

Commentary — From the Margins

The Repentance of Zacchaeus

And when Jesus came to the place [the sycamore tree Zacchaeus had climbed], he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they [the Pharisees and the crowd following Jesus] saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:5-10)

Salvation did not come to the house of Zacchaeus until after he pledged to give half of his wealth to the poor and to restore fourfold anyone he had defrauded ... the Son of Man did not come for the ones who possessed the promise of eternal life, but came to the lost.

The Apostle Paul writes that death reigned from Adam to Moses (Rom 5:14), not Christ Jesus. Death reigned because the world had not received the promise of salvation, of inheriting eternal life. But with Moses came that promise of inheriting life, a promise given to the mixed circumcised and uncircumcised nation of Israel on the plains of Moab when God set before the nation life and death (Deut 30:15-20), with the promise of circumcision of the heart (*v.* 6) coming through the faith required to return to God in love and obedience when in a far land (*vv.* 1-2). Spiritual circumcision is a euphemistic expression for having the laws of God written on the heart and placed in the mind by the divine Breath of God, with this circumcision requiring that the heart be cleansed by faith. Therefore, because the promise of life had come through the second covenant mediated by Moses, Israel should not have been a nation of lost sheep, but a nation that had all received the promise of inheriting life.

But Israel was a nation lost. And the Son of Man came to recover the lost—Jesus sends the Twelve to the lost sheep of the house Israel (Matt 10:5-6), which is not to the descendants of the northern kingdom that had by this time been in dispersion for nearly seven centuries. Rather, He instructs the Twelve to go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but to go throughout Israel, which from God’s perspective had been reduced in size to the city of Jerusalem prior to Israel’s exile to Babylon (Ezek 12:9-10, 19, 22-27). Upon the exiles’ return, the house of Israel was the land ruled by the Hasmonean dynasty prior to the reign of Herod. The Twelve did not go to the steppes of Russia or to Afghanistan or to whatever other lands in which the descendants of

the former northern kingdom then dwelt. They returned much too soon to have traveled beyond the Black Sea.

Luke records that at Nazareth, Jesus read from Isaiah about proclaiming the gospel to the poor and liberty to the captives, then said that in the drought of Ahab there were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was sent to Zarephath and to a widow woman of Sidon; that in the time of Elisha, only Naaman the Syrian was cleansed of leprosy (4:16-27). He reminded the synagogue that neither Elijah nor Elisha was sent to Israel, but to foreigners, the lost of this world. And the town brought Him to the brow of the hill to throw Him down the cliff such was its anger at Jesus not performing the miracles there that He had at Capernaum, then declaring them strangers in their own land.

Miracles were the means by which God identified Jesus to those who did not know Him. Because the synagogue at Nazareth recognized Jesus as Joseph's son, Jesus could do no miracles there. They did not receive Him as the Son of God.

Jesus, however, did not come to do miracles but to save the lost, with *the lost* including all who had not received the promise of salvation. ... As chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, a son of Abraham, was among the lost: he had made himself a stranger to the covenants of promise. He was a friend of the Emperor, a tool used by Rome to collect an odious tax, a sinner by trade. And like all sinners, he was an alien in the land of Israel. Regardless of physical ancestry, under Moses sinners had no part in the inheritance of Israel, the promise of inheriting eternal life.

Jesus, the only Son of *Theos* (John 3:16) and the Creator of all that is (John 1:3), came to His own, the nation He had married at Sinai (Ex 19:5-6), but His own would not receive Him (John 1:11). The synagogue at Nazareth received Him as the carpenter's son, and the religious leaders of Israel received Him as a bastard. Zacchaeus, though, was eager to receive Him into his house when Jesus said that He must stay with him.

Under the second covenant mediated by Moses (Deut chaps 29-32), sin would send Israel into captivity, and continued sin would prevent Israel from receiving the promise of inheriting eternal life. Although a means was given to Israel by which the nation could cover its sins, the blood of Israel's sin offerings was as the blood of a menstruating woman [menstruation comes when the promise of life is sloughed away]. So as a righteous man abstains from relations with his menstruating wife (Ezek 18:6), God abstained from bringing forth His Seed from sinful Israel until Mary, blessed because of her faith, received the only Son of *Theos* in her womb ... receiving Jesus as the recognized Son of God is central to the righteousness that comes by faith, and to salvation.

Although the Law of Moses contained covenants of promise (Eph 2:12) from which *the nations* [Gentiles or the Uncircumcised] were excluded as long as the marriage made at Sinai was not broken by death, Israel had by its sins excluded itself from these same covenants despite their existence being known to Israel. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23); thus, sinful Israel was a nation separated from God by its death. Through its lawlessness, Israel made itself into a nation of lost sheep.

