

# “THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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## LUKE 19:1-20:19

Before this season, dog-fighter / quarterback, Michael Vick, was the most hated man in sports. He was vilified for his cruelty to animals. No one was as maligned as Vick. He spent 21 months in prison for his crimes. Yet, it's amazing how a successful season, and some charity work for the humane society, can transform a man's image. Vick is a candidate for this year's most valuable player. Six months ago who would've thunk it...

Well, in Luke 19 we find a similar transformation. The hatred dog lovers had toward Michael Vick was tame compared to animosity the citizens of Jericho had toward Zacchaeus the tax collector. Even today, people who work for the IRS don't mention it at parties. But tax collectors in the Roman empire were particularly despised. The extravagances of Rome were funded by the taxes collected among the colonies. Rome would hire a local, provide him military force, assign him a quota, and then let him pocket whatever he collected above he owed them.

And Zacchaeus was their man in Jericho. He was getting rich off the backs of his own countrymen. Only one thing could cause a man to absorb the ire of a whole community - *greed*. More than respect, or popularity, or patriotism, or even peace, Zacchaeus desired to be rich. Among the Jews in Jericho Zacchaeus' approval rating was just a little higher than Hitler's.

Yet by the end of the day, everything will change. Zacchaeus will go from *greedy* to *generous*. He'll experience a Michael Vick turn-around in the eyes of the public. And it's all because of his encounter with Jesus...

Chapter 19 “Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.”

Notice he was the “*chief*” or “*arch*” tax collector. Zacchaeus was the big wheel in a corrupt system. He was a regional figure. He had underlings working for him. This made him *most hated*.

“And he sought to see who Jesus was...”

Zacchaeus had heard a lot about Jesus. One of his colleagues, a Galilean tax collector was now a follower. Levi's life had been so transformed he got a new name, [Matthew](#). Perhaps the men knew each other. Imagine, Matthew and Zaccheus grabbing a falafel together for lunch, and Matthew telling his story.

Zacchaeus had heard enough about Jesus to risk seeing for himself. It was dangerous for such a hated man to venture out into a crowd unprotected. Yet there was such a strong longing in his heart for forgiveness, and freedom, and acceptance, and purpose that he combed the parade route looking for a perch from which he could see Jesus.

“But (he) could not (find a place) because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.”

Zacchaeus was vertically challenged. He probably looked like Danny Devito. He was short guy and crowds of taller guys lined the streets... so he shimmied up a sycamore.

On my first trip to Israel in the early 90s we stopped in Jericho, and saw the supposed sycamore. Zacchaeus goes out in search of a new life.

“And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him...” He may’ve chuckled. It was a comical sight - a dignified city official literally up a tree. And Jesus initiated the conversation, “(He) said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.”

It may’ve been quite some time since Zacchaeus had smiled.

Andrew Carnegie once said, “Millionaires who laugh are rare. My experience is that wealth is apt to take the smiles away.” I’ve heard it put, “Money will buy a fine dog, but only love will make him wag his tail.”

Zaccheus had all the money he could handle, but he was bankrupt for love. Until Jesus came to his house, joy and Zack were total strangers. It had been a long time since anyone had said a kind word to this man.

It reminds me of three guys in a life raft stranded in the middle of ocean.

Suddenly a bottle floats by, and one of the guys grabs it, rubs it, and out pops a genie. The genie tells them each of the men can make one request. The first man says, “I wish I were back in Atlanta with my family.” Suddenly, he disappears... The second man, “I miss my girlfriend in California. Send me back to her loving arms.” Presto, he’s gone...

Finally, the last fellow says, “Oh, I’m so lonely without my two buddies. I wish they both were back here with me.” They weren’t happy campers.

Zacchaeus was also a lonely man, but when Jesus came into his life so did joy. “He received Him joyfully.” In the ancient world to enter a man’s home – to break bread together – was the ultimately act of acceptance.

Zacchaeus was so overwhelmed by Jesus’ show of grace he’ll want to follow Him the rest of his life. It’s amazing what just a little bit of love will do to revive a depleted heart. A man’s whole life changes on one invitation.

