

January 21

“Turn the Page to Switch Tracks”

Focus on Luke 19:5-6

<sup>5</sup>When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup> So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

Special Music:

“There was Jesus”

Zach Williams & Dolly Parton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CNqhpRycfY>



## **Luke 19:1-10**

**1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.**

**5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to 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.”**

**8 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.”**

**9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.**

**10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”**

## **SWITCHING TRACKS**

Jeff stared at the notification that had arrived this morning in his work email. He hadn't seen this coming although he knew that the company that he worked for was struggling financially. Jeff was an IT software application and database engineer. He had been with the company for fifteen years and always had superior performance reviews. Surely, this had to be a mistake. He read the email again and started to accept that he had been let go. There was a decent severance package, and his health insurance would be in place for another six months. With the package and his savings, he and his wife Frances should be all right until he was able to find another job. Frances worked as a legal secretary and that should buy them even more time.

Someone from HR had dropped off a box at his desk before he had arrived for work. He had been wondering why it was there and now he knew. His termination was effective today. No notice. Not a hint that this was coming. Sitting there trying to wrap his head around what was happening, his computer returned to its locked home screen. He tapped in his password to continue with his regular work but quickly realized that his privileges had been revoked. They certainly weren't wasting time.

Standing up in his cubicle, he looked around. There were others around him that had already started packing their things. He realized that this was nothing personal and others were leaving as well. Grabbing the box, he began to

pack up his personal belongings. There was his silver framed picture of Frances, trinkets and gadgets that his work friends had brought back from their vacations and conventions. There was a family picture of him, Frances, and his son Jake at his son's graduation from Texas Tech. And there were all the little bits of whatnot that he wasn't sure why he was packing other than to give him a minute to continue processing the moment. He hadn't even had the chance to call Frances. It was probably for the best. He would tell her when he got home and then take her to dinner, just to reassure her that it was all going to be okay.

He picked up the box only to realize that Tom, the security guard, was standing behind him. Tom asked him for his company badge, his cell phone, and his company laptop. Reality set in. This was really happening. It was embarrassing. Humiliating. He didn't even have the chance to say goodbye to everyone. He felt guilty and didn't know why. He hadn't done anything wrong but felt he was being treated like a criminal. But the others that were leaving were getting the same treatment. He had seen these protocols before and felt bad for those leaving, but he had never understood how they felt until now.

Picking up his box, he began what felt like a perp walk past his fellow employees. Tom escorted him from the building and shook his hand. They were actually friends outside of work, going on a couple of fishing trips together and the company hunting trip in the fall. Tom was the only one he got to say goodbye to. Not even his manager took the time to wish him well.

When he got home, he had a sit-down with Frances and explained everything. She took the news well, considering. And, as he promised himself,

he took her out to a nice dinner. He loved his wife so much and her support meant everything to him at a time like this.

The next day, Jeff sat down at the computer and brushed up his resume'. Once he was satisfied with it, he started addressing envelopes to friends he had in the industry. With his resume', he included a personal letter regarding his situation and availability. That was a good place to start. He left the house to mail the envelopes and it struck him that he could apply for unemployment. So, he stopped by the unemployment office and sat down with a counselor. The counselor helped him fill out the paperwork and went over his options. He felt very out of place at the unemployment office. But he was willing to sacrifice his pride to ensure that He and Frances would have the time they needed to right the ship.

For the next month, Jeff continued to send out resumes and go to interviews with those companies that showed an interest. But the truth is often hard to deal with. He was sixty-one years old in an industry that catered to young minds. While Jeff had excellent qualifications, his resume' impressive, and his references impeccable, it did not change the fact that he found himself to be a dinosaur in an industry that had been in its infancy when he had started.

After that first month, the interviews started to taper off. It soon become clear that Jeff wasn't what the industry was looking for. They wanted fresh minds that had grown up and been indoctrinated early into the Information Technology path.

