

LUKE 19:1-10
THE STORY OF NEWNESS

In the story we know as “Pilgrim’s Progress,” a man named Christian is deep into his journey toward heaven. He and his fellow travelers discover a mirror. On the front of the mirror is what you would expect to see in a mirror: a human face, with all of its beauty and blemishes - the splendor and pain of our humanity. But on the back of the mirror, Christian sees something you would never expect to see in a mirror: he sees the glory of Jesus Christ.

The journey of “Pilgrim’s Progress” is ultimately about the glory of Jesus Christ. That is also the heart of our story. During this year, we are journeying through the scenes of the story of our God, our world and our lives, and today we complete the third scene. The first scene was creation. The second scene was the fall. The third scene is redemption, where we see Jesus, as he rescues people from the guilt and power of sin, and frees them to a new life with God.

The face on our side of the mirror reflects both the greatness of creation and the pain of the fall. But Jesus Christ is all about making people see something new. As they see him, they see glory, and as they believe in him, they are made new with his glory. We do not become Jesus, but we become more and more like Jesus, and it is a glorious sight to behold.

In the final meeting of this scene, we meet Jesus as he meets Zacchaeus. As little children, we sang of him as a “wee little man,” but his story is not a story of shortness or tallness. It is a story of newness. It is a story that captures the heart of redemption, and it is a story that changes every day of our story, even to eternity.

I want to wrap our minds around this story with three words - three words that sum up all that we have seen in this scene: confession, profession and expression. Yes, they rhyme. Yes, I want you to remember them, for I want you to live them. Every day. Forever.

The story of this man is first the story of **A NEW CONFESSION**. Our story of redemption begins with confession. When you confess something, you are agreeing with someone. When you confess your sin to your friend or your crime to a judge, you are agreeing that you are guilty. When you confess your faith in church, you are agreeing with the people around you who confess the same faith. For Zacchaeus and for us, the confession of redemption agrees with two realities: I am low, and I am lost.

I AM LOW. Again, this is not the “lowness” of shortness! It is a confession of where we stand before the holy and mighty God.

Zacchaeus is a tax collector. In fact, he is the chief tax collector in this area. He seems to be sort of a middle manager - working for the Romans who want the tax money, and overseeing the people who actually collect the tax money.

He has a nice place to work. He is in Jericho, where a major trade road runs between the city of Jerusalem and important places to the east. His tax collectors collect taxes on a lot of wealth, and Zacchaeus gets a cut of their cut. Financially, he is surely doing well.

But he is despised. No one likes tax collectors. They are doing the work of the Romans who rule Israel, and many of the collectors take more than they should - to line their own pockets. If people hate the average tax collector, what must they think of the fellow in charge of the tax collectors? We cannot be sure about this, but Zacchaeus may be climbing that tree not because he is short, but because the crowd knows him, and no one will step aside to let him see Jesus.

I am low. This man has all he wants, but he lacks something he needs. Somehow, he has discovered that for all he possesses, his wealth has not secured joy or peace. For all of his wealth, he is still desperately poor. Maybe that is why he runs ahead and climbs a tree to see Jesus. Maybe he knows Jesus has something that his wealth can never provide.

I am low. Confession also agrees with this: *I AM LOST*. We do not read of Zacchaeus using this word

about himself, but Jesus uses this word about Zacchaeus. He says, “The Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.”

What does it mean to be lost? Jesus’ redemption is designed to secure places for people in his eternal kingdom. He is the Son of David, the Son of God, the Son of Man, who has come to bring people back into relationship with God, and to lead people into the eternal kingdom of God. Yet as we have learned during this scene, not everyone has the right to enter this kingdom.

“Lostness” means we cannot find our way to the kingdom of God. As blemished souls, we need God to find us and guide us to his kingdom. As Zacchaeus runs ahead, climbs a tree, welcomes Jesus and speaks to Jesus, we see a man who has a sense of his “lostness.” Not only is he low in the emptiness of his soul, he is lost in the emptiness of his hope.

I am low. I am lost. The great British Prime Minister Winston Churchill once described a political opponent this way: “A modest little man who has a good deal to be modest about.” Churchill meant those words to hurt, but they help us, for they capture the heart of our story. In our sin, God sees us as modest people with a great deal to be modest about.