Once a children's hospital employed a tutor to help sick kids keep up with school. One day she got a call from an English teacher who asked her to pay a visit a student in the burn unit. He needed help with his grammar. When the tutor saw the child she was not prepared for the severity of his condition. The young boy had severe burns over most of his body. She stumbled over her words, “Uh, I’m the hospital teacher and I heard you need help with nouns and verbs.” She was embarrassed with her awkwardness. She mentions grammar to a child who’s fighting for his life.

The next day when the burn unit nurse approached her, she started to apologize. The nurse said, “You don’t understand. We’ve been worried about that boy. But ever since your visit his attitude has changed. He’s fighting back, responding to the treatment... It’s as if he’s decided to live.”

Later the boy explained “It dawned on me, they wouldn’t send a teacher to work on nouns and verbs with a dying boy?” Her visit had given hope.

This was Zacchaeus' logic... Jesus wouldn't visit a hopeless cause. Evidently he wasn't out of God's reach after all. No one is beyond the grasp of God's grace. Jesus has designs even on rotten, greedy traitors.

**"But when they (the Jews in Jericho) saw it, they all complained, saying, 'He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.'" Like the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son. They didn't understand grace.**

In the middle of the Monica Lewinsky scandal President Bill Clinton sought spiritual advice from Tony Campolo. Other Christians criticized Campolo for reaching out to the president. In fact, one pastor wrote a letter stating, **"Don't you understand that this man does not deserve grace!"** Yet by its very definition grace is something no one deserves. It's love that's on the house. Its not prompted by us, but by God - it's unearned.

But once received it has an explosive impact, verse 8, **"Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.'" Here's outward evidence of Zacchaeus' inward transformation. He pledges half his income to charity, and restores those he cheated four-fold. Repentance is willing to repair the damage and make restitution. After this kind of transformation the Jews might've voted him MVP.**

He certainly found God's forgiveness. **"And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.'" Rather than condemn the Zacchaeuses of this world, Jesus seeks and saves.**

Verse 11, **"Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately."** This was a reoccurring misconception.

In a few days crowds in Jerusalem will lay out palm branches across His path, and hail Jesus as Messiah. They'll expect Jesus to lay out plans for the overthrow of Rome and a political revolution. But by mid-week the Jews are so disillusioned with His response they cry out for His blood. They wanted a visible, tangible kingdom. God was working spiritually.

**"Therefore He said: 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas..."** A **"mina"** was a quantity of money. Three months of "a working man's wage" - it was a sizable sum.

**"And said to them, 'Do business till I come.'**

Verse 14 **"But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading."**

In a sense, we've living today in between verses 14 and 15. Jesus is the nobleman who went to heaven – **"a far country"** – but He's going to return. And when He does we'll give an account of what we did in His absence.

Notice, while the nobleman was gone an uprising occurred. The citizens of earth have revolted and challenged Jesus' authority. They'll be punished. While the servants of Jesus make investments for their Master... And here are the words of Jesus to us, "*Do business till I come.*"

Jesus is coming back soon, but He doesn't want us to bail out on society. We're not suppose to quit our job, or drop out of school, or sale our belongings, or move to a mountain top and wait on Him to return. Our job is to "*get down to business.*" Whatever business God has called you to do, it's your job to get it done. Its been said, "*Live as if Jesus were coming back tomorrow, but plan as if He weren't coming back for 10,000 years.*" Our future hope should motivate, not paralyze our present.

"Then came the first (servant), saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.'" This fellow managed a profit - a tenfold return for his Master. Here's his reward... "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'"

Notice, faithfulness to God is rewarded with position and authority in the future kingdom Jesus establishes on earth. Those who stay at their post and fulfill God's calling will be governors and mayors in God's government. If you're a faithful servant, you'll reign and rule with Jesus. Those Christians who fall asleep on the job will end up being the Dog Catchers...

Verse 18 "And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow.'"

Here's a servant who had misread his Master. His Boss was known for his cunning and cleverness. The servant's Master was a risk-taker. He was a shrewd businessman.

