

"ZACCHÆUS"

Chapter 13

Studies in the Gospels

by

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Luke xix. 1-10.

The Lord is on his way to Jerusalem, on that last journey thither, which was so rich in incidents, and whereof St. Luke has preserved for us so accurate a record. *'And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And behold there was a man named Zacchæus, which was the chief among the publicans.'*¹ It was only natural that Jericho, from its position close to the fords of Jordan (Josh. ii. 7), and as the frontier city on entering the land from Peræa, set, too, as it was in the richest plain of Palestine, and that which abounded most in the choicest productions of that favoured land, in the rare and costly balsam above all,² should be the seat of an officer of a somewhat superior rank, who should there preside over the collection of the revenues of the state.

Such an officer was Zacchæus; one too who had succeeded in winning that wealth, in the quest of which he had been content to brave the contempt of his fellow-countrymen, to come under that mingled scorn and hate with which they visited the traitors to the national cause, who for filthy lucre's sake were content to gather for the Roman treasury that tribute which was the most humiliating token of their subjection to a Gentile yoke (Matt. xxii. 17). And yet, rich as he was, he had not, as the sequel shews, incurred the woe of those rich who are full, and who have so received their consolation here, that all longings for a higher consolation are extinct in them (Luke vi. 24). We may take, as an evidence of this, the fact that *'he sought to see Jesus,--who He was;'* not *'who He was'* in the sense of *'what manner of person;'* but, *'which He was'* of that confused multitude, to distinguish Him from his company.³ And he sought this, as the issue proves, out of no mere curiosity, such as Herod's (Luke xxiii. 8); but much more nearly in the temper of those Greeks who at the feast desired to see Jesus (John xii. 21).⁴ He may not have known or given any account to himself, out of what motives this anxiety to see the Lord had its rise; yet assuredly there were yearnings here, unconscious they may have been, of the sick man towards his Healer, of the sinner towards his Saviour.

1 His superior dignity probably suggests *άνήρ*, not *άνθρωπος*, twice used in regard of him (ver. 1, 7). Whether he was one of the publicani, the farmers of the revenue, or held some intermediate rank between these and the portitores, the actual collectors of the customs and taxes, is uncertain; but the latter is the more probable supposition. The fact that the publicani were generally Romans, and Roman knights, would not indeed of itself be decisive on the matter; for Josephus tells us that Jews sometimes attained to this dignity. Yet is it more probable that the *άρχιτελώνης* belonged himself to the *τελώναι*, although, as the name implies, having many subordinate officers under him.

2 Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xii. 54. There is a beautiful description of Jericho in Keim, *Jesu von Nazara*, vol. iii. p. 17.

3 Maldonatus: *Quis esset eorum quos in confertâ et confusâ videbat turbâ.*

4 Augustine (*Serm.* 174): *Noli te extollere; pusillus esto, Zacchæus esto. Sed dicturus es, Si Zacchæus fuero, præ turbâ non potero videre Jesum. Noli esse tristis; adscende lignum, ubi pro te pependit Jesus, et videbis Jesum; with much other profitable adaptation of the words.*

It was not easy for him to accomplish his desire. *'He could not' see Him 'for the press, because he was little of stature.'* So earnest, however, is he in the matter, that, rather than be defeated of his longing, he devises a way for the satisfying of it, which will involve, indeed, a certain compromise of his dignity, but from which he does not therefore shrink. Many, no doubt, would wonder that he, a rich man, and of some official position in the city, should climb up, like one of the populace, into a tree, the better to gaze upon a spectacle below.⁵ But there is that in him which will not allow such respects as these to have any weight at the present. He has not, or, if he has, he overcomes, that false pride, through which so many precious opportunities, and oftentimes in the highest things of all, are lost.⁶ Jericho and the neighbourhood was famous for its palms ('the shady city of palm trees,' as the poet Vaughan has called it; cf. Deut. xxxiv. 3; Judg. i. 16; iii. 13; 2 Chron. xxviii. 15). No stately palm-tree however, but a sycomore, a tree of much humbler name, plays its part in this story. The sycomore would now be sought in vain in the plain of Jericho, although found elsewhere in the Holy Land (Robinson); but they were common once (1 Kin. x. 27; 1 Chron. xxvii. 28; Ps. lxxviii. 47); and one of these did on this occasion bear fruit of the noblest kind; so that Fuller with good right exclaims, "Who dares say sycomores are always barren? See one here loaden with good fruit."⁷ For into one of these Zacchæus had climbed; hoping, it may be, for he has run before the multitude, effectually to conceal himself in its leafy screen, before the throng of the crowd come by; not to say that these will be the less likely to remark him, as their attention will be turned in quite another direction.