We imagine ourselves to be “high.” We have our wealth. We have our stuff. We have our achievements. We have our pride. But what does it truly gain for us? God obliterates that “highness” as he holds a mirror to our hearts, where we see the emptiness of chasing and chasing what will never satisfy us.

We assume ourselves to be “found.” Like the religious people of Jesus’ day, we presume we are on our way to a place of eternal joy. Then Jesus holds up a mirror and reminds us that so many who think they are found are truly lost, and all who are lost need him to enter their story and find them.

Confession is agreement. God holds up a mirror to us and says, “You are low. You are lost.” My new confession is when I say, “God, I agree. I have chased after gods other than you, and I am low. I have no right to demand a place at the table in your kingdom, for I am lost. I agree, for I am seeing myself as you see me.”

I must do this. But I do not like to do this. My heart cries out against this. I desperately long to defend myself and explain myself and promote myself. I deeply love to think well of myself and make sure you think well of me. But today and every day, Jesus calls me to this heart - the heart of a person who sees the emptiness of his soul and the hopelessness of his life, apart from him. He commands and commends staring at that mirror with unblinking eyes, and offering a new confession to God. He calls us to ask for this grace, and he gives it to us.

((SINGING OF “PSALM 32” - Verses 1-3))

This is the story of a new confession. This is the story of **A NEW PROFESSION**. Jesus reveals here that he has come “to seek and to save what was lost.” This profession sees not only our lowness and lostness on one side of the mirror - it sees Jesus on the other side of the mirror.

When you profess something, you are not just agreeing with someone. You are positively declaring something to be true. You profess your admiration for your favorite athlete or entertainer. You profess your love for your spouse or a close friend. You profess your faith in your child or your co-worker. You are proclaiming the truth that fills your heart.

This profession sees, first, that *JESUS IS LORD*. Notice what happens here. Jesus comes along, and Zacchaeus races ahead and climbs a tree to see Jesus. When Jesus reaches the tree, he looks up, sees Zacchaeus, calls him by name, and commands him to come down, for Jesus wants to stay at his house.

What is happening here? Jesus is demonstrating his Lordship. He is showing that he is fully in charge of the situation. Zacchaeus, you are to come down from there, because I want to come into your home and eat with you. I have a purpose with you. I have a plan for you. You are not your own. You are mine. Come, let us have fellowship together.

How does Zacchaeus respond? He “came down at once.” He does not discuss or debate or dispute with

Jesus. In his lowness and his lostness, he professes his faith in Jesus by quickly coming to Jesus, by hastening to follow his command, by affirming his Lordship over his life.

That is the profession of the Christian. We profess, “Jesus is the Savior who saves from my sin.” But we also profess, “Jesus is the Lord who rules my life.” As he leads, I follow. At once. For he is Lord.

Yet there is more to this profession. This profession declares Jesus is Lord, but it also proclaims, *JESUS IS LOVE*. Jesus commands Zacchaeus to come down. He comes down immediately. But what is his attitude? He “welcomed him gladly.” He has seen Jesus and heard from Jesus, and he wants nothing more than to be with him, so when Jesus summons him down from the tree, you can almost see him fumbling and stumbling and stumbling down through the branches, to the ground, so he can be with Jesus.

The Christian life is more than a life of mere duty. The Christian life is a life of magnificent delight. We receive Jesus with joy, for in him we find the One who truly and triumphantly quenches the thirst of our souls. As the Lord of love, he loved us and gave himself for our sins, and now he rules and reigns as a Lord who loves us in all of his dealings with us.

This week, I read words that reminded me of this. The writer recalled that we live after the fall. This world is corrupt, and I am part of this world, so everything I do will have a little hint or a big helping of corruption. I will never do anything purely right. Even if I confess who I am and profess who Christ is, my living will never be beautiful enough to make me good enough for God. In this life, I will never clean the mirror well enough!

For example, let’s say I volunteer at a ministry that serves the poor, like Rock Solid. Anyone would commend me for this. Indeed, maybe I am doing good work. But why do I do it? Could there be a hint or a helping of pride in my service? How do I do it? Might I do it with a cold heart toward either the people for whom I work, or the people with whom I work? What may happen as I do it? Might my heart wander to self-righteousness about the sins of the people I serve, or might my eyes wander to lust, even as I serve? Even my beauty is blemished.

