

Broken Chains

Part 1

My name is Mannele. I write this letter today to tell you what really happened to me. My life was drastically changed by a savior, but it will soon end. Though losing my life may sound tragic, it will be a blessing to me because I will be reunited with my Lord. So, to tell my tale I will begin with the sad truth of my old life.

My name means “comforter.” It sounds nice and all, but I did not live up to my name. I thieved from innocent Jews, was hated by all, and named a traitor. From the way I was treated, most would think me a murderer and criminal, but I was just a simple tax collector who liked to keep a few extra coins for myself. In hindsight, I now realize my selfishness.

My life thrived on routine. I woke at the crack of dawn every morning, checked what taxes I needed to collect, put on my plain robes, and set out to steal from pestered peoples. I enjoyed the routine in my life. It made me feel stable and organized, yet I knew my life was in shambles. I constantly worried about the questions of life.

“What is my purpose? Why am I here? Will *anybody* ever love me?”

My first resort was to occasionally go to the temple and quietly pray to myself while egotistic, affluent men prayed loud prayers in front of the crowds. The temple itself offered little consolation, only the hope that there was a God who *might* love me.

I sought peace in my life. Since “religion” didn’t seem to help me, I fell onto what my small sum of coins could get me. I bought silk robes, expensive foods, and women to satisfy my desires, but after about a month of these luxuries, I discovered that these things fade away like chaff in the wind. My idea was pitiful, and I was left to simply continue work and routine.

The drab days passed by like tales through towns. They flew by, but I didn't look back to account for the hours I wasted. Nothing excited me, nothing tore me down, and I was left in a continuous state of work. Collecting taxes was the only thing in my life that occupied my time other than sleeping and eating. My consistent work ethic allowed me to rise above other tax collectors, and after two years I had become a wealthy publican (one who employed other tax collectors for the Roman government). In the boredom of all my success, I bought a large house with a vineyard and retained twelve slaves. Due to my new role, I created a new routine. Every morning, I woke up when the sun crept through my window to bring warmth to my sealed eyes, put on beige robes with blue stripes, told my slaves what I expected them to do that day, and set out to tour Jerusalem. I generally searched the city to amuse my weary soul.

In my time studying the city, my curiosity grew. As my curiosity grew, the reach of my wealth also grew. So, one day, I decided I should also peruse Jericho. The neighboring town caught my attention when I heard of the rich tax collector named Zacchaeus. Little did I know that Zacchaeus' prestige would alter my eternity.

Part 2

I awoke early one spring morning. I heard the wind jostle through the streets, and felt the slothful sun slowly begin to rise. I felt excitement run through my veins. It was the first time in years that I had felt, well, anything. My provisions were hastily packed, my clothes quickly put on, and my journey earnestly set.

It takes about eight hours to walk to Jericho, so I searched for any form of entertainment. I first found pleasure in throwing pebbles along the road, but soon stopped after I realized that passerbyers disliked my amusement. Thus, I tried to enjoy the scenery that spanned from lush, green lands to desolate deserts. However, I was rudely interrupted by a small, over-ecstatic man.

He ran up to me and shouted, almost spitting, “Have you heard? He will be here! In Jericho!”

With the little self control I had, I calmly responded through gritted teeth, “Who?”

“Jesus! The man who can save us from the Romans!” he replied.

He then continued to run down the road, never slowing for air or rest. His words left me in wonderment.

“Who is this man that could defeat Rome? How large must his armies be?”

I feared because I was employed by the Roman government and my job was the only secure thing in my life. Despite these things, I was still anxious to trek the city that lay before me.

I soon reached Jericho and hurried through its massive walls, to avoid the lepers, into crowded streets. I wandered around markets, enjoying the sights and smells of crisp breads that steamed pleasure, and ripe fruits whose vibrant colors shone amongst the food stands. After I became tired of the pleasantries, I left to find a place to stay for the night.

I found a small apartment to stay in. The owner was very kind and made sure that I had no difficulties in my time there. However, in my need for consistency, I persisted routine even out of my house. In the morning, I rose at daybreak, put on my robes, and then proceeded to tell myself what I had to do that day for my slaves were not with me. I intended to find Zacchaeus, tour the streets till about lunch, and then head back to Jerusalem as quickly as possible.