If this *was* at all his expectation, he is disappointed in it; for *'when Jesus came to the place, He looked up;'* and He, who knows how to discover his own in places the most unlikely, a Matthew at the receipt of custom, a Nathanael under the fig-tree, with sure and unerring glance detected Zacchæus in the sycomore, and at once laid bare his hiding-place; addressing him by his name, for *'He calleth his own sheep by name'* (John x. 3); and drawing him forth from his concealment with that word, *'Zacchæus, make haste, and come down.'* This his dealing with Zacchæus reminds us of the gentle violence by which he compelled another, however reluctant, to come out of the crowd, and to confess before all that she had touched Him, and why (Luke viii. 45-47). Like that, it is meant for the overcoming of a false shame; and the summons is not without a certain delicate rebuke that he, inwardly drawn, as no doubt he was, to the Lord, should have been content with that far off sight of Him, instead of coming boldly forward, and joining himself to his disciples. Yet that faint rebuke is at once made good by the words which follow: *'for to-day I must abide at thy house;'*⁸ words of an extraordinary grace, for while the Lord *accepted* many invitations into the houses of men (Luke vii. 36; xi. 37;

5 Die Unwahrscheinlichkeit einer Baumkletterung des Mannes von Geld and Stellung, is urged by Keim as a proof of the unhistoric character of this story of Zacchæus.

6 Calvin: Signum enim vehementis, desiderii fuit, arborem conscendere, quum divites ut plurimum sint fastuosi, seque specie gravitatis venditent. Neque enim Christi conspectum sine cælesti instinctu tantopere expeteret. Sic Dominus sæpe priusquam se hominibus manifestet, cæcum illis affectum inspirat, quo feruntur ad ipsum adhuc latentem et incognitum.

7 *A Pisgah Sight of Palestine*, ii. 12. Fuller has here taken for correct the old derivation of *συκομωραία*, finding *μωρός* foolish, and not *μῶρον* the mulberry tree, in the latter half of the word: Porro sicomorus ficus *fatua* dicitur, eo quod inanes ficus generat (Stella; and so Augustine, *Serm.* 174, § 3). This, it need hardly be said, is an error, the sycomore deriving its name from a resemblance to the fig in its fruit, to the mulberry in its leaves.

8 Augustine (*Serm.* 113): Volebas videre transeuntem; hodie hic apud te invenies habitantem.

xiv. 1), yet we do not read that He honoured any but this publican by thus offering Himself to his hospitality. 'Adopting the royal style,' as the author of *Ecce Homo* puts it well, 'which was familiar to Him, and which commends the loyalty of a vassal in the most delicate manner, by freely exacting his services, He informed Zacchæus of his intention to visit him, and signified his pleasure that a banquet should be instantly prepared.'

The word of gracious command was not spoken in vain. Zacchæus in the sycamore tree was as ripe fruit, which dropped into the Saviour's lap at his first and lightest touch: '*he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully.*'⁹ Each had found what he was looking for, the Saviour and the sinner; the Shepherd had found his sheep, and the sheep its Shepherd. Some, as usual, were displeased--as many, that is, as conceived that the Christ should be a prince of Pharisees, rather than a Saviour of sinners. These, '*when they saw it, all murmured, saying, That He was gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner.*'¹⁰ Could He not have chosen some other for his host? Jericho was a city of priests, as well as a city of publicans. The Talmudists assure us that there were almost as many priests there as at Jerusalem itself; so that it is a stroke from the life to introduce in the parable of the Good Samaritan the priest and the Levite, as passing exactly along that road which led from one of these cities where they dwelt to the other where their duties lay (Luke x. 31, 32). With such a choice of hosts from whom to select, would it not have better become a preacher of righteousness to select some other than this sinner, whose house to honour with his presence? Surely it was ill done by a favour so signal to reverse that just sentence of social excommunication under which the publicans, and Zacchæus among the number, lay (Luke xv. 2).

Probably the murmurers, with these words of discontent on their lips, with these thoughts of displeasure in their hearts, followed to the house of Zacchæus. But they meet there with a practical refutation of their discontent; there it is plainly shewn that the Lord had chosen well, when He chose this man for his host and entertainer. He was one who was a smoking flax, which they would have quenched outright, but which the Lord with only a breath of his mouth fanned into a light flame. Christ's presence in *his* house forms a parallel by way of contrast to his presence in the house of the Pharisee (Luke vii. 36; cf. xiv. 1). There He could bring no blessing, for there was there no sense of need; there the Pharisee esteemed that he was honouring the Lord, not that he was being honoured by Him.

