

Growing up, I loved the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10 — the “wee little man” who climbed the sycamore tree “for the Lord he wanted to see.” The life of this small-statured, wealthy tax collector radically changed after he encountered the Lord. After spending time with Jesus, Zacchaeus gave half of his goods to the poor and repaid four times the amount to those he cheated.

If he gave all that away, what did he have left? Jesus answers this question in verses 9–10 — the gift of salvation!

As I’ve talked with our recipients this troublesome year, I have had the privilege of hearing about their own salvation stories and ministry experiences. Joe Martinez, a retired pastor and Mission:Dignity® recipient, currently resides in Arizona and shared his redemption story. His journey to repentance is marked with the same transformative power found in Luke 19.

Joe grew up in a Roman Catholic household but never really heard the gospel until he went to the Floresville Baptist Church in Texas. Through the church’s ministry, he prayed to receive Christ as Lord and Savior at age 11 and was baptized soon after. He was ridiculed for his decision by others but says, “They couldn’t take away what I received in Christ.” Joe was a changed man.

After surrendering his life to the ministry, Joe and his wife, Lorene, served as church planters for 48 years with the North American Mission Board in Colorado, Texas, South Carolina and Arizona. “Seeing people come to Christ and seeing the churches started was such a blessing,” Joe says. “So many lives were changed.”

As Joe and Lorene aged, they realized they needed help in retirement. “We just weren’t making it,” Joe says, prompting them to reach out to Mission:Dignity. Joe and Lorene have been receiving assistance for the last six years and have even been helped through emergency grants. “God said He would provide all I need. I have salvation. I have my wife and family. I have food to eat, clothes to wear, glasses to see. I wouldn’t have all my needs met without Mission:Dignity!” he says with gratitude.

Thank you for giving in this difficult year to these retirement-age ministers, workers and widows. Like Zacchaeus, the gift of salvation transformed their lives from top to bottom. And now these soldiers of the cross have the gift of dignity through your care — which makes all the difference. May God bless you as you help them finish 2020 with dignity.

Working together,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aaron J. Meraz', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Aaron J. Meraz, Ph.D., D.Min.
Director of Mission:Dignity

P.S. 2020 is almost over! Help Mission:Dignity finish the year strong by giving a year-end gift or a Christmas check gift. Learn more at MissionDignity.org.