

THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

– *JUNE 14. – LUKE 18:9-14; 19:1-10. –*

"I came not to call the righteous but sinners." – Mark 2:17.

IN OUR Lord's parables He dealt chiefly with the Pharisees and the publicans; for the Sadducees were Jews in name only, not believing the Scriptures nor expecting a future life. The Pharisees were orthodox, revered the Law and taught it to the people. Outwardly, they were very correct; but Jesus in various parables pointed out that with many of them religion was a ceremony and the keeping of the Law an outward obedience, which did not extend to the heart. The publicans did not profess holiness, but rather confessed estrangement from God and lack of harmony with His Law.

The Pharisees treated the publicans as though they were Gentiles – refused their company and would not even eat with them. The Pharisees recognized Jesus as being exemplary, and His teachings as in full accord with the highest principles. They wondered, therefore, that He did not join with them, and wondered still more that He would have fellowship with publicans – confessed sinners.

The secret of the matter is that Jesus looked not upon the outward appearance, but upon the heart. He did not love the publicans because they were sinners, nor disapprove of the Pharisees because they outwardly kept the Law. We remember the case of the young Pharisee who came to Jesus and who, when questioned about the Law, said, "All these things have I kept from my youth up." We read, "Jesus beholding him loved him." He was a sincere Pharisee.

The parable of our lesson illustrates this matter. It shows us the heart-attitude of some of the Pharisees and of some of the despised publicans: Both men went up to the Temple to pray. The one said in his heart, How thankful I am that I am not a sinner, like the majority of men and like this poor publican! I thank God that I am a Pharisee – that I am righteous! But the publican felt differently. The weight of sin was upon him. He could not look up to Heaven. Striking his hand on his bosom, he exclaimed, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

From God's standpoint, both men were sinners – both needed forgiveness of sins. But the one trusted in his own imperfect works, and asked no forgiveness; the other realized his blemishes, and prayed for mercy. We are not to get the impression from this that God is more pleased with people who live in sin than with those who strive to live to the best of their ability in harmony with His Law. The lesson is to the contrary. We must all realize that we come short of perfection, and that we need Divine mercy. The sinner who recognizes this is more pleasing to God and nearer to forgiveness than the more moral person who fails to see his blemishes.

At another time, Jesus referred to this same error of the Pharisees, saying, "The whole need not a physician," and, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." By these words He sought to call attention to the fact that although the Pharisees claimed to be righteous, they were not so. They were sin-sick, imperfect, needing a Savior. But they were not in a condition to appreciate their need and to come to the Lord for forgiveness – not until they should learn their need – that they and all other members of the fallen race are sin-sick and need the remedy which only Jesus can give.

Not realizing their need, the Pharisees did not come to Jesus, did not become His disciples; and thereby they missed a great

blessing. On the contrary, the majority of Jesus' followers was made up of publicans and sinners – people who had not been living proper lives, but who were earnest, who acknowledged their faults, turned [R5464 : page 156] from them and accepted the forgiveness and healing of the Good Physician.

PHARISEES IN OUR DAY

Both classes are still represented in the world, amongst Christians. Some are trusting in their church membership, their benevolences and general morality, for salvation, and ignoring the fact that all are sinners, and that forgiveness of sin is obtainable only through faith in the Crucified One. Others today, not so conspicuous in religious circles, are all the more ready to discern their own weaknesses, to confess them and to accept forgiveness of sins and everlasting life as unmerited gifts of God based upon the Sacrifice at Calvary. These latter, we may be sure, will have much advantage every way over the others as respects Divine acceptance to joint-heirship with Christ in His Kingdom.

The general lesson to us all is expressed by the Apostles James and Peter: "God resisteth the proud, but showeth His favor to the humble" – the penitent. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." Confess your sins, strive manfully against them, and trust for deliverance, ultimate victory and life everlasting through the merit of the Crucified One, in whose footsteps you seek to follow.

A LITTLE MAN – A BIG HEART

The latter part of our lesson relates to Jesus' journey from Jericho to Jerusalem, just prior to His crucifixion. Multitudes were journeying in the same direction, going up to the feast of the Passover. As always, Jesus was the center of attraction; all wanted to see and hear Him of whom we read, "Never man spake like this man."

