



What Is Repentance?

“Now turn from your sins and turn to God, so you can be cleansed of your sins.”
(Acts 3:19, NLT)

“What a repentance (change of thinking) story I have! My name is Zacchaeus. I’m just a little short Jewish guy, but my job affects every man, woman and child in the city of Jericho. I am the chief tax collector, a job that has made me very rich. Not only do I collect taxes for the Romans, but also I charge extra and put the money in my pocket. Oh, how my fellow Jews hate me! They call me a “traitor” and a “sinner” for cheating them and for working for the hated Romans who have taken over our country. Yes, I’m rich, but I’m miserable! How would you feel if everyone hated you? Deep down I know I have betrayed my own people. I did not know it, but I was about to experience a miracle!

Exciting news

“Word had spread quickly that day. Jesus, the miracle worker, was on his way to Jericho! I joined the noisy excited crowd, pushing and shoving, trying to find a place where I could see. But I was too short and couldn’t see over the crowds. So I ran ahead, and when I saw a sycamore tree, I quickly climbed it. What a perfect spot it turned out to be!

A divine appointment

“I could see Jesus coming down the road. He came closer and closer until he was right under the tree! My mouth dropped open, and I almost swallowed a fly when he stopped, looked up and said: ‘Zacchaeus! Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.’ (Luke 19:5b, NLT) I could not believe it. Jesus knew my name! (Although Zacchaeus didn’t know it, Jesus knew everything about him – his sin, the hatred and rejection by his people, and his unhappiness.) I’ve never been so excited and full of joy in my life! Jesus was coming to my house! As I scrambled down the tree, I could hear the crowd grumbling, ‘He’s going home to be the guest of a sinner!’ They were right about that.

A miraculous change

“Don’t you wish you could have been a fly on the wall and heard what Jesus and I talked about? Since the Bible is silent about that conversation, I will not tell either, but you can imagine what I needed to hear. I needed to know that Jesus loved and accepted me no matter what I had done and that my sins could be forgiven.

“After talking with Jesus all day, the Holy Spirit caused something wonderful to happen in my heart. I saw the truth about Jesus. I knew the Messiah had come. I understood how sinful I was. I hated my old life, and with all my heart wanted to change. My thinking was so changed I stood up in front of Jesus, looked him in the eye and said, *‘I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!’* (Luke 19:8, NLT) All I could think of was making things right with the people I had wronged – even if it bankrupted me! When Jesus told my story, he explained what happened to me, *‘Salvation has come to this house today.’*” (Luke 19:9a, NLT)

The attitude change

What happened to Zacchaeus to cause him to make such an attitude change in ONE day? He discovered that Jesus (God the Son) loved him, accepted him, and forgave his sins. By coming to his home, Jesus had said to Zacchaeus, “You are a person of value. I accept you. I love you.” In the past Zacchaeus had been running from God, but now he did an about-face, ran towards God and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. What did Zacchaeus do when he repented? He changed his thinking (attitudes) and the direction of his life (actions).

- **Zacchaeus changed his attitude toward God and himself.** You can imagine how easy it had been for him to believe God hated him – everyone else did. The enemy had deceived him into thinking that even God could not forgive his terrible sins. But when he understood that God created him, loved him and forgave him, he received Jesus as his friend, Savior and Lord. Zacchaeus was not just sorry for what he did, or sorry he got caught or sorry because of the consequences. He grieved because he had hurt a holy God who loved him. Jesus said, *“God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* (Matthew 5:4, NLT) Think about it. Have you ever felt grief, not because of something you did or someone you hurt, but because you hurt God?
- **Zacchaeus changed his attitude about sin in his life.** (See “What Is Sin?”) He hated what he had done. He had broken God’s law by stealing from his people. Sin had caused broken relationships. Money had become his “god.” He grieved with heartfelt sorrow. When he recognized what a heart of sin he had in God’s sight, he deliberately decided to change and to live a holy life. What about you? Do you need to change your thinking about something you are doing and bring your actions in line with God’s will?
- **Zacchaeus changed his attitude about how to be saved.** Zacchaeus recognized there was nothing he could do to save himself. Only God could save him when he believed in Jesus. The Bible says, *“God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9, NLT) If you are a believer, do you daily thank God for that eternal gift?
- **Zacchaeus changed his attitude toward others.** He was willing to give up his riches in order to make things right with those he had wronged. Only God’s love in his heart could have made such an attitude change. Is the Holy Spirit convicting you that you need to make things right with someone? No matter what the cost, how willing are you?

- **Zacchaeus changed his attitude toward things.** He no longer cared about money and possessions for himself. He loved Jesus and out of an attitude of gratitude wanted to please him by obeying his commands.

True repentance results in changed thinking and a changed life. Although Zacchaeus is never mentioned in the Bible again, his story teaches a great lesson about repentance. Although an infant Christian, he learned much that day with Jesus. However, you can be sure that Zacchaeus failed at times, just as you will fail. When you fail, agree with God that you failed and trust the Holy Spirit to change your thinking, your speech and your actions. You, too, can experience a miracle. **Each day can make a difference!**

Attitude Check:

- Which of the above attitudes have changed because the Holy Spirit worked in your heart?

Explore:

- Read, “Place Christ before All Else” (Philippians 3:4-8) and “Our Lives Should Show That God Is at Work in Our Hearts” (Romans 7:4)
- Record in your journal one new thing you learned about Jesus and one new attitude that has changed since you met Jesus.

Talking with God:

- Father, just as you met Zacchaeus where he was in life, meet me and teach me that I might have your attitudes.