

## Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10, Trinity Sunday VIII

August 6, 2006

Beloved of the Lord....From what we have just heard, what was it that made Zacchaeus different from other men? In the Holy Scriptures what was unique about Zacchaeus which made him stand out among others? The first thing we observe is that he was short. He was so short he had to climb a tree to see Jesus. We also readily observe that Zacchaeus was rich. Certainly if Zacchaeus was in a crowd, his rich clothing would make him stand out from the common people of Jericho.

The point to be made here today is that we so often only look on the surface of things. We look at outward appearance. If we were to look Zacchaeus we would quickly notice that he was shorter than most people, or perhaps that he was rich. But do you think Jesus looked the same way at Zacchaeus? When Jesus looked up at Zacchaeus in that tree, what did Jesus see? Did Jesus immediately notice that Zacchaeus was short or rich? No, He didn't. Instead Jesus saw a sinner who was troubled by his sins. Jesus saw a sinner who was so eager to see Jesus, that he, a grown man, climbed up into a tree just to catch a glimpse of Him. Jesus is so unlike us! We tend to look on the surface of man, at his outward appearance,.....and even worse we immediately make judgments about him. Jesus on the other hand does not look on the surface or outward appearance, but Jesus looks upon the heart. God sees right into the heart of man, and He knows whether a man is sorry or not for his sins. He knows whether a man has faith or not. The Bible says, "the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

Because Jesus is God, Jesus knew the heart of Zacchaeus. Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was a man who was sorry for his sinful life. Jesus knew that Zacchaeus was worried about his own soul's salvation. Most important of all, Jesus knew He could save Zacchaeus from sin. As we hear the lesson of Zacchaeus today, let us remember that the Lord does not look on the surface of things or outward appearances, but Jesus looks beyond appearances, and looks straight into the heart. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

I. The invitation of Jesus is an invitation to sinners. Let us first learn the background of Zacchaeus. The Bible says he "was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich." The publicans were the tax collectors. Not only was Zacchaeus a tax collector, but he was the head honcho. Unfortunately Zacchaeus was a corrupt tax collector. He would overcharge the people their taxes and pocket the excess. Because Zacchaeus stole from people

in this way, he became rich, and the people of Jericho hated him for it.

Zacchaeus didn't have to break into houses to steal. He abused his own employment for the love of money. The Bible says, "The love of money is the root of all evil." It is not the money that is sinful, but it is the love of money that is sinful. The seventh commandment says, *Thou shalt not steal*. But what does this mean? *We should fear and love God that we may not take our neighbor's money or goods, nor get them by false ware dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and business.* "God forbids every kind of robber, theft, and fraud, as well as sinful longing for anything that belongs to our neighbor." All sin stems from the heart. It begins by wanting something that belongs to our neighbor. All of us have committed this sin. We can steal the good reputation of our neighbor by way of slander. We can steal from our neighbor by way of cheating on our taxes and dishonestly reporting our income. We can steal from our neighbor by frivolous and unjust lawsuits or by filing for bankruptcy. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 says, "The wicked borroweth and payeth not again." We can steal from our neighbor by not working our hardest or best at work, or by taking too long of a lunch break, or by punching in late or leaving early. Stealing need not be the obvious breaking into a bank and robbing it. It is much more common than that. In one form or another, we steal from our neighbor every day. Gambling for money is a popular way to steal. It is not just a harmless game. If gambling is just for the enjoyment of a game, people should have no problem returning their winnings. But there is also a flip side to the seventh commandment, and that is that we should be content with what we have, and also that we should work so that we can help others. God's children do not work in order to get rich. They work so that they can help others. The Bible says, "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. " Prov. 23:4 Also, "let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Eph. 4:28 Our Lord Jesus therefore wants us to work in order to provide for our families and loved ones, and also to provide for those in need.