Zacchaeus, a rich man of that vicinity, was one of those whose curiosity was aroused to see Jesus, of whom he had heard much. He was not a Pharisee; he did not profess holiness of life. He was one of those condemned and ostracised by the Pharisees. He had accepted a minor office under the Roman government; he was a tax collector for the Romans – a publican. On this account he was despised, and declared to be disloyal to Judaism.

Small of stature, Zacchaeus was unable to see Jesus because of the crowd. He therefore ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree, that he might have a good view of Jesus as He passed by that way. Little did he realize that the Master knew him and had read his heart and perceived in it honesty, and that therefore he was to be greatly honored. When Jesus came where Zacchaeus was, He looked up at the publican, called him by name and told him to come down at once, for He was to be his guest. The summons was gladly received by Zacchaeus. And we may be sure that the whole circumstance was greatly to the disgust of the Pharisees. They murmured at Jesus' being the guest of one not orthodox.

Evidently the murmuring reached the ears of Zacchaeus, too; for forthwith he addressed the Lord in self-defense – as though urging that these charges against him should not hinder the Master from coming to be his guest, and as intimating his desire of heart to be all that he ought to be and could be. He said: "Lord, behold, I give one-half of all my goods to the poor; and if I have wrongly exacted money from anybody, I restore him four-fold." Thus did Zacchaeus intimate his devotion to God and to righteousness, and his acceptance of Jesus as his Lord, his Teacher.

How did Jesus receive all this? He replied to Zacchaeus, "This day is salvation come to this house; for as much as he also is a son of Abraham." From the Lord's standpoint, all the sons of Abraham were eligible to discipleship. The thing required was an

honest confession of imperfection, a turning from sin, a hearty acceptance of Christ and an endeavor to walk in His steps.

Unquestionably this same principle still applies, regardless of what men may think or say to the contrary. The Lord is willing to receive the repentant. No longer is it necessary to be of the natural seed of Abraham in order to be acceptable as disciples of Jesus. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down, as St. Paul explains. All who have the faith of Abraham may be counted in as children of Abraham by becoming related to the Divine Plan as disciples of Jesus.

Our lesson closes with our Lord's words, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Some who deny that Adam was created perfect, who deny his fall from Divine favor and who deny that redemption by Jesus was necessary, have sought to sustain their position by saying that Jesus never referred to the fall, although the account in Genesis tells of it, and St. Paul and other Apostles particularly mention it. But in this text we have Jesus' own statement as to why He came into the world at all. He did not come into the world to help along the Adversary's schemes; but, as He says, He came into the world to be man's Redeemer – to seek and to recover, restore, that which was lost.

Everlasting life was lost, Eden was lost, human perfection was lost, the image of the Divine character was lost. These could not be recovered by humanity, all of whom were under death sentence – the curse. God's compassion arranged a Plan, by which Jesus came into the **[R5465 : page 156]** world and gave Himself a Ransom for all.

The very fact that the Master speaks of His work as a ransoming one (Matthew 20:28) corroborates the declaration that man was under a sentence of death and needed to be ransomed from it. Without the Ransom there could be no resurrection of the dead, no future life. The Bible is beautifully consistent and

harmonious when we allow it to speak for itself. It demonstrates that it is the Word of God, written under Divine direction.

TWO SALVATIONS – ONE SAVIOR

Although the race was one and although all shared the same sentence of death, nevertheless it has pleased God to provide two different salvations from this curse of death. Both salvations are based upon the great sacrifice which Jesus accomplished at Calvary. The first of these salvations is for the Church class, called out of the world during this Gospel Age, called to a change of nature – from human to spiritual nature. Even this first salvation is not yet complete, and will not be until the whole company of the Church shall have been selected from the world, and by the First Resurrection shall have been glorified with Christ. These will be joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom; and that Kingdom will begin its work on behalf of the remainder of the world.

The second salvation belongs to the Millennial Age, during which Messiah's Kingdom will control the affairs of earth, and Satan will be bound. Then the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth. Then all the blind eyes shall be opened and all the deaf ears be unstopped; and at that time the second salvation will be effective to all mankind. That will not be a spiritual salvation – to the new nature, like unto the angels. It will be a salvation to human perfection, and uplift out of sin and death to the image of God, as at first experienced by Father Adam.

Both salvations will be grand, glorious, though that of the Church will be the more glorious. This salvation alone is open now; and the pathway to it is by the low gate and narrow way of consecration and self-sacrifice, walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

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