On two specific occasions, Luke records Jesus addressing the question of what must be done to achieve salvation, to escape death, for the lost to be found. A lawyer, testing Jesus (Luke 10:25), asked what must he do to inherit eternal life—what must he do to be saved, or to be under the covenants of promise. Jesus asked the lawyer how he read the law, for salvation can be found in the law if obedience to the law is pursued by faith rather than by the works of the hands (Rom 9:31-32). Yes, contrary to what most of Christendom teaches, the law leads to salvation if Israel, when in a far land, returns to God and to obedience, keeping all that is written in Deuteronomy (Deut 30:10). Thus, the lawyer, citing from Deuteronomy, answered correctly the question about how he read the law. And if he had applied what he knew the law required, he would have achieved salvation (Luke 10:28). But he had a problem with loving his neighbor, a problem that prevented an affirmation that salvation had come to the lawyer. So the lawyer, who should not have needed being found, remained numbered among the lost.

A rich young ruler asked the same question the lawyer asked: what must he do to inherit eternal life (Luke 18:18). Jesus told the ruler that he knew the commandments, and Jesus cites enough of them that there is no doubt about which commandments He referenced (*v.* 20). The young ruler assured Jesus that he had kept the commandments since his youth (*v.* 21). Jesus said there was one more thing that the young ruler lacked: the ruler should sell all he had, give the money to the poor, and follow Jesus (*v.* 22) ... following Jesus requires the person to pull up the stake that tethers the person to this world. Following Jesus prevents the person from seeking the things of this world: wealth, houses, families, even funeral plots (Luke 9:57-62). The cost of being found is rejection of this world. And the rich young ruler could not reject this world, for his possessions apparently were evidence to him of his righteousness.

Being found when lost requires the person to leave behind the material clutter that hides the person from God. As seen in the case of Zacchaeus who voluntarily pledged to give half of all he possessed to the poor and to restore fourfold all who claimed he had defrauded them, the tether of wealth was broken. Zacchaeus received an affirmation that salvation had come to his house; for the law that the lawyer could cite and that the rich young ruler claimed he had kept requires that love be applied with faith. Jesus told the Pharisees that none of them kept the law (John 7:19), for the Pharisees did not share their bread with the hungry or invite the homeless poor into their houses or clothe the naked (Isa 58:7, 10).

Note: before Zacchaeus actually received Jesus, Zacchaeus pledged to give to the poor and to restore those he wronged.

Zacchaeus does not deny that he was a sinner, or that he had defrauded others. He does not seek to justify himself or his past behavior. Rather, he is like the tax collector in the parable Jesus had only shortly before told:

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt” “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust,

adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who is humbled will be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14).

When the Pharisee in the parable justified himself, he said he fasted twice a week, but what sort of a fast did he undertake? Fasts like those condemned by God? Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said, “Cry aloud; do not hold back; / lift up your voice like a trumpet; / declare to my people their transgression, / to the house of Jacob their sins. / Yet they seek me daily / and delight to know my ways, / as if they were a nation that did righteousness / and did not forsake the judgment of their God; / they ask of me righteous judgments; / they delight to draw near to God. “Why have we fasted, and you see it not? / Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?”” (58:1-3).

Why, indeed, did God not hear Israel? Why had He not been impressed with the nation’s fasts? And why would He not be impressed that the Pharisee fasted twice a week?

God does not hear those who humble themselves to manipulate Him—and this is the reason most of Israel, natural and spiritual, fasts. Israel wants to get something from God: salvation, deliverance from an enemy, physical health, material possessions. God does not see the nation that fasts to seek its own desires, its own wants, its own pleasures, while oppressing widows and orphans, the poor and the needy. Rather, He sees the sinner who understands that, indeed, he or she falls short of being righteous. He hears the pleas of the lost that cry out to Him about the transgressions committed in Israel.

Although provision was made for Israel’s sins through added animal sacrifices, no sin should ever have been committed in Israel, let alone the rampage of sin that sent the northern kingdom of Samaria into Assyrian captivity (ca 721 BCE) and the southern kingdom of Judah into Babylonian captivity (ca 586 BCE).

Even though Israel sought God daily and professed delight in knowing His ways as if the nation were truly righteous, the nation fasted “to quarrel and to fight / and to hit with a wicked fist” (Isa 58:4) — and the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable was a man of Israel, well taught in how to oppress the homeless, to shackle them to bonds of wickedness with the yoke of poverty so that a man stole to feed his starving children; so that one like Zacchaeus defrauded others in the name of Rome while Pharisees defrauded in the name of God.

