

## **ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH RESTORED.**

– LUKE 19:1-10. – DEC. 16. –

*"The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

ZACCHAEUS was a Jew and a chief publican, which signifies that he was in the employ of the Roman government as a tax-gatherer, a very lucrative office, but one greatly despised amongst the Jews, because (1) their views of patriotism led them to resent the service of their conquerors; (2) their tax-gatherers collected for a per centage of the tax, and were at the same time assessors of the amount of the tax, and charged (probably generally with good reason), with gross violations of justice – taking advantage of their position and of the necessities of their neighbors to reap large usury by advancing them money for the tax and requiring superabundant security for both tax and usury. Publicans, then, it will be seen, were a disreputable class amongst their own people, esteemed as financially immoral, and unworthy the confidence and honor of faithful Jews. Zacchaeus as a "chief" probably employed under-collectors to assist him in his contract, and for this reason was designated chief publican.

He had heard of Jesus evidently, and curiosity and possibly other nobler sentiments operated in his heart and led him to desire to see the great Teacher. Possibly indeed he had qualms of conscience respecting his business and business methods, and a longing for peace with God, which his riches could not take the place of. These nobler and better thoughts and aspirations were quickened as he found himself in the presence of the celebrated Nazarene, of whose holiness and exalted teachings he had heard. Quite probably, too, he had heard that, unlike the Pharisees, this great Teacher did not spurn publicans and sinners, but, on the contrary, treated them kindly. Zacchaeus sought a glimpse of the Master's face, but there being a throng in the way, and he being of small stature, could not discern him. There was a throng anyway at

this season, going up to the Passover, and so notable a person as Jesus would always be an attraction.

Zacchaeus soon resolved what to do, for he was a resourceful man; he would run ahead and climb into a tree, and thus get a good view of the Master. We cannot help admiring the courage of this little rich man, ordinarily probably dignified enough in his bearing, but now his heart swelling with feelings of interest in righteousness and a desire for reconciliation with God, and ran along like a boy and climbed the tree. When Jesus and the multitude came to the place the Lord addressed Zacchaeus by name, possibly by that power of knowledge which is beyond our comprehension; or possibly by reason of hearing the crowd jeer and laugh at the little rich publican in his lugubrious position.

How astonished he must have been when the Master said, "Zacchaeus, come down, for I must lodge at thy house!" So great an honor as this Zacchaeus had not dreamed of, and the multitude of Jews were likewise surprised. The latter murmured against Jesus because he, as a holy man, should have nothing whatever to do with this publican. Perhaps it was in part to give the Pharisees a lesson, as well as to provide for his own entertainment or to put himself in the way of Zacchaeus, that our Lord proposed this visit to the publican's house. In any event, nothing could have pleased the serious thinking little man more. He came down from the tree immediately, and joyfully took Jesus (and the disciples also we may presume) to his home for entertainment. Thus does the Lord look for and care for and assist those who are of a contrite heart – those who are feeling after God, and longing, as prodigals, to return to the Father's house. Had Zacchaeus been of other condition of heart we may reasonably presume that our Lord would have paid no attention to him whatever.

What a surging of sentiment took place in the heart of little Zacchaeus! His name in the Hebrew comes from a root signifying *pure*, and the inference is not unreasonable that his

ancestors had been noble and holy people, and that back of his love for money and dishonest practices lay good principles, which now, under favorable conditions, were asserting themselves and clamoring for a change of life, – worrying his conscience and embittering all his pleasures and causing [R2731 : page 352] him to long for righteousness in his own heart and life. In no other way can we account for his sudden determination to reform. Nor was he content merely to determine upon reform in his heart; he would seal the matter by a public confession. As we read, he stood forth in the presence of his own family, in the presence of Jesus and his disciples, and probably numerous friends and neighbors who had gone along, and publicly acknowledged that he had gained part of his wealth by unjust exactions, and pledged himself to restore all such wrongfully obtained money, to the extent of his ability, fourfold. More than this, realizing that there were probably many cases of small injustices which it would be impossible for him to ever correct in detail, he publicly pledged one-half of all his possessions to the poor in off-set of these.

Noble Zacchaeus! Well did his conduct show that the Master knew what he was doing when he went to lodge with this little man, so much despised by some of the Pharisees. Jesus knew that notwithstanding his wrong course of life he was much nearer to the right attitude of heart than some of the self-righteous who denounced him – altho outwardly they were living a cleaner life and a more moral one – making clean the outside of the cup while inwardly it was full of vile affections and selfishness, abominations in God's sight.

Our Lord's reply is striking: "This day is salvation come to this house; forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." While it is true that "salvation is to be brought unto us at the revelation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" – at his second advent – it is nevertheless true also that this salvation begins in the present life to all who are of the spiritual house of Israel, who, repenting of their sins, come into harmony with the Lord, and seek to walk according to his ways. It is

a salvation of the heart, reclaiming it from sin and selfishness and meanness – filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit." – 2 Cor. 7:1.

This salvation means reformation and transformation; and while the Lord can read the heart and see there more than men can see respecting the change, yet, as Brother D.L. Moody suggests, the change, the conversion, the transformation of life, must have been appreciable even by the most unsympathetic of Zacchaeus' neighbors when, the next morning after this event, Zacchaeus' servant presented himself to the neighbor with a purse of money, and when asked what it was for replied, "My master says that he extorted from you a sum of money years ago, and now returns it fourfold." The conversion that includes recompense – and that not merely in a skimped manner but abundantly – four-fold – undoubtedly signifies a true conversion, one that is not likely soon to be forgotten or ignored.

We might find parallels to this incident, which belonged to the end of the Jewish age and to fleshly Israel, in the end of this age and to spiritual Israel. We find today some backsliders from the Lord's Covenant of Grace, as Zacchaeus was a backslider from the Lord's Covenant of the Law. We may perhaps find them living in a measure of sin, in business which they admit is unjust and in violation of their consciences. We are not, therefore, to pass by them with the Gospel message, the good tidings of great joy; but if any such manifest an interest in the present truth we are to seek to assist them as our Lord and Head assisted Zacchaeus. And there is an encouragement to this class in Zacchaeus' case, for tho they may feel themselves sadly short of the stature of a man in Christ, if they have in their hearts a longing desire for righteousness and to behold the Lord's face, they will find opportunity to do so, if they will but humble themselves to take the necessary steps. And sincere reformation today must be like that of Zacchaeus; it must make some outward manifestation expressive of contrition and of a desire to make reparation to the extent of ability. Some one has said, and quite truly, we think: –

"No religious profession amounts to anything if it does not include a readiness to put one's property at the service of the Lord. It has been well said that 'a personal consecration' should be spelled 'a purse-and-all consecration.' And the full restitution of all that had been taken wrongfully must be made by a Christian disciple – even to the stripping of himself of all his earthly goods."

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