

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Transform**

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

Speaker: Scott Dudley

*Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

---

Hello, great to see you all here. Thank you for coming. Those of you in the room, those of you online, thanks for worshiping with us this morning. Well, as Annie just prayed, here at BelPres, we are focused on being disciples, and a disciple is someone who is becoming like Jesus, someone who is filled with his love, his hope, his courage, his joy, and who changes the world in the ways that he changed it for the better. And we just completed a sermon series on how Jesus restores us to mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

And the biblical word for restore is Sabbath. So building on that sermon series, we're going to start a new sermon series today called Transform, about how we actually become like Jesus. A few weeks ago, I was on a plane. And I don't know about you, but airplanes challenge my ability to be like Jesus. The man next to me had a cold and he kept coughing without even covering his mouth. And there was a woman who kept walking up and down the aisle. And every time she passed me, she'd use my head as a hand rest to steady herself.

I have no idea why she was doing that. Now, I could have said something, but then you got the awkwardness of the whole flight left. So instead, I just sat there next to the incubus of plague and the woman using my head as a hand rail, and I just got these flashes of anger and started muttering shocking words to myself like golly and fiddlesticks and things like that, as I read my book about how to become more like Jesus, which I was reading to prepare for this sermon series. But I will say, I have made progress.

10 years ago, it would've been more than flashes of anger. So I've made some progress. How do we become like Jesus? Have his courage, his joy, his hope, and change the world for the better. Well, as it turns out, for the last 2,000 years, there have been some practices that are proven to help people become like Jesus. And those practices are

Sabbath, which we just did a sermon series on, prayer, scripture, mercy and justice, fasting, community, solitude, witness.

Now, some of those may sound really good to you, some of those practices may sound good to you, and others of those you may be like, ooh, that sounds hard, or I'm not sure that will be very fun, or it sounds kind of unpleasant. Maybe a little bit like a meme. Some of you may have seen that offered a helpful sort of tip. It said, "Pro tip, if you stir coconut oil into your kale, it makes it easier to scrape into the trash." Now, some of these practices, that's what some of you may feel when you look at that list of practices.

It's like eating your kale, which I actually kind of like, by the way. You put the right salad dressing on it, it really works. So maybe some of these practices feel like a little bit like eating your kale to you, but like Sabbath, which we just talked about, these practices lead to greater joy, hope. They lead to better relationships. They lead to greater peace of mind, less anxiety, more joy. And some of you may also be thinking, well, I'm not sure I want to become like Jesus. I just want to feel a little better and be happy.

I get that. I get that. But I would suggest to you that given the rates of anxiety and depression in our culture, the levels of anger and division in our culture, the anxiety and stress and worry so many people carry, I think there's good evidence that the ways we're pursuing happiness in our culture aren't working. Jesus says, "I love you and I have a better way." Jesus says, "I love you and I have a better way." That for 2,000 years, has a 2,000-year track record, of producing more hope, courage, joy, peace of mind.

Plus, our option is not whether or not to engage in practices that transform us. Oh, we are all engaging in practices that transform us. The question is by what and into what. If we engage in the practice of spending too much time consuming news, we are being transformed into anxious, angry people. If we engage in the practice of constantly buying things and new cars and kitchen upgrade and all that and we do that constantly, if we engage in that practice, we are being transformed into materialistic people who can only find happiness in things.

We are all engaging in practices that transform us. The question is by what and into what. And that list of practices that I showed you, it starts with Sabbath. Because unless we practice Sabbath where we are restored, all of those other practices become one more burdensome obligation. But they are joyful if they are coming out of Sabbath where we are being restored by Jesus. And this list of things is not meant to be legalistic obligations, one more darn thing to do. They're things we practice, which means we don't get them perfectly.

We're practicing the way of Jesus. So let's look at a story in the Bible about a man who was transformed by Jesus. Luke 19. 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. So at the time, Israel is occupied by the Roman Empire and the people who collected taxes for the Romans were hated, because what they did was they would charge way more than the Roman government actually required and they would pocket the rest for themselves.