We need to make sure we don't misread our Master. Jesus is known for his risky and radical maneuvers. What a risk to leave the halls of heaven and be born an infant in a sin-stained world. The Almighty became dependent on a teenage mom. I love GK Chesterton's comment on the Incarnation. "*Alone of all creeds, Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator.*" Jesus was not afraid to take a risk to save us.

The Master addresses his servant, verse 23, "Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?" And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' ("But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.')

For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

In the spiritual realm the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. When we use what God gives us, He gives us more. God wants us to be a pipe, not a tank. Blessings flow - not just in - *but from us to others.*

An article appeared in the Los Angeles Times. It was written by columnist Ann Wells, "*My brother-in-law opened the bottom drawer of my sister's bureau and lifted out a tissue-wrapped package... He discarded the tissue and handed me the slip. It was exquisite. Silk, handmade, and trimmed with lace. A price tag with an astronomical sum was still attached. 'Jan bought this nine years ago on a trip to New York. She never wore it. She was saving it for a special occasion. I guess this is that occasion.'*"

He took the slip and put it on the bed with the other clothes we were taking to the mortician. His hands lingered on the soft material for a moment, then slammed the drawer, and turned to me. *"Don't ever save anything for a special occasion. Every day you live is a special occasion."*

I remembered those words through the funeral and the days that followed. I'm still thinking about his words, and they've changed my life... I'm not "saving" anything! We use our good china for special events like losing a pound, getting the sink unstopped, or the first camellia blossom...

"Someday" and "one of these days" are fading from my vocabulary. If it's worth seeing, or hearing, or doing, I want to see, and hear, and do it now... Every morning when I open my eyes I tell myself that it is special."

Here's the lesson... Horde God's blessings and He'll take them away. But use them for the good of others and His glory and He'll multiply them.

**"But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me."** Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, will return to Earth in power to crush His enemies, and rule with a rod of iron. The least we can do is present Him a return on His investment in us.

**"When He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when He came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet (Bethany is on the east side of the Mount of Olives, just below the crest of the hill), that He sent two of His disciples, saying, "Go into the village opposite you, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose him and bring him here.**

**And if anyone asks you, 'Why are you loosing it?' thus you shall say to him, 'Because the Lord has need of it.' " So those who were sent went their way and found it just as He had said to them. But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of him." Oh, that we were like the owners of that colt and yielded whenever the Master had need of us.**

**"Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him."** They made an impromptu saddle.

And notice the miracle here... A young donkey that had never been ridden is saddled up and stationary under the weight of its first passenger. Normally, such an animal would need to be broken and tamed. But this colt senses instinctively he needs to submit to Jesus. This is no ordinary rider! Jesus is once again demonstrating His mastery over nature.

Verse 36, **"And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road."** The other Gospels tell us they also lined the street with palm frons. It was the Jewish equivalent of rolling out the red carpet. It was the royal treatment.

**"Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives"** (He's topping the hill. A panoramic view of Jerusalem is before their eyes.)

**"The whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: "'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD! 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'"** The crowd begins to chant Psalm 118. It was a song written about the Messiah 1000 years before His arrival on this day.

This was the only public demonstration Jesus ever orchestrated. And He did it to fulfill prophecy. The date was April 6, 32 AD. If you study Daniel 9 you'll discover this was a date predicted by the prophet. The exact day Messiah would present Himself to the nation Israel.

Daniel teaches that 69 periods of 7 years or 483 years would elapse from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the presentation of the Messiah. The decree by the Persian Emperor Artaxerxes was issued on March 14, 445 BC. Daniel was using the Babylonian calendar that consisted of 360-day years. Thus, mark off what amounts to 173,880 days, and you come to April 6th, 32 AD - the exact day in Luke 19 of Jesus' donkey ride.

The Jewish leaders should've known Daniel's prediction and it's date. To make sure His people didn't miss this crucial day, God added in Zechariah 9:9, "Behold your King is coming to you; he is just, and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."

This was the day the pieces of the puzzle should've fallen together for the Jewish leaders. God affirmed His Son. The Jews should've connected the dots. Instead they just further hardened their hearts toward Jesus.

