

## Zacchaeus

In the record of Matthew chapter 21, we read of Messiah's indictment of the chief priests and elders of the people:

"Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him." (Mat. 21:31-32).

So it is that through belief, or faith, the publicans and harlots will enter the kingdom, when those who were righteous in their own eyes will be excluded. The expression "publicans" speaks of the despised Tax Collectors, who frequently extorted a substantial profit through the misuse of their office. Even they would enter into the kingdom before the chief priests and elders of the people.

There is a case in point in today's reading of Luke chapter 19. Here we read of not just a publican, as in the case of Levi, but one who was "the chief among the publicans", namely Zacchaeus. He was a publican who came to recognise the Messiah, and obtained his favour. So the Lord said "this day is salvation come to this house ..." (Lu. 19:9). We also come to the Master as sinners needing healing and forgiveness: we can therefore learn much from the example of Zacchaeus, that salvation might come to us also.

After introducing the man as "the chief among the publicans", the inspired narrative proceeds to describe how he sought to see Jesus:

"... **he sought to see Jesus who he was**, and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way" (Lu. 19:3-4),

Zacchaeus had evidently heard about Jesus, but desired to see him for himself. In this, we have a parallel with our own position. We may well have heard the Gospel being preached, and the things concerning the Name of Jesus Christ being taught, but we desire to see those things for ourselves. Then, our faith will not stand because of the persuasiveness of men's wisdom, but because we have tasted for ourselves, and seen that the Lord is good (Psa. 34:8). We must seek to see Jesus for ourselves, to find out whether what we were told is true. So the Apostle exhorts:

"... but **we see Jesus** who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour: that he, by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9)

And again:

"Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, **looking unto Jesus** the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

When we open our eyes to see Jesus therefore, we must divest ourselves of everything that might hinder us in following his example. Just as Zacchaeus gave away of his riches, and so made provision for others, even so we must cast aside everything that might hold us back.

Zacchaeus, we are informed, "was rich". In the chapter before, Luke 18, the Master had already spoken of the position of rich men in relation to the Kingdom:

**"... How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!** For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, the things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (Lu. 18:24-27).

In the chapter before us, we have the humanly impossible situation resolved by the Father, bringing in salvation to the chief publican.

The ecclesia at Laodicea is also a case in point. Revelation chapter 2 describes the members there:

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:17-18).

Like Zacchaeus, they were rich in material things. But whereas he repented, they evidently did not. Supposing that gain is godliness, they trusted in the material wealth they had accrued for themselves and did not recognise their true spiritual condition. The lessons for us are obvious.

Zacchaeus then, climbed up a tree so that he could see the Messiah. And like Nathaniel before (Jno. 1:47), the Master knew and addressed him by name, saying: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for today I must abide at thy house" (Lu. 19:5).

This is a characteristic of the Lord: he knows us individually by name:

"he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and **he calleth his own sheep by name**, and leadeth them out ..." (Jno. 10:1-3).

Notice there, the sheep know his voice, and the shepherd knows their names. We must therefore heed the voice of the good shepherd, to receive individual recognition from him.

Jesus said to Zacchaeus: "today I must abide at thy house". What an extraordinary privilege this was! The Son of the Most High Almighty Creator wished to abide at a tax-collector's house! There was no time to spruce up the house, or give it a thorough clean, or prepare it in some way for the Royal Visit. Messiah would come to the house as it was. But again, we see a parallel with our own circumstance. The Master is, as it were, knocking to enter into our house:

"Behold, I stand at the door, **and knock**: if any man **hear my voice**, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me ..." (Rev. 3:20-21).

But how do we respond to our esteemed caller? The Song of Solomon also describes the knock of the bridegroom:

"I was asleep, but my heart waketh: it is **the voice** of my beloved **that knocketh**, saying, Open to me my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled ..." (Song. 5:2).

Like the situation described in the Apocalypse, the bride hears the voice and the knock of the Bridegroom. But notice how she responds – with excuses not to arise from her bed!

“I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?” (Song. 5:3).

But the Master will not stand and knock indefinitely: the opportunity to answer will pass, and it will be too late to allow him to enter into our hearts. So the Bride laments:

“... I opened to my beloved, But my beloved hath withdrawn himself, and was gone: My soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave no answer.” (Song. 5:6).

There is therefore, a day of opportunity, when we can respond to the Master who desires to enter our houses, but we must not delay, lest we leave it too late.

In response to these words of the Master, the multitude murmured: “ ... they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner” (Lu. 19:7). However, he had already addressed this objection before, in response to those who criticised him for being hosted by Levi, another tax collector:

“... their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, why do you eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. ***I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance***” (Lu. 5:30-32).

By contrast to the Pharisee in Messiah’s parable of yesterday’s reading in Luke 18, the publican threw himself upon the mercy of the Lord, and did not trust in his own righteousness. As a sinner, he was brought to repentance – just like Zacchaeus, who was likewise despised by the Pharisees.

As a token of his repentance, Zacchaeus resolved to put right the wrongs he had committed in his office as tax collector:

“Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: 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”

In response to which, the Lord said:

“... this day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.” (Lu. 19:9).

These words of the despised Tax Collector were viewed favourably by the Son of the Highest, and he stated that salvation had “come to this house”.

These events, it would appear, took place in Jericho (see verse 1). It is interesting to note the words of Messiah cited at the beginning of our remarks: “the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Mat. 21:31). Jericho was the place of this publican’s acceptance, but it was also the place where salvation came to the house of a harlot – Rahab. The account in Joshua chapter 6 recounts how that because of her faithfulness in believing the message of the 2 spies, and harbouring

them from the officials who sought after them, her house would be saved. Although the city wall would fall, her house – built on that wall – would stand intact:

“and Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the Harlot’s house and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her” (Josh. 6:22).

This is the situation echoed by the Proverb:

“... the wicked are overthrown, and are not: But ***the house of the righteous will stand***” (Prov. 12:7)

Salvation was brought to Rahab the harlots house – and paradoxically, she was the righteous, whilst the other people who believed not, were the wicked. So it was in the case of Zacchaeus the publican, again in Jerico.

In Luke chapter 19, the Master identifies Zacchaeus as being of the seed of Abraham:

“... today is salvation come to this house, ***forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham***” (Lu. 19:9).

There is a tremendous import in this saying: to be the “son of Abraham” involves more than physical descent from him. Galatians chapter 3 describes this:

“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7).

And again, in Romans 9:

“... For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but In Isaac thy seed shall be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed” (Rom. 9:6-8).

And examples could be multiplied. The point is, to be considered “a son of Abraham”, one must have the faith of Abraham. To be regarded as his spiritual seed, the flesh counts for nothing – those who have like precious faith to this Patriarch are counted as the seed – See Romans chapter 4. Zacchaeus therefore, once he repented, became a man of faith – and in his confession, he demonstrated faith in action.

The name Zacchaeus literally means “pure” – an unusual designation for a despised and corrupt tax collector. But in his case, we see a dramatic turnaround, commencing with his desire to “see Jesus”. So is illustrated the saying “Blessed are the **pure** in heart, for they **shall see** God” (Mat. 5:8). He became pure in heart, and saw Yahweh manifested in his Son. And this is the hope that we have:

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him: ***for we shall see him*** as he is. And everyone that hath this hope in him ***purifieth*** himself, even as he is ***pure***” (1 Jno. 3:1-3).

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