And Zacchaeus is one of those people. Worse even still is he's an Israelite. So he's collaborating with an oppressive foreign power perpetuating an unjust system that is hurting his own people. Zacchaeus was a bad, bad man and nobody liked him. He wanted to see who Jesus was. But because he was short, he couldn't see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and he said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

Now, this may strike us as a little weird in our US culture. If I were to walk up to you after the service and say, "I must stay at your house today," you might panic a little bit and go, "No, the pastor's coming over. What should we have for dinner? What do pastors eat? Is there special pastor food? What do I do?" But there are cultures in this church, Chinese culture, African culture where this would actually be welcomed. And it was the same in Jesus' culture. Hospitality was of very high value.

To that culture, this is great. So Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed him gladly. Something has already changed. He's experiencing Jesus' love. And notice it says gladly. This is not a burdensome, difficult transformation. It's a joyful transformation. Something is changing in Zacchaeus because he's experienced Jesus' love. And any transformation that does not come from an experience of Jesus love is legalism and it'll lead to burnout. It's got to come out of that Sabbath with Jesus where we experience his love and rest.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." Religious people love to mutter. Religious people have always been a problem for God. But Zacchaeus stood up, but Zacchaeus stood up, and that word but is really important. Here he is surrounded by people who hate him. They're muttering about him. And in the face of all that, but Zacchaeus stood up anyway and said, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, which he has, I will pay back four times the amount."

Now, the law in this case only required the original amount plus one-fifth. So Zacchaeus is going well above and beyond the law. Zacchaeus is being transformed from an oppressor to someone who practices mercy and justice, which is one of those practices that for 2,000 years have helped us experience Jesus and help us become more like him.

And it's going to be the topic for today. And in the weeks ahead we'll talk about some of those other practices, but today it's mercy and justice.

And they're related, but they're different. Mercy is when we help people in need by giving them what they need. So when he says, "I will give half my possessions to the poor," that's mercy. The word justice in the Bible is about restoration. It seeks to restore, same word we were using for Sabbath, it seeks to restore people by repairing systems and patterns that contributed to them being in need in the first place. And this is different than our versions of justice, which often are about retribution or revenge, getting back, getting even.

That's not the kind of justice going on here. Jesus does not allow Zacchaeus to continue to oppress the Israelites, but neither does he allow the Israelites to turn around and oppress Zacchaeus out of anger and revenge. Jesus' form of justice is anti-anybody wrecks everybody, pro-everybody blesses all. Biblical justice is about restoration. So when Zacchaeus says, "I will pay back four times the amount," he's helping to repair an unjust system that he was part of and restore people to what they were before they experienced the injustice.

There was a news story recently about how African Americans were waiting longer for kidney transplants than other groups. Wait times are based on estimated kidney health, which is measured by certain chemicals in the blood. And based on a few studies, that only involved a small number of African Americans, and those studies alleged that those chemicals vary by race. Based on those studies, Black people's test results were adjusted in a way that overestimated their kidney health by 16%, which put them lower down on the wait list.

But those studies were faulty because they had small sample sizes. Well, this was recently discovered. And since then, that biased system has been changed and corrected and they've gone back to recalculate the scores for African Americans. And so far, 14,000 Black people have had their wait times adjusted. That's justice. An unjust racist system has been corrected and there was restoration for the victims of that unjust system.

And participating in mercy and justice changes us to be more like Jesus in several ways. First, it's a command. One in six verses of the New Testament talk about caring for the poor and the marginalized. This is a really high priority for God. Second, it breaks our hearts for what breaks God's heart.

When we get close to people in need who are experiencing some kind of injustice, whether that's elderly people being taken advantage of by various scams, children who are being sex trafficked, racial injustice, predatory loan practices, when we encounter victims of injustice face-to-face, not as categories we have opinions about, not as political

ideas that we vote about, but as people, it softens our hearts and breaks our heart for what breaks God's heart. In other words, it makes our heart more like the heart of Jesus. And I'll give an example in a bit. See, Zacchaeus suddenly starts to see people the way God sees them and his heart starts to shift and become more like the heart of God. Third reason, mercy and justice help us experience Jesus and be more like Jesus is because we get to be part of Jesus healing the world. Jesus gives us the dignity of responsibility. The dignity of responsibility. It's like when you're a little kid and your parents would let you help them do something.