Verse 39 "And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." They were calling Him the Messiah. And Jesus was basking in their praise. The Jews wanted Him to rebuke them.

"But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out." I really wish the disciples had shut-up for a minute or two. It would've been cool to here the original Rolling Stones praise the Lord. This would've been some real *rock music*.

In fact I've brought back from Israel some rocks I picked up on the Mount of Olives. I'm hoping one day I'll hear them sing Messiah's praise! And I suppose they would, but I keep beating them to the punch!

"Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

Imagine, this was their day - predicted over 500 years in advance. But when the day finally arrives – the most important day in Jewish history - their eyes are closed. And it causes Jesus to weep. He mourns their stubborn hearts.

Instead of relishing this glorious day, Jesus speaks of an ominous day.

Verse 43, "For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Jesus now makes a prediction of His own. He looks ahead four decades to 70 AD. The Roman army, led by Titus Vespasian, will invade Israel and lay a siege to the capitol of Jerusalem. The siege lasted 143 days. In the end the Temple was burned and the once glorious city was reduced to rubble. An unbelievable 600,000 Jews were killed in the battle. Many thousands more were forced into slavery, or killed for sport in the Roman amphitheatres. It was another holocaust.

And on the Temple Mount not one stone was left on another just as Jesus said. Go to Jerusalem today and you can visit an archaeological dig just south of the Temple Mount. It's known as the "*Southern Excavations*."

There today in the ravine below where the Temple stood sits piles of huge stones that once made up the Temple structures. The stones were toppled by Roman soldiers. The prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled, "*(not) one stone (was left) upon another.*" The whole Temple platform was leveled.

As the story goes, the outside of the Temple was overlaid with gold. So when the Temple burned the gold melted and rolled into the cracks between the stones. The soldiers disassembled the stones to loot the gold.

Verse 45 "*Then (Jesus) went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it...*" When Jesus saw priests making a buck off God it angered Him.

To pay the Temple tax worshippers were required to swap their Roman coins for Temple shekels – at a hefty exchange rate. To offer a lamb you had to purchase a certified sacrifice from the priestly herd, at an inflated price. It was all a scam.

This was the second time Jesus cleansed the Temple. The first time He used a whip. This time He was so mad all it took was His bare hands.

Jesus said to them, verse 46, "*It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'*" Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7.

A den is a place to relax. Thus, it's an indictment against the Church when we become a place that tolerates people with the wrong motives. If we were a "*house of prayer*" we might just weed out the crooks.

*"And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him."*

In 1966, the Mamas and the Papas had a hit song called "*Monday, Monday.*" The lyrics went, "*Monday, Monday, can't trust that day... On Monday morning you gave me no warning of what it would be - that Monday evening you would leave and not take me... Monday couldn't guarantee - that Monday evening you would still be here with me.*"

The author of the lyrics was dumped by his girlfriend on Monday.

In a sense, this happened to Jesus. On Sunday Jesus rode His donkey into Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowd, but on Monday morning Jesus confronted a different attitude. The Jewish establishment didn't appreciate Him upsetting the Temple trade. Jesus threatened their *power and profits*. They grew so mad they plotted to kill Him. As in the song, a wonderful weekend and glorious Sunday, turned into a sad, treacherous Monday...

Chapter 20, "*Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted Him.*" I like showdowns. High noon is my favorite time of the day. High noon at the OK Corral. Here the bad guys walk into the Temple to take on Jesus. What follows is a guns-blazing confrontation where Jesus mows them down...

In verse 2 the Jews speak to Jesus, "*saying, 'Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?'*" Jesus had challenged Jewish authority. He'd said to them, "*What right do you have to turn My Father's house into a den of thieves?'*" Now they're picking up the gauntlet. "*Who are You to tell us what we should and shouldn't do? Where do you get your authority?'*" It's a battle of clout.

Of course, their question, like all their questions that day, was a trap. Authority was a touchy subject under Roman rule. If Jesus claimed Divine authority He could be painted as a potential enemy of Rome. If He said He lacked authority from God He'd lose His credibility with the masses. Either way Jesus answered the Jews thought they had Him.