What follows is placed by some on the next day. They assume the Lord to have tarried a night under the roof of Zacchæus, and that on the following morning, perhaps as his divine guest was about to depart, Zacchæus stood forth and made this profession of a new life, with a making good, so far as this might be, of the faults of his old. But '*to-day*' of ver. 5 is too clearly taken up by '*this day*' of ver. 9, to admit of such an interpretation.¹¹ Rather the meal was ended at which he had been permitted to entertain his Lord; and he then stood forth, making that practical answer to these murmurers, which ought to have silenced, and perhaps did silence some of them; for it shewed that he had not received the grace of God in vain; it shewed what the condescending love of the Saviour could effect, how it could separate a man

9 Ambrose (*Exp. in Luc. ix. § 90*): Zacchæus in sycamore, novum novi temporis pomum.

10 Augustine (*Serm. 184*): Hoc erat, reprehendere quod in domum ægroti intravit medicus.

11 Nothing can be built on *καταλύσαι*, as though, which some urge, this must imply the tarrying for a night. We have in Xenophon (*Amab. I. 10. 19*), *καταλύσαι τὸ στράτευμα πρὸς ἄριστον*.

for ever from his old conversation, to walk henceforward in newness of life. In the presence then of them all (see ver. 11), 'Zacchæus,' who had so long, like another Levi, *sat* at the receipt of custom, 'stood,' or stood forth, '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,¹² I restore him fourfold.' The present, 'I give,' expresses the fixedness of his resolve; for however this distribution of his goods is still in the future, that future to him is as though actually present. To make it stand for a past, and to accept this 'I give,' and 'I restore,' as the expression of his past conduct in the stewardship of this worldly mammon, as though Zacchæus had been another Cornelius, 'a devout man, which gave much alms to the people' (Acts x. 2), is a curious missing and marring of the whole point of this incident, in fact a most notable piece of Pharisaic exegesis.¹³ Zacchæus might, and would even then, have needed the higher righteousness of Christ, but he would scarcely have been until this day one of the 'lost.' Salvation would not on that day have first come to his house. But it is not thus. All this which he now announces of a giving of his own, and a restoring of that which is another's, is to be taken as the blessed results of Christ's visit, as the outward utterance of the mighty inward change that had passed upon him. Now is he a righteous man according to that rule of the prophet (Ezek. xviii. 21, 22; xxxiii. 15), and his name and he are agreed.¹⁴

But at the same time, while, 'If I have taken anything from any man,' must not be looked at as expressing only a possible case, which the speaker regards as very improbably an actual, neither must it be pressed too far in the other direction. It is not, indeed, such a confident clearing of himself as Samuel's (1 Sam. xii. 3); yet neither, on the other hand, is it to be accepted as the confession and admission of an habitual unrighteousness, of a free allowing of himself hitherto in chicane and wrong. Zacchæus had been hitherto no extortioner. Had he been so, had he been conscious that his were in the main 'treasures of wickedness,' gotten together by fraud and wrong, it would have been ridiculous to offer as a gift half of them to the poor, while as yet it was not seen whether the whole would satisfy the demands of justice, might not be swallowed up in acts of restitution, with such addition as the law required.

12 The verb *συκοφαντεῖν* occurs in the N.T. only here and at Luke iii. 14. It is rendered there, 'to accuse falsely;' here, 'to take anything by false accusation;' and in the Geneva, 'to take by forged cavillation.' The use of the word as to defraud or to wring out by chicane is not uncommon in the Greek orators. Rettig (*Theoll. Stud. und Krit.* 1838, p. 775) observes that, while the story of the forbidden export of figs from Attica, and of the *συκοφάντης* as one who denounced this, is, as all now admit, a later invention to explain the word, still it is so manifestly connected with *σῦκον* and *φαίνειν*, that in them the key to unlock its meaning must be looked for.

He suggests that the *συκοφάντης* was originally one who informed against him who made to the State too small returns of his property for the purposes of taxation; and, the figtree being a chief source of wealth in Attica, informed against him who returned the number of these, or the crop derived from them, below the mark. He observes that *συκόβιος*, an informer, and *συκάζειν* (= *συκοφαντεῖν*) both point in the same direction.