It was the tax collector who went down from the temple justified, not the one who tithed mint and cumin and all he had; for paying the tithe was the reasonable expectation of all Israel. Keeping the commandments is the reasonable expectation of all who claim to be Israel. And only when a person goes beyond what is expected does the person break his or her bonds of servitude to this world. Zacchaeus went beyond what was expected when he pledged to give

half of all he had to the poor and to repay fourfold whoever brought a claim of fraud against him.

The Pharisee who fasted twice a week loosed no bond of servitude to sin when he thanked God he was not like the tax collector, a man who understood that he was a sinner before God. Zacchaeus, by pledging to repay fourfold any who accused him of fraud, acknowledged that he was a sinner. He placed himself at the mercy of those who would be his accusers. Yes, Zacchaeus placed himself at the mercy of his enemies; he put himself into the hands of those who could rightly or wrongly accuse him of fraud. He offered no defense. He sought no special consideration. He did not seek to negotiate downward his pledge to repay; he did not seek to protect himself from exploitation. Rather, he trusted God to protect him with at least as much faith as he had previously trusted Roman soldiers to protect him when he was extorting tax moneys.

In Luke's gospel, the lawyer, the rich young ruler, and Zacchaeus form models for discussion of salvation coming to the firstfruits, the early barley harvest; whereas the two thieves crucified with Christ form the model for salvation in the great White Throne Judgment, the maincrop wheat harvest. In the cases of the lawyer and the young ruler, the requirement for salvation was plainly stated by Jesus, but neither wanted it enough to pluck it from the tree of life. Neither could make the journey of faith necessary to cleanse their hearts. Zacchaeus, however, made a journey of faith when he climbed into the sycamore tree, then climbed down; so that when he stood before Jesus, condemned by those in the crowd, he pledged without prompting to do what was right to the best of his ability—if he would have given all of his goods to the poor, he would have nothing from which he could restore fourfold what he had taken fraudulently. Thus, the textual assumption is that after giving to the poor and restoring what he had taken, Zacchaeus will have nothing but salvation. He will have given all he had in this world for everlasting life.

Jesus' first disciples left all they had to follow Jesus, what Jesus asked of the rich young ruler—and herein is a problem that has confounded Christendom: since following Jesus costs the person all he or she has in this world, the person with much has great difficulty in entering the kingdom of God, and for the person who is physically minded or whose mind is set on the things of flesh entrance as part of the harvest of firstfruits is impossible, as it is for the person involved in the governance of this world. Therefore, physical things and their pursuit form a schism that separates genuine disciples from false, and those who are spiritually circumcised from those who are not. Only occasionally will someone tethered by wealth and power to this world pull up the stake that hinders him or her from following Jesus: Zacchaeus is such an individual. Thus, Zacchaeus forms an acceptable model for repentance, which is more than merely feeling bad about a personal failure of integrity. It is doing something about the person's wrongful behavior other than justifying oneself. It is receiving Jesus as the Son of God when He knocks (Rev 3:20).

Zacchaeus is long removed from the 21st-Century. Situations are not the same as they then were, or so some will argue. Cultures change; values change; societal

expectations change. But God does not change, and the criterion by which salvation comes remains unchanged. And once in a while, endtime disciples will encounter situations that are directly analogous to Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and the publican [tax collector], with Zacchaeus representing the tax collector.

Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord [*YHWH*] says that the person who is righteous “does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge” (18:7); the person who is righteous does as Zacchaeus did, the reason why Jesus said that salvation had come to his house.

There has recently been a case in the Port Austin area where one man, Norman Scott Edwards, who claims to be the brother of another, Terry Monte Williams, acknowledged in writing that he owed the other \$85,140.00. These moneys represented William's life savings, but Edwards would not repay Williams what he had acknowledged that he owed. He sought the help of other disciples to mediate between them, and he began to claim that the moneys advanced were contributions to his ministry that he did not have to repay. He would not do what Zacchaeus did: offer to repay fourfold what he had taken by fraudulent means. He would not even repay what he acknowledged he owed. As a result, the matter ended up in civil court where the judge, before any evidence was entered into the record, compelled in a pretrial settlement agreement that Edwards repay to Williams about half of what Edwards had publicly acknowledged owing Williams. The settlement agreement was based upon ability to repay, not upon justice.

