And because it's mind changing, it changes the person who trust Jesus and everything to do with their life.

And Zaccheus? He knew that he was selfish and a cheat. He knew that wasn't compatible with following Jesus and he decided to change.

Whether you want to know Jesus this morning – or whether you have known Him for years, I believe God is asking us to examine ourselves this morning. We know we have sin in our lives that needs dealing

with. Even if like me you've been a Christian for 40 years – or much longer, you know there are areas in your life that are not honouring to God. This isn't something for people new to the faith.

If we're not walking God's way, not walking in the Spirit, then we're walking our way and however OK it seems to us, however harmless. You know: a little bit of gossip never hurt anyone, it's only a white lie, she deserves it, I don't see why I should care about him, I don't need to pray, everybody else does it, nobody sees me, a little bit of something you fancy never hurt anyone, everyone takes a sickie and so on. Remember that verse we read: *Prov 14:12 (NIV) There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.* It's true but don't find that out the hard way! And all these things are the thin end of the wedge. It starts with something we "get away with" and it then escalates to whatever we think we can get away with. Sady, be sure your sin will find you out. We all know of even mature Christians that have fallen because one indiscretion led to another .. and the bigger you are, the harder you fall.

God is saying to each of us: "About turn!" Confess your sins, walk in God's way.

◆ Repentance cost Zaccheus

So Zaccheus repented. He turned into a generous man, and somebody who more than repaid those whom he'd cheated. I bet he found that difficult. Losing the wealth he loved. - even worse asking the forgiveness of those he cheated. Repentance is action – and it cost him. .

The story is told of W. P. Nicholson who lived about 100 years ago and worked amongst dock workers in Belfast. Many men accepted Christ and started to bring back everything they had stolen from the shipyards. In the end the dock company had to make a public announcement: "Will all those attending the meetings of Mr. W. P. Nicholson please stop returning stolen goods. "We have nowhere to store them."

Actually the evangelist J John does a series of public talks called Just 10 on the 10 commandments. When he did You shall not steal when he visited Norwich, that the police were totally amazed at the amount of stolen stuff that was brought to J John's meeting the next night.

Between you and God this morning, you know that you need to repent. And sometimes it costs to follow God's way. And you know that to do that will cost you. I have known many Christians over the years who have led sour, sad lives because they couldn't bring themselves to eat humble pie and mend a broken relationship, Christians who have been dishonest and need to come clean, Christians who have lied and now need to put things right, Christians who have problems with alcohol, drugs, porn and the like and need to seek help, Christians who are in relationships and friendships they know that are wrong and need to get out. And it goes on. Following Jesus costs. Yet by His Spirit, God gives you the grace and the strength to make the change and follow Him.

Is that you this morning. Remember the verse *1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* You know you are sorry before God for that in your life which dishonours God, you know that you want to follow Jesus. What are you going to do about it?

The first thing is pray. Zaccheus found Jesus because he responded to Jesus. The second thing is to clear those things out of your life which dishonour God. Maybe you're going to find that difficult. Being part of a church means that you do not need to face that alone. Share it with someone, let someone pray with you. God wants you to realise your potential in Christ this morning

Prayer.

Luke 19:1 (TEV) Jesus went on into Jericho and was passing through.

2 There was a chief tax collector there named Zacchaeus, who was rich.

3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd.

4 So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way.

5 When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, "Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today."

6 Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy.

7 All the people who saw it started grumbling, "This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!"

8 Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much."

9 Jesus said to him, "Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham.

10 The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."