You felt so cool and honored to be able to help them do something, until you became a teenager and then you didn't want to help anymore. But you just felt the dignity of responsibility. Jesus says to us, "Heal the world with me." And when we are part of what Jesus is doing, we experience him and that changes us to be more like him. Fourth, when we practice mercy and justice, we show people what God is really like. Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

And another way to translate the original Greek is see your good deeds and form a right opinion about God. Many people have a wrong opinion about God. The early Christians were the first community in history not just to accept prostitution as the way things are, but to call it injustice to the people trapped in what is more correctly called sexual slavery. And then to advocate for systemic change. In fact, you can trace the spread of Christianity by tracing the legal overturn of sexual slavery.

You can follow the spread of Christianity by just tracing that one metric. What we call foster care was not invented by social service agencies in the 20th century. It was invented by Christians 2,000 years ago. The number of Christians in the United States is in free fall in part because people are starting to see Christians as a problem, not a help in our world. But when we practice the way of Jesus, people see who he really is and they're drawn to him.

And then lastly, mercy and justice transform us because our most profound encounters with Jesus are often in the company of the poor and the marginalized. Did I just turn all purple or something? This point must need special emphasis. That's why. Our most profound encounters with Jesus are often in the company of the poor and the marginalized.

Jesus says this, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me." Jesus is telling us something about where we can find him. Jesus gravitates to people in need

and he says, "If you want to experience me, go where I go." And that's to people in need.

And if we ignore the cries of the poor, isolate ourselves from the loneliness of the elderly, ignore a story because it doesn't match our worldview or our politics, then Jesus says, "You're not going to experience me as much as you otherwise could." Because when we enter the company of the suffering, we are walking into the Holy of Holies. It's the meeting place of God. And we find ourselves getting out of our own problems and our own burdens and our own worries.

This month marks the 30th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda. And as a church, we have been involved in Rwanda for 20 years. And some of you were here when we built a center for street kids in Rwanda to give them an education, job skills, get them off the streets and into a new life, and introduce them to Jesus. Over a thousand kids have been helped by that center that we built. And a long time ago, I told you about the night before that center was opened. And I was there with others from our church as they were putting the kids on the bus to go to the center.

And these kids were so excited because we'd given them a toothbrush, something they never had, and they were going to go sleep in a bed, many of them for the first time in their lives. And they were jumping around and laughing and they were so happy. And I walked through the bus, shook hands with every kid on that bus. They had no idea I was the pastor of the church that had built that center. And after that, I went back to my room that I was staying in and I cried for the next 30 minutes.

Joyful tears, but cried because it was just such a moving experience. And I couldn't stop crying. In fact, my roommate said, "Looks like you need a little alone time," and he left. These kids were so excited because their lives had been changed, and I got to be a part of it and many of you got to be a part of it. And I just kept hearing Jesus saying, "Look what we did, Scott. Look what we did. You, me, people from BelPres, look what we did." I will remember that day until the day I die.

It was one of the top 10 moments of my life. I felt so, so close to Jesus and my heart shifted a little bit to be more like his. And my worries and my problems suddenly seem smaller because I was part of something so much bigger. And I became a little bit more like Jesus. When we practice mercy and justice, we experience him. And like anything we practice over and over, it starts to become part of us, muscle memory, like riding a bike. And it's not about doing it perfectly. These are practices.

We don't have to do it perfectly. We just practice the way of Jesus, which draws us closer to him and changes us to be like him. So action step for this week. First, look for opportunities to practice mercy and justice. We have lots in this church. Jubilee REACH,

which helps families get out of poverty. East Side Academy, alternative high school for kids who need that. Auto Angels, that repairs cars for people in need. Refugee Resettlement, maybe it's just to invite an immigrant into your home for dinner to make them feel welcome and to make them feel like they know someone in this country.

Maybe at your school or workplace or neighborhood, people of color or the elderly or kids with special needs, maybe they're not being treated fairly. What can you do to create a more just system there. I mean, Zacchaeus couldn't change the Roman tax structure, he didn't have that kind of power, but he could change it in his sphere of influence. What can you do? Second action step, get baptized on April 28th and be sure to be here for baptism Sunday. Just like we did last year, we'll be baptizing people of all ages, kids, adults, grandparents by immersion.