Finding himself with time on his hands, he started engaging more with his favorite hobby of building custom doll houses. Using his computer skills, he was able to design and produce renderings for each house. He had never made any money at his hobby, but then he had never really tried. It was a way to relax and use a different skill set away from work. Over the years he had gotten pretty good at it. He never used store-bought fixtures or elements but made everything by hand. This took a great deal of patience. The work was extremely detailed. Jeff had made a house for each of his granddaughters and a few nieces. He didn't know how much they cherished them until he got a call from his son telling me how much his daughters loved the houses.

Which led to a thought, or more like an idea. What if he were to build a website and sell the houses online? He could show the details and various models as well as let the customer choose the color scheme and other furnishings. Each house would then be customized. He wasn't sure he could make money with this idea, but it was something that he enjoyed doing. He talked it over with Frances. She was enthusiastic about the idea and made some suggestions on how to get started.

Jeff started putting plans together and building the website. He also decided that he could also offer the plans for the houses online so that people interested in building the houses for themselves could buy the blueprints. He invested in Google ads and other places in the digital market. It took a couple of months for everything to spin up but soon he had more work than he could

handle. Jeff hired a couple of assistants to help him out and they brought with them some of their own ideas.

Without realizing it, Jeff had switched tracks into a career that brought him an extreme amount of pleasure and was fairly lucrative. He wasn't going to get rich, but the income outweighed what he had made in his IT job, without the headaches and responsibilities. Jeff and Frances were glad that he had made the commitment and the change.

Sometimes in life, we have no choice but to change tracks. For whatever reason, the track in front of us will take us nowhere and it might even cause us harm. But when we change tracks, it's easy God's hands in our lives leading us to where he wants us to be. It could be for our protection or health. It could also be because he has special plans for us that cannot be accomplished on the track we are on. But when Jesus is the engineer, we don't have to worry about the track, because he will choose the track for us.

When I was in my early teens, I had an uncle that had accepted the position of Sr. Pastor at the First Baptist Church of Whittier, California. Our families had always been close, even though my uncle's family had been serving as missionaries in Korea. While he was serving in Whittier, my parents made arrangements for my sister and me to fly out and to spend a week or so with them. It was a great week. We went to Disneyland, and we were able to be involved in the church activities.

The church had a youth outing where we went to the Rose Bowl Parade. Because of the sheer crowds, most of the crowd came prepared to sleep on the sidewalks in downtown Pasadena to see the parade. So, there we were, about fifteen youth and accompanying adults with our sleeping bags trying to catch some sleep in the bitter cold on the sidewalks of Pasadena, California. The experience is one I will never forget. Although there were hundreds of porta-potties, many of them were already overflowing when we arrived. Filling stations that had restrooms were charging people \$5 dollars to relieve themselves and the lines to those restrooms often ran around the block.

Sleep deprived, hungry, somewhat miserable, we patiently waited for the parade. It was still far off when we first heard the drums. And when the first floats and bands arrived at the corner where we were, most of us were not tall enough to really see the parade as we stood behind rows of much taller humans. But I was able to proudly say that I had been to a Rose Bowl Parade. I have never had the desire to repeat the experience.



Zacchaeus must have felt much the same way when he heard Jesus was coming to Jericho. Jesus was the Superstar of the time and there was a huge amount of excitement from everyone who wanted to see the Rabbi from Nazareth. His fame and stories of the miracles that he had performed were front-page headlines. Everyone wanted to see Jesus and his entourage as entered the gates of Jericho.

Zacchaeus had two problems that prevented him from being able to see this radical teacher and healer, and his disciples. The first problem was that Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in Jericho. That meant that he was hated and despised. Tax collectors were considered by the religious leaders and the Jewish people as sinners, lowlifes, friends to the Romans, cheaters, and abusers of the people. The way a tax collector gathered money was through the Roman government establishing a tax for each person and anything that the tax collector was able to garnish over that amount, they could keep, which today would be considered usuary. But everyone had to pay the tax collector and he would only take and deliver the tax money to the Roman government if his fee was included. Zacchaeus was very good at his job, which also meant he was very rich. So, Zacchaeus was not well-liked. Tax collectors were on the same level as prostitutes and thieves. No one trusted them. This meant that no one was going to allow Zacchaeus to get to the front of the crowd to see Jesus. And second, he was so short, he would not be able to see over anyone. He had to come up with a different approach.