That is why I must remember and rest in my profession of Jesus as the Lord of love. As Paul wrote, my life is “hidden” in him. In all that I am and all that I do, Jesus is Lord. Yet in all that I am and all that I do, Jesus is love. So even as I pledge to follow him as Lord, I must know that I live only in his love. Each day, I fall short. Each day, he forgives and loves me anew, because of what he has done to secure my salvation on the cross. I walk each day in the hiding of that Lordship and that love. I am right with God not because of any right I do, but because of Jesus’ righteousness, given to me. I always need it, and I always have it. That is the profession of our hearts and our lips, in the story of redemption.

((SINGING OF “JESUS I COME”))

A new confession. A new profession. But this story also reveals **A NEW EXPRESSION**. Confession and profession lead to expression. This means I live my words. I say I am a low and lost person who has been found by Jesus. I say Jesus is the Lord of love. So I express this by living this. I first live this new expression *IN WHAT I DO*.

I think of the words of Charles Colson, the founder of Prison Fellowship. Not long ago, he recalled the day over three decades ago when Jesus rescued him from his sin and freed him to a new life. Did Colson’s life instantly become perfect? Hardly. He was in prison when he was saved. Since then, he has suffered from major health problems. Two of his children have had cancer. But still he could write, “How do you celebrate 35 years as a Christian? By recommitting yourself to use every available moment, every ounce of energy, in service of the King. For what He has done for me, how could I ever do less?”

Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus. The people are not thrilled. Zacchaeus is a “sinner.” How could Jesus be the guest of a “sinner”? He can easily be such a guest for one who will confess and profess. Zacchaeus does this and more, as he arises and says, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor.”

Before this, Jesus has met the rich young ruler. He has called him to give all his possessions to the poor and follow him. But that man has left sad, for he is rich, and Jesus reminds us that it is hard for the rich to stop trusting in their riches and trust in him for true riches.

But now we see the joy of Zacchaeus. In his joy at meeting Jesus, the entire direction of his life will change. His story will be radically different. As he has been loved, so he will love, and he will express that love by giving half of his possessions to the poor.

Is this a rule for all Christians at all times and all places? Not in the details, but in the desire. We will all be called to express our love for Jesus in different ways, but the story of Zacchaeus reveals that we will not just confess who we are, and we will not just profess who he is. We will express this confession and profession by living with a new direction.

That is what is happening with Zacchaeus. Before, his direction was toward taking what he could get. Now, his direction is toward giving what he can give. For a man in his work, this would naturally lead to a concern for the poor, for he surely knows he has gained wealth from the poor. So now he will follow a new direction - he will live a life of honestly giving wealth to the poor, instead of dishonestly gaining wealth from the poor.

What about you and me? Maybe this expression will change my direction in using money. Maybe it will change my direction in loving my spouse. Maybe it will change my direction in caring for my children. Maybe it will change my direction in filling my mind. Maybe it will change my direction in responding to people who hurt me. Maybe it will change my direction in caring for people who hurt around me. Maybe it will change all of that, and more! It will be a new expression in what I do.

As well, it will be a new expression *IN WHERE I GO*. Zacchaeus' first words are general: I will help the poor around me. Now he is specific: "If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." The law of Moses required repayment by cheaters, but this pledge is more than the law demanded. Somehow Zacchaeus knows money has been his god, and he knows he must go to this specific place, in this specific way, in order to dethrone this god. He will express his confession and profession by letting Jesus change even this. Even...this.

How do I discover those places where I must go? In his book "Counterfeit Gods," Tim Keller writes about the false gods of our hearts and lives: the things we follow, more than we follow the true God. He urges us to search for false gods in three places: in the things we daydream about, in the things we fear the most, and in the things that most irritate and frustrate us. We express what we confess and profess when we ask God to search those places, to see what is offensive to him, and to lead us in a new way.

This will be specific to you. What are your daydreams? What are your nightmares? What stirs your heart in harmful ways? Jesus makes all things new - in the general direction of what we do in our lives, and in the specific details of where we go in our lives. He has come to bring us into a new story that will last forever. His redemption is a rescue from the death of the past and a freedom to live a new future.

Confession. Profession. Expression. This is our story of redemption. We begin with the front part of a mirror that reveals both beauty, and the blemishes we must confess. We turn to the other part of the mirror, where we profess all the beauty of the unblemished person of Jesus. Then we express this in a story reflects his glory.

Will you confess who you are? Will you profess him as he is? Will you express this in your life?