

## ZACCHEUS THE PUBLICAN.

– MARCH 17; LUKE 19:1-10. –

**Golden Text – "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." – Luke 19:10.**

SEVERAL observations in view of this narrative claim our special attention; viz., (1) The desire and earnest effort of the publican to learn of Jesus; (2) The courage and generous kindness of the Lord in running against the popular current of public sentiment to bless an outcast from the public favor; (3) The proper attitude of heart in coming to Jesus, as illustrated in the publican; and (4) The reward of obedient faith.

Zaccheus was a Jew (verse 9). He was the chief among the publicans or gatherers of revenue for the Roman government. The taxes levied by the Romans on subject nations were farmed out to men of wealth, who, for a specified sum, paid at once into the Roman treasury, secured the privilege of collecting the taxes of a particular city or [R1783 : page 62] province. These contractors in turn engaged other subcontractors or tax-gatherers. This system gave the widest scope for extortion and justly elicited the general public condemnation, as through the abuses of the office the very name publican or tax-gatherer came to be associated with the idea of dishonesty and extortion. As a class, therefore, they were ostracized and despised, though doubtless there were some conscientious and upright publicans.

Among them were many who seemed impressed by the Lord's public ministry and who heard him gladly. (See Luke 3:12; 5:29; 7:29; 15:1; 18:10.) Being cast off from the sympathies and friendship of the Jews in general, they were naturally less influenced by their prejudices and hence more ready to receive the truth. Zaccheus was so anxious to see the Lord that he made considerable effort to do so, and that effort was not unnoticed or unappreciated. Evidently it was not a lukewarm curiosity.

(2) The Lord's courage in withstanding erroneous public sentiment is very marked. How bravely and how kindly he did it! and how heedless was he of the murmuring crowd who said, "He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." So he would have his followers "mind not high things" – popular ideas, methods, etc., – "but condescend to men of low estate" – the despised, the poor and the unpopular. He would have us identify ourselves with them fearlessly and openly. True Christian fortitude is a grace which dignifies and ennobles every soul that cultivates it.

(3) The attitude of heart which Zaccheus manifested in coming to Jesus was that of an earnest seeker after truth and righteousness. He freely acknowledged and repented of his sins, and expressed his determination, not only to forsake them, but proposed also, so far as was in his power, to undo any damage done to others by restoring anything he had unjustly appropriated, and that with large interest – "four-fold." Probably this interest was measured by him by the amount of former extortions.

That was surely a true repentance, and it brought the quick response of blessing – "This day is salvation come to this house." The additional phrase, – "forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham," – was in reference to the fact that the gospel was to be preached *first* to the house of Israel – "to the Jew first, and afterward to the Gentile." It was in keeping with the Lord's statement on another occasion, "I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), and his commission to the apostles – "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." (Matt. 10:5.) The Syro-Phoenician woman might eat of the crumbs (of truth) that fell from the rich man's (the Jews') table, but it was not meet to take the children's meat and give it to the (Gentile) dogs (Matt. 15:26); and when the apostles were finally sent to preach the gospel to all the world they were told to *begin at Jerusalem*.

Why? Because the Lord strictly observed the times and seasons which were indicated in the Father's plan. A **[R1784 : page 62]** certain

time of special and exclusive favor was determined upon Israel (Dan. 9:24-27), and that time must be closely observed. So our Lord would have us carefully note the times and seasons and all the directions of the divine plan if we would be in co-operation with him. Such work is the only work that will abide (1 Cor. 3:12-14) and that will meet the divine approval.

Two words in the golden text are very notable – "seek" and "save." The Lord was seeking to reach the heart of Zaccheus when he (at that time a man distinguished and very prominent before the public as a great prophet and teacher) offered to be the guest of one popularly despised and hated. The gracious offer, together with the tone and manner of a *perfect* gentleman, seemed at once to win his heart. Ah, there is a way to many a heart if we seek to find it. Blunt, coarse, rough ways are repellant, not winsome; and the heart must be won before the soul can be saved; for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness."

Oh, with what care should we deal with the hearts of men, when we know that eternal interests are at stake. We need to deal with them carefully, not only to win them for Christ, but also to help to hold them for Christ against the strong current of temptation from the world, the flesh and the devil. And if we need to exercise this care to win men for Christ by the manifestation of his spirit of love and kindness in us, how much greater is the responsibility of helping to hold them for Christ and to speed them onward in the Christian life! When the feet of a weak brother have well nigh slipped and he is stumbling over the stones of severe trials, how disastrous may be the effects of unkindness or impatience or any lack of manifestation of the Master's spirit towards him; and how great is the responsibility thus incurred! Let us imitate the Master's care in seeking the heart; for the seeking is more than half the work of saving, so far as the will of the individual is concerned.

-----