The first person I encountered that morning was a beggar wailing for help, but I continued to walk because I had worked hard for my money. I entered a large street, and the ground began to shake. Then, a crowd so large and boisterous, stampeded over a hill about thirty steps away from me and appeared like an ambitious army, ready to trample anybody in the way. The side of the street welcomed me into its circle of safety. The unruly crowd continued to surge by, and I began

to see whom the people tried to reach, but I was quickly distracted by a short man who was climbing a sycamore tree across the street from me. He appeared of a prosperous, influential position, and I pondered why he would climb a tree.

Then I heard a voice call out among the crowds.

“Zacchaeus!” he yelled. “Come down from that tree, for I must be a guest in your home today!”

I couldn't believe my luck! The opportunity to meet Zacchaeus was practically given to me. Then, the man who called out to Zacchaeus turned, and I saw him between the multitude of people that separated us. He smiled, and it seemed as though time slowed down, peace poured down on me like rain, and the anxieties of life were washed away. I instantly vowed to meet this man, so I pushed and shoved through the crowd with no remorse, but I found Zacchaeus instead. I was slightly content with that.

I quickly introduced myself. “Zacchaeus, I am Mannele, the publican of Jerusalem. Who is this man that you intend to dine with?”

“I am honored to meet you Mannele. Have you not heard? Have you not seen? He is Jesus! I have ambitiously worked to meet him. He loves the beggars, the thieves, the lepers, and even a tax collector like me! For any other man, I would say, ‘What is special about your name?’, but for him, I can truly say there is power in the name of Jesus!”

I was left astonished and speechless. How could anybody love a beggar? How could anybody love a leper? How could *anybody* love me?

Part 3

Zacchaeus invited me to the feast he prepared for Jesus. Pharisees bickered outside, but I focused intently on Jesus. That meal was the focal point of my life. My whole life began to change, but I didn't know yet. I just simply listened and then followed him after the meal. To my benefit, he was heading to Jerusalem also. There, I was able to witness parables, miracles, and a society transformed.

Before long, it was time for the Passover. People flooded into Jerusalem by the thousands, and I returned home. How can I describe home? The word itself makes me feel warm, safe, comforted, and at peace. As nice as it was to return to my welcoming abode, I soon realized that I felt no peace or happiness. I was left longing for something. I pondered for hours what my issue was. Like an epiphany, I realized what was wrong. That peace and comfort I cherished in my home, was now not in my house, but in Jesus!

I ran through the streets searching for Jesus as light began to peak above the horizon. To my dismay, I discovered that Jesus had been betrayed, taken, and the crowds now cheered for his crucifixion. As the sun rose, my heart sank, and my life collapsed into misery.

I was so disillusioned from life that I struggled to walk. I made my way to Calvary, and at around nine in the morning, I watched Jesus hang on a cross. As blood poured down Jesus' body, tears streamed down my filthy, dirt-covered face. The only person to ever *love* a tax collector like me was doomed to death.

I went back to my "home" before he died. When I was entering, a sound like death blasted my ear drums. The sky tore itself apart, and the rocks that covered the ground shook and broke apart. In all the chaos, I knew Jesus had just died.

Three days passed.

Part 4

I expect you know the story. The Romans said that Jesus' resurrection was faked, but that's not what really happened. Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples. I wasn't there to witness that. However, Jesus appeared to 500, and I was blessed to see Jesus during this occasion. I left my life as a tax collector and my routine and became a devoted follower of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I was baptized and gave away all my possessions. The church accepted me; a former tax collector! The love that flowed through Christ radiated from the followers like a spiritual aura. I lived through it all; the foundation of the church, the threats, the persecution, the miracles, the lives changed. It was marvelous! I was blessed to teach people of Jesus' love and my testimony moved people, for my testimony spoke solely about God's redeeming grace. Every blessing in life comes from Christ Jesus, who is my savior and Lord.

Now, it has been twelve years since Jesus rose from the dead. I sit on hard, barren floor in chains. I am to be beheaded when the sun rises. But, I am content with that fate. As I have stated before, I always awoke when the sun rose, but now, when my life shall be put to rest, I will see the true son who has risen at the right hand of God!

I have peace now. I have run the "good" race. After all these years, I can now say I have lived up to my name because I was able to comfort and love the beggar, the leper, and the tax collector. These last words I pen to you will pass through my mind before I embrace my Savior.

Remember the chains that Christ broke. May God's grace be with you. All glory to God! Amen!