If Zacchaeus had pledged to give all he had to the poor, the ones he defrauded would not have received justice. Zacchaeus would have doubly wronged them, for he would have given their moneys to the poor. Justice would not have been served.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? ... And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ... Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?” (1 Co 6:1-6). And with his words, Paul introduces a dilemma within the Church: who is an unbeliever, and who is a brother? The judge who mediated the settlement agreement would not have identified himself as an unbeliever—no, indeed, for he comes from generations of Roman Catholics—but he is not a Sabbatarian disciple of Christ Jesus, and probably doesn't want to become one because of what Sabbatarian Christendom now represents in the Port Austin area. He certainly will question whether Edwards is a Christian, for Edwards objected to an extension so that Williams' attorney could bury his 95 year old father, a pillar in a local Methodist congregation.

Paul writes further: “To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!” (1 Co 6:7-8). Williams no longer recognizes Edwards as his brother. And here is the question

that must be addressed: is everyone who claims to be a Christian every other Christian's brother? Is the Roman Catholic who persecuted a follower of Martin Luther his brother, or is the Lutheran who persecuted the followers of Menno Simons their brother, or are the Mennonites who shun Sabbatarian disciples their brothers, or is the Seventh Day Adventist who will have nothing to do with a follower of Herbert Armstrong his brother, or is an Armstrongite the brother of a [Philadelphian](#)? At what point does a "Christian" cease being the brother of another "Christian"? At what point does a *Believer* become a non-Believer?

A situation exists within Christendom that did not exist in the 1st-Century: nearly a third of the world self-identifies itself as Christian. And all who claim to be Christian cannot be what they claim, for the Body of Christ is not divided, and righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness.

A standard needs to be reaffirmed about who is or isn't a Believer.

The lawyer who asked what he must do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25) had no love for anyone unlike himself. This lawyer knew the law, and probably outwardly practiced what the law seemed to require. But without faith and love, the law could not be fulfilled. And the lawyer was short on love. Thus, the disciple who knows the law and who outwardly keeps the law has no assurance of salvation unless this disciple also manifests love of the type the Good Samaritan displayed. Therefore, being a Sabbatarian disciple is not an assurance of salvation, for the lawyer would have been a good Sabbatarian, as would have been the rich, young ruler.

Note the above: even though a person attends with a Sabbatarian fellowship and professes to keep the commandments of God, the person is not automatically the brother of every other Sabbatarian disciple although all who claim to be Believers should be the brothers of one another. The reality of endtime Christendom falls far short of the ideal.

Following Christ is more than professing that Jesus is Lord: following Christ is walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), which will place the person in conflict with the religious leaders of today; which will have the person living as Judean, keeping the Sabbaths of God, abstaining from all things offered to idols (especially unclean meats), not pursuing the wealth of this world, seeking neither power nor prestige nor photo-ops with politicians and presidents. Following Christ means keeping the commandments, means believing God, means separating oneself from this world. Following Christ means receiving Jesus into the tent of flesh in which the born-of-Spirit son of God dwells. And the rich young ruler lacked the faith to give away all he had and follow Christ, but this rich young ruler is not alone: most of self-identified Christendom does not follow Christ, and will not be ruled by Christ, but are numbered among the lost. Most of Sabbatarian Christendom will not receive Jesus into hearts and minds, but runs as fast and as far as it can from the expression of *inviting Jesus into one's heart*. Thus, Moses stands even today as the accuser of all Christians.

It is to Zacchaeus that disciples must go to find the promise of salvation ... no secular judge, no disciple mediating between two parties should ever have to decide a matter for Believers, because the Believer will offer to repay the one he

has either innocently or deliberately defrauded. The Believer, after the manner of Zacchaeus, will not dispute about the amount, but will acknowledge the debt. If unable to repay, he or she will, in good faith, seek terms to repay the other whatever the other claims. The Believer will not seek a reduction in the amount owed—reducing the amount is entirely the prerogative of the one owed the moneys or objects.

The non-Believer will attempt to avoid repayment of an amount owed. He or she will deny that the amount is correct, or haggle over the amount, or make many claims as to why he or she should not be required to repay. For example, in the Port Austin affair, Edwards acknowledged in writing that he owed Williams \$85,140.00, but when he couldn't or wouldn't repay, he began telling all who would listen that these moneys were donations to his ministry, a school that allegedly exists to educate Sabbatarian youth through mentoring programs. But he stole the idea of a school from Williams—he stole from Williams more than merely his life savings. He stole hope and dreams and years from Williams, who determined that no thief was his brother. With a few pen strokes Edwards figuratively gutted Williams when he filed a revised Purchasing Agreement over the top of the one that four men had signed as trustees—the revised Purchasing Agreement is signed by only one trustee, and is supported by a trust indenture filed at the same time that has only one trustee, Edwards. The other three men [Williams, Philip Frankford, and Paul Drieman] were written into non-existence without their permission or knowledge. And Williams had made \$85,140 in payments for real property in which he no longer had an interest under the revised Purchasing Agreement.

