

**32ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, (ZACCHAEUS SUNDAY)
JANUARY 8/21, 2007**

I TIM. 4: 9-15

ST. LUKE 19: 1-10

by

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Gospel: *And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.*

And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

And 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.

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.

And he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully.

And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

But when the grace of the spirit rules within him, then he no longer has a will of his own, but whatever he does is according to God's will. Then he is at peace. Men like that will be called sons of God (cf. Matt. 5:9), because they will the will of their Father, as did the Son of God who is also God.

[St. Peter of Damaskos in *The Philokalia* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth), *Volume Three*, Faber and Faber Inc., Paperback Edition, 1995, p. 84.]

Jesus Does Not Pass Him By

Zacchaeus was not only a publican but chief of them. Publicans were despised by the populace because they derived their income “from no other source than the tears of the poor”:¹

The wealth of the publican comes from nothing else than the tears of the poor; as many as seek to get rich from such acquisitions will soon afterwards be weeping as they are deprived of their own goods. Extortion is the ‘old leaven’ which brings corruption wherever it falls.²

But see that Jesus did *not* pass him by. Even a chief publican is not despised by our Saviour.³ Not only did He not pass him by, but the Lord singled him out to stay at his house. Christ took him ‘prisoner’ in order to save him.

The Chief Publican's Eagerness For Christ

The chief publican, being too short, had run and climbed up a sycamore tree to better see the Lord. Notice the publican's willingness and eagerness to see the Lord, but He had *already* seen him.⁴ Christ urges him to come down because He intends to stay with him at the house. Imagine the crowd's consternation when they saw Christ's intention! They probably couldn't believe it!

Those Christ Came To Save

But the Lord came to us for just such folk: the sinners, ones shunned by society, the weak and the poor, the downtrodden, the simple, in short, all sinners. The less pretentious we are, the more Christ loves us.

Christ ‘Anticipates’ His Faith

Christ loves our enthusiasm for Him. He “always anticipates us if only He sees that we are willing and eager”. When He saw Zacchaeus, he urged him to come down from the tree, which he did obediently. He “came down, and received Him joyfully”. The crowd muttered their disapproval that the Lord had gone to be a guest of a man who is a sinner. [Apparently, they did not consider themselves in this category – a ‘fault’ we all have...]

He Gives His All: More Than The Law Required

He immediately declares he gives half of his goods to the poor, and he restores fourfold those from whom he had obtained money from unrighteously or fraudulently. Thus, he *remedies* the harm he has done; and, above that, he increases the lot of those so wronged. Bl. Theophylact points out “This is a true almsgiving,” and, in accordance with the Law commanding thieves to make fourfold restitution.⁵ See how the chief publican ‘cleans himself out’ basically. He gave away half of his goods to the poor and increased fourfold anyone he had harmed. So, he fulfilled *more than* the requirements of the Law. His thinking went beyond legal prescription “for he had become a disciple of the Gospel, and he loved his neighbour *more than himself* (emphasis supplied).⁶ Notice, too, he didn’t promise to give. He did so!

Christ Gave Salvation To This New Son Of Abraham

Due to his demonstration of faith, Christ gives him salvation. The Lord tells him he is saved *this* day. By saying salvation has come *to this house*, He means to Zacchaeus himself. He refers to him as *a son of Abraham*. Salvation has come to him because he resembles the Patriarch Abraham in two ways: “he believed and was counted righteous by faith, and with money he was magnanimous and generous to the poor”.⁷ Yes, he practised what he preached! He put his faith into action!

The Lord didn’t mean that he had always been a son of Abraham. Before as a chief publican and tax collector, he did not resemble Abraham thus wasn’t then a son of Abraham. But *now* he is because Zacchaeus has *changed*.⁸ He had been lost, but now he had saved himself by his faith in Christ resulting in faithful action [which is the product of true faith].

Christ’s Meaning –

The meaning of the Lord’s final words “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” can be understood in its literal sense, Christ came to find those “lost” and save them, to bring them to the point where they voluntarily accept and follow His Way, the Way of the New Adam. We can also understand it another way:

If we are chief in wickedness, we lack spiritual stature, flesh and spirit are each other’s opposites. Thus, we cannot see Christ for the crowd, the crowd being “a multitude of passions and worldly affairs”. Being hemmed in by these worldly forces, we are “not able to see Jesus acting, moving, and walking about”. We can’t see Christ in us, around or among us because we are preoccupied with worldly pursuits.

But sometimes we ‘wake up’ and come to our senses. We “*climb up* (emphasis supplied) to the top of the sycamore-fig, passing by every pleasure and sweetness, as signified by the figs, and counting them as foolish and dead”.⁹ We pass by temptation to get to the tree top where we can see Christ and He can see us. We are repenting our past sins. When the Lord tells us to hurry and come down, he recognizes that through our repentance we have climbed to a higher life, but He wants us to come down, not get too ‘full of ourselves’, we need to come down through humility before our pridefulness causes us to stumble.

Christ lives in the house of such a humble one. If he “repents and follows a path that is opposite to his former way of wickedness, he heals his former sins through the four virtues,¹⁰ and thus he receives salvation and is called *a son of Abraham*”.¹¹ He comes out of his old self, throws off the old man, and puts on Christ, changes and finds salvation as did Abraham, so he is *now* a son of Abraham.¹²

Now what must *we* do? Simple, repent and climb our spiritual tree. We are assured that Christ will see our repentance and eagerness, and whilst cautioning us about the necessity for humility, He will dwell in us:

...we seek to see Christ clearly and properly, but we cannot see Him unless we leap away from such as keep us from Him, and climb up a tree; that is to say, unless we transcend earthly things and rise to the things of heaven. Then Christ will see us, will cordially call us to Himself and will make His dwelling in us; for in this way do fervent believers become the house of God.¹³

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 247.

² See Hieromonk German Ciuba, (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 578.

³ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

⁴ *id.*

⁵ *id.*, p. 248.

⁶ *id.*

⁷ *id.*, pp. 248-249.

⁸ *id.*, p. 249.

⁹ *id.*

¹⁰ *id.*, see fn 6, p. 250, they are courage, prudence, righteousness, and self-control.

¹¹ *id.*

¹² Ciuba, *op. cit.*, pp. 578-590 in general and pp. 587-589 in particular for a corroborative explanation of the Lord coming to save what was lost.

¹³ *id.*, p. 588.