There was a sycamore tree nearby and Zacchaeus climbed it so he could get a better view. I won't say he was a Jesus fan because he really didn't have an affinity toward this self-proclaimed Messiah, but this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and he wasn't going to miss it. Who could blame him? This was Jesus we are talking about.

Have you ever experienced a moment where, without any prior discussion, someone picks you out of a crowd to go do something? It's embarrassing. It's unexpected. It's a "Who, me?" moment. "Why me? Please don't pick me? Please pick anyone else." But that is exactly what happens to Zacchaeus. Jesus is moving down the street and gets even with Zacchaeus, turns, and says, **"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."** The most notable celebrity of the time had just invited himself to dinner at Zacchaeus' house. As far as Zacchaeus was concerned, this would like us being told that the president was coming by our house for dinner. It wasn't even a request. It was a "This is going to happen, so get ready," moment. It was a point in time where you are told that Taylor Swift is coming to your house even though you are a Dolly Parton fan. There was nothing religious or profound in this event other than it happened to Zacchaeus who believed himself to be the last person Jesus would want to visit. How could anyone say no? If nothing else, he would be able to proudly tell everybody that Jesus had stayed at his house. This was a life-changing, track-switching moment, although not in the way he expected.

When he came down out of that tree and stood in the presence of Jesus of Nazareth, he suddenly realized that everything he had heard was true. This rock star that had invited himself to dinner was, in fact, man's connection to the Creator of the universe. A truly awe-inspiring moment. And in that split second, the train that was Zacchaeus' life switched tracks and he said, **“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.”** It was as if his train had been headed west and was now heading east. A total about-face and spur-of-the-moment change in his life. A revelation of divine import that inspired a complete about-face that not only changed how he was going to live his life but also created within him a committed desire to repair and provide restitution to the lives that he had manipulated and crushed.

And Jesus, never the one to waste a teaching moment, replies to the crowd around him, **“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”** At that moment, Zacchaeus became a new creature.

There is something else very significant about this moment and some may be angry when I say this, but I want everyone to notice that there is no “sinner's prayer” here. No Baptism. Jesus doesn't require anything of Zacchaeus other than to let him know he wants to come break bread with him. And yet, Zacchaeus' life is changed profoundly in an instant. While religious leaders and

**devout Jews decried Jesus' actions of eating with sinners, and while the crowd looked on in awe and speculation, Zacchaeus is transformed before their eyes.**

**The realization of who Jesus is, changes us. When we lose our awe-struck pop star fan worship of the legendary Messiah and come to an understanding that Jesus is an actual incarnation of the living God, we change. When we stop keeping the Nazarene at arm's length and welcome him into our house and our hearts, we can't help but change. It's not about some magic words or a ceremony involving water, but it is an actual encounter with our risen Lord, and we embrace an intimacy with God that we never believed was possible. That encounter is what not only allows but encourages us to switch tracks into life, it also encourages us to actually experience a relationship with a carpenter from Nazareth, who was born into this world to do that very thing; to throw the switch on the tracks of our lives and take us where God wants us to go.**

**This week, I encourage us to think back to that moment in our lives when we turned the page to switch tracks to follow Jesus. It wasn't an accident. It was a planned encounter where Jesus called us to climb down out of our tree and embrace a new relationship with him, to begin our metamorphosis, to set our wheels on a track that takes us into a greater relationship with God. We claim to be Christians, but where are our tracks taking us? If it isn't closer to God, closer to our Creator, we may need to be praying for God to switch the tracks so that we can have a closer encounter with him.**

**God bless you all!**

**AMEN**

**Copyright © 2023 Rev. Walt Wellborn**

**Scripture references provided under copyright by:**

**THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION©, NIV© Copyright © 1973,  
1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. © Used by permission. All rights reserved  
worldwide.**