"But He answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me..." Jesus answers their question with a question of His own. "The baptism of John - was it from heaven or from men?" The Jewish authorities tried to put Jesus on the spot. Here, Jesus returns the favor...

Verse 5, "And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet." The Master had out maneuvered His enemies.

"So they answered that they did not know where it was from." They played dumb. By the end of the day we discover "playing dumb" wasn't difficult for them. Try to *match wits* with Jesus, and you end up the *dimwit*.

It's amazing throughout the day that Monday the most brilliant minds in Judaism tried to argue Scripture with it's author. They attempted some Scriptural sparring. They debated *theology* with the *Theos*. But when you take on the original Bible-Answer-Man you only prove how dumb you are.

"And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." He's saying, *if you won't go out on a limb to answer Me, then why should I do out on a limb to answer you? Round one goes to Jesus!*

"Then (Jesus) began to tell the people this parable: "A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time."

This was a common business arrangement in Israel. A landowner would transform a tract of land into a vineyard - then lease it to a vinedresser expecting a percentage of the profits come harvest time.

"Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out." This was horrible. The tenants have forgotten they're tenants.

They must've been drunk on their wine by the way they treated the owner's servants. "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do?'" He doesn't want to *whine!* He wants to take appropriate action. He reasons, "I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him." A visit from the owner's son should command their respect.

"But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.'" Under Jewish Law any man could claim ownerless property. They thought by killing the Son they could take ownership of the vineyard.

"So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others." And when they heard it they said, "Certainly not!"



Jesus' *parable* was actually a *prophecy*. In fact, a prophecy that would be fulfilled within the week. Israel was the vineyard. Just a few feet from where this confrontation takes place, carved grapevines adorned the huge doors of the Temple. The Jewish leaders were the tenants. The owner's servants were the prophets. And His Son was Jesus. After beating the prophets, and trying to steal the kingdom from God, they're now posed to eliminate God's Son. A courageous Jesus confronts the very men who're plotting his murder.

Notice verse 16, the owner promises to "*destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others.*" This was fulfilled historically. When the Jewish establishment rejected the Gospel preached to them by Peter and the early Church, God sent the Romans to sack Jerusalem. The year was 70 AD. This dismantled the institutions of Judaism – from priesthood to Temple.

God's work in the world shifted from Jews to the Church. And by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD the fellowship of the Church was almost exclusively Gentile.

Verse 17 "*Then (Jesus) looked at them...*" The Greek word means "*to see through.*" Jesus looked right through them. They responded to the parable by being aghast. "*Certainly not.*" They'd never kill the owner's son. Yet that was exactly the treachery they were plotting in their hearts even as they feigned their disapproval and mouthed their hollow words.

"*And (Jesus) said, 'What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone'?'*" Psalm 118:22 is a Messianic passage that was attached to an ancient story. Construction of the Temple was an incredible feat of engineering. Huge stones – some 20 feet thick and 40 feet long – were quarried north of Jerusalem, then assembled on site. They were so precisely sculpted no mortar was used.

But one stone seemed out of place. It didn't seem to fit so the builders rolled it off the Temple Mount into the Kidron Valley. Only when the Temple was near completion that it was discovered the stone they'd rejected was actually the capstone or cornerstone. This was the mistake the Jews were about to make with Jesus. They were plotting to destroy the cornerstone.

Jesus didn't fit. At the time Judaism was about legalism, ritualism, self-righteousness, prejudice. Jesus was about freedom, love, and relationship. The Jews rejected Jesus, but He's become the lynchpin of the Church.

Verse 18 is an ominous warning. "*Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.*"

Come broken and humble to Jesus. Surrender to Him. Fall on Him and He'll lift you up. But harden your heart, and He'll fall on you and grind you to powder.

"*And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people - for they knew that He had spoken this parable against them.*"

They were seething in anger, but it gets worse. The showdown isn't over. The beat-down Jesus gives them continues... and we'll talk about it next time.