And now you might be thinking, "What? What's baptism have to do with mercy and justice?" Everything. This sermon series is about how we are transformed. And like all the other practices we're going to talk about in the weeks ahead, if mercy and justice aren't coming from a heart that is being transformed by Jesus, then it's going to turn into us being preachy or virtue signaling or burnout or feeling superior to others because we practice mercy and justice and you guys know.

We'll get all smug and superior about it. In fact, survey after survey, when asked the question, do you think you are more compassionate than the majority of people, 80 to 90% of Americans say yes. 80 to 90% of Americans say they are more compassionate than the majority of people, which also means 80 to 90% of Americans can't do math, right? We can't practice mercy and justice without becoming smug and self-righteous, unless it comes from a heart that's being transformed by Jesus.

So maybe you've been baptized before, but you're at a place in your life where you really want to be transformed by Jesus. Maybe you've been baptized before, but you're in this new place spiritually where you really want to be transformed. Get baptized on the 28th as a way of reaffirming your baptism and saying publicly to yourself and to God, "This matters to me. I want to be more like Jesus." Or maybe you have been baptized and you are also wanting to be transformed.

Same thing. Get baptized on the 28th as a step toward transformation. You can sign up for that on our web page, the home page under the what's happening section. Click on the baptism banner. And if you're not going to be baptized, be here anyway to worship God and encourage the people who will be baptized. This is a team sport. We need community. Pastor Tyler Staten tells a story of a friend of his named Sarah who started reading the Bible together with another friend of hers from their church.

And they made the radical decision to actually do what Jesus did, like to actually put it into practice. And she noticed how regularly Jesus ate with the poor and she never did. And she thought, how can I become like Jesus if I avoid hanging out with the people that Jesus tended to hang out with? So she decided that every day she'd eat her lunch with a group of unhoused people that were always on the same street corner. She'd eat her lunch with them every day. She started doing that, ended up being really good friends with these people.

Well, that got her on a slippery slope and she sort of liked it. And so a few years later, she moved on purpose to one of the poorest neighborhoods in the country, South Bronx, and started having family dinners every Monday night. And it's packed with all kinds of people, a grandmother who has lived on that block ever since she immigrated from Guatemala, a recently released prisoner trying to put his life back together, single mother who spoke no English, but came every week because it was one of the few hot meals in a week her kids would get.

And there are kids running around and people are playing games and there's lots of laughing and there's lots of joking. She does that every Monday. She also uses her connections to help these same people get jobs. And then eventually she started a group that provides adult companions for kids all the way from birth through graduation. Just an adult companion who's there to help them with their homework, someone they can talk to about their problems.

Because research shows that kids who have more than one caring adult in their life do way better in school, way less anxiety, way less depression. And this program is having unbelievable success. That's mercy. It's also justice. She's repairing something that's broken, a lack of caring adults in kids' lives, especially from under-resourced neighborhoods. And she loves it. She keeps doing it not because out of obligation, she loves it. She's not miserable. She's seeing God change her life.

She's got laughter and friendship and community all around her. She's becoming more like Jesus. Now, how you practice mercy and justice may be different than how Sarah did it. But how can you? How can you out of Sabbath with Jesus, not duty, guilt, or obligation, out of Sabbath with Jesus, how can you give some of the love away that he gives to you so that you experience him more, so that your heart becomes more like his, and you care about the things that he cares about?

And so that you and I and together as a whole church become more like Jesus, filled with his love, walking in his joy, participating together in healing the world more than enough with plenty left over. That's what Jesus longs to give us. So Lord, thank you that you give us the dignity of responsibility. And thank you that when we follow it, we experience you.



Lord, this week, give us eyes to see the ways that we can give your love away through acts of mercy and justice at school, at work, at home, neighborhood.

Lord, show us the opportunities we have. And then, Lord, when we step into those, help us to see you in them. Help us to experience you because we want to be like you, Lord. Our culture pushes so hard against us. But Jesus, we want to be like you, so help us to follow you where you lead and experience you in a way that changes us to look more and more like you. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

### **Discussion Questions:**

---

*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures):

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Why do you think Zacchaeus responded so quickly to Jesus?
- What strikes you as significant about the promises Zacchaeus makes after he encounters Jesus?
- What does this story teach us about Jesus? What does it teach you about you?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.