January 2019


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LUKE XIX: 1-10

THE STORY OF ZACCHAEUS

The story of Zacchaeus is told us only by St. Luke. This is characteristic of St. Luke, for his Gospel is eminently the Gospel of forgiveness. He always dwells with special interest on such incidents as especially bring out the character of Christ as the great Friend of sinners. It is St. Luke who has recorded for our comfort the three beautiful parables in which the Savior pictures His infinite love to all sinners, the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. He who tells us that all the publicans and sinners drew near unto Jesus for to hear His words, that Jesus rejected none, that He received all with outstretched arms of love and mercy. In short, St. Luke loses no opportunity of preaching and enforcing upon our hearts the one great cardinal truth of Christianity, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save the one which is lost." And this is his object in narrating to us the story of Zacchaeus.

This story, to which I desire to turn your attention this evening, is full of teaching.

On His last journey to Jerusalem, the Lord entered and passed through the city of Jericho. There dwelt a man by the name of Zacchaeus, a very wealthy man, and chief among the publicans. He was at the head of the revenue office of Jericho, and was hated and despised by all on account of his greed and methods of extortion. The Jews had no kindly feeling toward a man who had entered the employ of the Romans, their conquerors. That indicated to them that He cared more for money than for his country.
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and his country's religion.

This man Zacchaeus, by the grace of God, had come to the knowledge of his sinful life, and desired to leave the broad path of the sinners, and to amend his life. He felt that all was not right between him and his God; he was conscious of his wrong-doing, and realized that he could not face his God. He was anxious to know what could be done to blot out his sinful past, and to escape the well-merited punishment, and to amend his life. But he could find no satisfactory answer to all his perplexing questions. While in this distressed state of mind he hears the report, which is spread throughout all the surrounding country, concerning a man named Jesus of Nazareth, who performs the most remarkable miracles, and who had shown Himself kindly disposed toward such as he is, who received even the vilest sinners, and cast out none that came to Him. "This man," thought Zacchaeus, "is the One to help me; oh, if I could only see Him, tell Him of my plight, unburden my heavy heart to Him; I know that He would not reject me, but extend to me His helping and saving hand, and draw me out of the mire of sin into which I have fallen". While he is occupied with such thoughts, the report is spread like wildfire through the streets of Jericho, "Jesus is coming! He is even now passing through the city!" Oh, what welcome news to the troubled and perplexed heart of Zacchaeus! He must see for himself if the reports concerning this man are true; if His appearance, manner, and personality inspire confidence; in short, if He is that sort of a man to whom one can freely unburden one's
heart. Without losing a moment's time, he hastens out into the streets of the city, sees a great concourse of people gathered about Jesus, and his heart sinks; for being little of stature, he cannot see Him for the press. In his great eagerness to see Jesus, the rich taxgatherer forgets the dignity of his office, and scrambles up into the branches of a sycamore tree which overhangs the road, from where he has an unobstructed view of the man of whom he expects so much. And what are we told of Jesus? Although Zacchaeus gave no outward evidence of what was going on in his heart, Jesus, the Omniscient, saw what no other man saw. He saw that it was not idle curiosity which brought this man to Him, but a deep concern and anxiety for the welfare of his immortal soul. Coming to the place, He looks up, sees him, and says, - "V. 5 And Zacchaeus made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully."

"Zacchaeus! make haste, and come down; Today I must abide in thy house". These words of Jesus suggest many great and precious thoughts on which we may touch. We have here in these words an illustration of Jesus' knowledge of the individual. "Zacchaeus make haste and come down!". There is no indication in the text that anybody had told Christ the name of Zacchaeus; but the same omniscient eye that saw Nathanael under the fig tree saw Zacchaeus in the sycamore, and seeing in secret, knew without being told the names of both. When Jesus calls an individual by name, He also desires to draw that person to Him by the bonds of love. And we too are spoken to by Jesus by our names and are thus drawn
closer to Him. The great, broad, universal "whosoever" of His assurance are directly meant for each of us as if they were in an envelope with our names upon them and put into our hands.

"Whosoever will, let him come". Say to yourself, "That is I". Whosoever cometh I will in no wise cast out". Say to yourself, "That is I". And in a like manner with ALL the general declarations, and especially with that chiefest of all, John 3, 16. Read this declaration right, and say, "God loved me, John, Mary, or whatever be your name - "Jesus so loved ME that if I believe in Him, I shall not perish, etc."