Zacchaeus might well have been a person who would have filed a revised Purchasing Agreement to defraud another, but when salvation came to his house, he pledged to restore fourfold what he had obtained wrongfully. By extension, salvation does not come to one who will not restore to another what has been taken by fraud.

If Zacchaeus is a valid model for how salvation comes to sinners through receiving Jesus into the house [tent of flesh in which a disciple dwells] of a son of Abraham, then determination of who is or isn't a brother comes from applying Zacchaeus' repentance and faith to the situation at hand; for few called-out-ones will be as deeply invested in the things of this world as Zacchaeus was. Few disciples will have as much to lose as Zacchaeus had; nor will any gain more than Zacchaeus gained.

Therefore, let it here be stated that the example of Zacchaeus was not unknown to Edwards, nor is it unknown to any who call themselves Christians; so when questions emerge about who is or isn't a brother regarding taking another to court, the one who is not a brother will not do what Zacchaeus did but will be like Edwards, who is here named as false as the Apostle Paul named Phygelus and Hermogenes, and John named Diotrephes.

Situations will develop when one disciple cannot repay another with the wealth of this world. In these situations, attitude becomes everything. The one who acknowledges the obligation and strives diligently to restore what is owed is

genuine; whereas the one who seeks relief from the obligation is of the world. Concerning the one who would restore if he or she could, it becomes the responsibility of the disciple owed the obligation to decide whether to retain the obligation or release it, with the model of this seen in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:21-35).

How then is justice best served? How would love be best demonstrated? Is it not through naming false shepherds, false teachers, and all thieves and con-men?

The lost who do not today receive Jesus include the judge who will not walk as Jesus walked, as well as the attorney who spent the Sabbath deer hunting. They are as the synagogue at Nazareth was: they recognize Jesus as the one who died on the cross at Calvary, but not as their actual elder brother whom they are to imitate as the Apostle Paul tells the saints at Philippi to imitate him (3:17). Therefore, Jesus can do no work among them—they have not received Him as the Son of God, but as part of a triune deity.

The Pharisee in Jesus' parable thanked God that he was not like other men, extortioners, unjust ... the sons of disobedience are unjust; they are adulterers; and they do not claim to be born of Spirit as sons of God. They do not claim to be Israel, the firstborn son of God, a holy nation that was not before a people (1 Pet 2:9-10). They do not claim to be righteous or to be able to educate the youth of Sabbatarian disciples. They claim only those things that pertain to the flesh, to the lust of the eyes and to a pride of possessions. They do not pretend to keep the commandments of God. And their judgment remains with God (1 Co 5:13).

But disciples are able to judge between disciples; they have been given that authority (John 20:23). And when, according to the judgment of genuine disciples, the sins of one who claims to be a disciple are retained by those who are genuine, these sins are retained by God. They will not be forgiven.

The sins of the one who is like Zacchaeus shall not be retained, but shall be forgiven by genuine disciples for Jesus, Himself, promised Zacchaeus salvation. But the sins of the one claiming to be a brother but who will not bring forth fruit worthy of repentance shall be retained, and if necessary, published ... Paul does not name all who left him in Asia (2 Tim 1:15), but only two, those who would deceive others. Thus, in showing love to all who are genuine, the ones who would deceive many shall be named.

The angel told John to *let the evildoer still do evil ... and the righteous still do right* (Rev 22:11). In this world, disciples are sojourners who do not possess good things, but rather experience trials and hardships, including losing life savings. Through Ezekiel the Lord tells Israel what it means to be righteous—and it means committing no robbery (18:7), for thievery whether with a knife or gun or by deceit is the same before God. ...The righteous person gives bread to the hungry and covers the nakedness of another. He or she does not lend at interest (does not breed money as if money were livestock), nor take a profit from another's misfortunes. The righteous person does not withhold his hand from injustice, but executes true justice between one person and another (v. 8); he or she walks in God's statutes and keeps His rules by acting faithfully (v. 9). This is the person who shall surely live. This person will not experience the second death, but will

enter into heaven. And this person lives by a much higher standard than does either visible Christendom, or Sabbatarian disciples who are not troubled by one who publicly acknowledged owing another \$85,140 settling this debt for half that amount in civil court.

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