Returning now to Zacchaeus, "When Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house." Though Jesus knew Zacchaeus to be a tax-collecting thief, Jesus invited Zacchaeus to eat with him. This invitation of Jesus to the sinful Zacchaeus is an invitation to all sinners. It is rightly said that Jesus is a friend of sinners. This does not mean Jesus approves of sin in any way, rather it proves that Jesus brings with Him forgiveness. His invitation of forgiveness goes out to even thieves, and that should bring us comfort. For we are no better than Zacchaeus. We too have stolen from

our neighbor and deserve nothing but punishment. But when we see Jesus inviting Zacchaeus to dinner, we should see Jesus inviting ourselves to dine with Him as well. To the thief on the cross Jesus said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Jesus still invites us into His Church, into His kingdom by way of the Gospel and faith. While we do indeed need to repent of breaking the seventh commandment, it is the Gospel invitation of Jesus which works complete repentance into our hearts. For to repent of your sins is not only to confess them, but also to believe in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. And so, when Jesus says to us in His Gospel Word, "Do not fear, neither be afraid, I have paid for all your sins on the cross, Thy sins be forgiven thee", such words bring hope, life, and faith to our hearts. For when we see Jesus as He is, a friend of sinners who brings with Him forgiveness, our hearts cannot but help to love Him in return.

II. Those who murmur. But what was it that happened when the people of Jericho saw Jesus inviting Zacchaeus to dine with Him? The people murmured against Jesus! How quickly they turned upon Jesus with hateful thoughts against our Lord! The Bible says, "When they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner!" You can almost hear the people muttering under their breath, "Does Jesus know who He is dealing with here? Zacchaeus is a PUBLICAN, he is a thief! He is a sinner!" Oh how they hated Zacchaeus, and oh how they hated Jesus for showing kindness to Zacchaeus!

Apparently the people of Jericho thought they were better than Zacchaeus! After all, they weren't thieves! They weren't tax collectors! They had never broken the seventh commandment! I speak sarcastically here. For these people represent all the supposedly "good" people of the world who think they have no need for Christ! They stay at home on Sunday rather than going to church because they're really not so bad! At least that is the way they think! Even worse, such people are quite unaware that they even need a Savior, for what sins have they done which need to be forgiven? So they think. And truly, are we any better than the people of Jericho? Don't we often have the same problem they did in judging their neighbor? Don't we often find in our own hearts the self-same self-righteous attitude of Jericho's people?

From all of this we should learn that a truly Christian church is a place for thieves such as Zacchaeus. A truly Christian church is a church for sinners who have broken the seventh commandment. A truly Christian church is for sinners, thieves like you and me! For we are either like the people of Jericho, who murmur and complain against Christ because He had fellowship with sinners, or we are like Zacchaeus who was overjoyed to learn that Jesus received sinners. We fall into one camp or the other. We are either sorry for our sins as Zacchaeus was,

or we are blind to our sins and only able to see the sins of others.

III. Jesus came to save that which was lost. Returning to our text...what happened after Jesus invited Zacchaeus to dine with Him? Zacchaeus "made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully." Zacchaeus was so happy that he joyfully came down from that tree! He was joyful and happy because He knew Jesus brought with Him forgiveness! And so it is with us. For when we know and realize the great depths and darkness of our own sin, ye we see Jesus coming our way.....and when Christ Jesus reaches out His Gospel hand of love and forgiveness to us, can't we be happy too! Can we not rejoice with Zacchaeus that Jesus is our Friend as well, a Friend of sinners! Indeed we can rejoice! And we do! For "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Though we be lost in this world of sin, though we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment, we know from God's Holy Word that Jesus came into this world to save sinners. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Once you realize you have been lost by way of sin, Christ finds you! That is, He comes to you in His precious Gospel Word and plainly tells you what He did for you on the cross. Jesus took your sins out of the way, nailing them to the cross. In this way, Jesus purchased with His blood, true spiritual peace between God and man. God made peace with you, through the blood of the cross. Therefore it is God Himself who absolves you saying, "Thy sins be forgiven thee!" It is God Himself who in the Gospel declares to you, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved!" It is God Himself who tells you "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." It is God Himself who tells you, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Therefore beloved of the Lord, knowing the riches of His grace let us be fruitful in all things. Let us joyfully bring forth the fruits of our repentance! For once Zacchaeus came to faith, the change in his heart was evident. The Bible says, "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." So the fruits of faith should be evident in our lives as well. For where there is faith, good works do follow. May our most gracious God help us to do good works, as we rejoice in the knowledge of our salvation through Jesus Christ, a Friend of Sinners. "This day is salvation come to this house." "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." May all of us be found in the faith of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.