"Today I must abide in THY house". Note Christ's perfect willingness and desire to dwell with the most degraded and outcast. There was not a ragged beggar in Jericho who would not have thought himself degraded by putting his foot across the threshold of that publican's house. But not so Jesus. He entered it.

And that is what He always does. Even today He is ever ready and willing to enter the home and the heart of the most degraded and outcast, who like Zacchaeus, would like to have their past blotted out, escape the well-deserved punishment, and lead better and nobler lives, and finally be saved. For that is the object of His coming into the world, "to seek and to save that which is lost".

Furthermore, the saying of our Lord, "Today - THY house" suggests that He recognized the value of ONE soul.

This scene with Zacchaeus happened within one week of His crucifixion. Our Lord was on that
last journey to Jerusalem to die. His disciples tried to persuade Him to turn back, and avoid the city of Jerusalem, where certain death awaited Him. But no; He was fully determined to go; nothing could hinder Him; yea, He is eager and impatient to begin His great work of reconciling a lost world to God.

But here, in Jericho, His journey was interrupted. Nothing else was able to stop Him but His own love toward the sinner. Here was a soul to be saved; here was a distressed and a perturbed sinner to be comforted. Christ, hurrying, pressing toward the cross, paused on His way to Calvary to attend to the needs of the sinner Zacchaeus. Let us learn the sweet lesson, and take to heart the large consolations that lie in such a thought.

And yet, one more thought is suggested by Christ's words, "TODAY —". What would have happened if Zacchaeus had disregarded the words of the Lord, and had remained in the sycamore tree? Jesus would have gone on to Jerusalem, and Zacchaeus would have remained in his sins. Jesus offers His salvation to all men, and would have all men accept it; but He forces Himself on no man. It was now or never with the publican. Jesus was never to go through the streets of Jericho again. It was Zacchaeus' last chance, and if he had not made haste, he would have lost Christ forever.

My friends, there may be some in this audience this evening to whom Jesus is now making His last appeal. I know not; no man knows. A minister was once asked when a man should repent. He answered, "Repent on the last day of your lives". And they answered, "But we do not know when that will be". And he said, "Then repent NOW". So I say, because
some of you may never hear Christ's Gospel again, and because none of us knows whether we shall or not, make sure work of it now and do not let Jesus pass by who this evening again stands before you, saying unto you, as He did to Zacchaeus, "Today I must abide in THY house".

Let us continue with the story. We are told that Zacchaeus, after he had received the Lord joyfully, said unto Him, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore Him fourfold". These words of Zacchaeus show the tremendous change that had taken place in his heart. He had felt his utter sinfulness and unworthiness, had seen in Jesus the only man to help him out of his misery. Him he had accepted as His Savior, Redeemer, and Deliverer; and this faith in Jesus wrought a wonderful change in his heart. He turned his back upon his own self, determined to break away from and to forsake his former sinful life, and makes this vow for the future, "Behold, Lord, etc."

My friends, the only thing that changes and transforms a man is the love of Jesus. The only thing that can alter the whole current and set of man's affections, change his views as to earthly and heavenly things, turn him inside out and upside down, make an entire new creature of him, I say, the only thing that can bring this change about, is the love of Jesus who came into the world to seek, etc. and who died on Calvary's cross to redeem us. "This change of heart, the forsaking of past evil and the earnest intention of doing better in
the future is the one great test of faith in Christ Jesus. He who has been washed and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, must necessarily follow after holiness.

It is useless to talk about trusting and believing in Jesus, and having a sweet assurance of forgiveness, and a glorious hope of heaven, I say, it is useless to talk thus, unless the love of Jesus has made you break off your bad habits of whatsoever sort they may be. Faith manifests itself in works, and of these works the chief is, "Behold, Lord, etc".

My friends, Jesus Christ is standing before each of us as truly as He stood before the publican, and is saying to us as truly as He said to him, "Let me in. Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man open I will enter." Rev. 3:20.

Oh, receive Him as joyfully as did the publican. You will be all the happier and richer for it. He will cleanse you from all your sins, teach you how to walk in the fear of God, guide and lead you through life, and finally receive you into His heavenly kingdom.

AMEN.