13 Maldonatus: Aliqui interpretantur quasi antequam ad ipsum Christus venisset, solitus fuisset dimidiam bonorum suorum partem pauperibus dare, et si quid quem defraudasset, quadruplum reddere. Cyprian (*De Op. et Eleem.*) is one of these: but many more adhere to the true interpretation, as Irenæus (*Con. Hær.* iv. 12), who sees in this to which Zacchæus adjudges himself, solutionem præteritæ cupiditatis; Tertullian (*Adv. Marcion*, iv. 37) and Gregory the Great (*Hom.* 27), who encouraging to repentance by various examples of those who through it obtained pardon, speaks thus: Alius avaritiæ æstibus anhelans aliena diripuit. Aspicat Zacchæum, qui, siquid alicui abstulit, quadruplum reddidit.

14 יְצַדִּיק = justus. Without restitution, as Augustine (*Ex. liv. ad Maced.*) says well, pœnitentia non agitur, sed fingitur.

Without, however, having been this extortioner, he yet feels that, according to that higher standard of right which he recognizes now, some of his gains may prove to have been unfairly acquired; for, as the Italian proverb has it, there is seldom a large river into which some turbid water has not entered. Any such injustice he will abundantly make good, even to a fourfold restitution, calmly adjudging against himself that which David in his extreme indignation adjudged against him who had taken his neighbour's lamb (2 Sam. xii. 6); imposing a maximum of penalty on himself; much more indeed than the law save in some exceptional cases required (Exod. xxii. 1; Ezek. xxxiii. 15).

The words that follow are spoken *to* Zacchæus, but in the hearing of the multitude, and *for* them no less than for him. This appears in the third person, under which he is addressed. As meant for him, they are an allowance, on the Lord's part, of this offering of his goods as the true expression of a higher offering, even of a dedication of himself to God: '*This day is salvation come to this house.*'¹⁵ As addressed to the multitude, they contain a further justification of the grace shewn to this man that was a sinner. Sinner as he is, salvation has yet come to his house, '*forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham*' (cf. xiii. 16); one therefore to whom this mercy was due; for their view, as may here be fitly observed, is worthy of no acceptance who assume Zacchæus to have been a heathen, and the Lord therefore to style him '*a son of Abraham*' only in an ethical sense, a follower, that is, of the faith of Abraham (Matt. iii. 9; Rom. iv. 12). It is well known that some, both in ancient and modern times, have so understood it, or at least have suggested this as possible,¹⁶ but in the face of all evidence alike external and internal. Zacchæus (Zaccai) is a Jewish name, occurring Ezra ii. 9; Nehem. vii. 14; 2 Macc. x. 19, and in the Talmud. Had he been not merely '*a sinner,*' but '*a sinner of the Gentiles,*' the murmuring multitudes would assuredly have urged as the head and front of Christ's offending, not '*that He was gone to be a guest with a sinner,*' but with '*a Gentile*'--which, indeed, would have been in their sight so enormous an aggravation of the offence, that it would have been impossible they should pass it over without notice. Neither did it belong to the proprieties of the Lord's earthly life, '*a minister*' as He was '*of the circumcision,*' to confirm the promises made unto the fathers' (Rom. xv. 8), that He should violate the ordinances and customs of the Jews, which, so acting, He would have done (Acts x. 28; xi. 2, 3; Gal. ii. 12). As little can any argument be founded on that word '*lost,*' as applied to Zacchæus; for elsewhere the Lord speaks of '*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*' (Matt. x. 6); and if, as surely is the case, the gulf between what a man is, and what he was intended to be, is oftentimes the truly tragic thing in his destinies, is that which alone furnishes the proper measure of his loss and of his fall, who, then, so '*lost*' as a son of Abraham, *that, not being a heathen,* was yet sunk down to a level with the heathen? Such was Zacchæus; and such '*lost*' as he was the Son of man declares that He was come '*to seek and to save*' (Ezek. xxxiv. 11).

This said, He seems to have moved forward without further delay on his journey toward Jerusalem, leaving that '*house*' poorer in this world's riches, certainly by one half, and probably

15 On the words '*to this house,*' rather than '*to this man,*' Grotius delicately remarks, *ut ostendat relatam hospitii gratiam.* Yet hardly so; the parallel is to be rather found in such passages as Acts xvi. 33, 34. It is doubtless for the sake of this verse that this Scripture supplies in the Roman Catholic Church the Gospel for the service on the occasion of the dedication of churches.

16 Thus Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* iv. 37: Zacchæus, allophylus fortasse), Cyprian, Chrysostom, Maldonatus, Stella, and others. Some, on the other hand, have identified him with Matthias, the future apostle; Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* iv. 6) for example.

by more than one half, than if He had never entered into it; and yet, as He Himself declares, how immeasurably richer too; for One bringing salvation had lodged within it; and, though He was now quitting it for ever, the salvation which He had brought with Him remained behind.