

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

ST. LUKE. VOL. II.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE XIX. 1-10.

1 And <i>Jesus</i> entered and passed through Jericho.	6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.
2 And, behold, <i>there was</i> a man named Zacchæus, which was the chief among the Publicans, and he was rich.	7 And when they saw <i>it</i> , they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.
3 And he sought to see <i>Jesus</i> who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.	8 And Zacchæus 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 <i>him</i> fourfold.
4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.	9 And <i>Jesus</i> said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.
5 And when <i>Jesus</i> came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.	10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

THESE verses describe the conversion of a soul. Like the stories of Nicodemus, and the Samaritan woman, the story of Zacchæus should be frequently studied by Christians. The Lord *Jesus* never changes. What He did for the man before us, He is able and willing to do for any one of ourselves.

We learn, firstly, from these verses, that *no one is too bad to be saved, or beyond the power of Christ's grace*. We are told of a wealthy publican becoming a disciple of Christ. A more unlikely event we cannot well imagine! We see the "camel passing through the eye of a needle," and the "rich man entering the kingdom of God." We behold a plain proof that "all things are possible with God." We see a covetous tax-gatherer transformed into a liberal Christian

The door of hope which the Gospel reveals to sinners, is very wide open. Let us leave it open as we find it: let us not attempt, in narrow-minded ignorance, to shut it. We should never be afraid to maintain that Christ is "able to save to the uttermost," and that the vilest of sinners may be freely forgiven if they will only come to Him. We should offer the Gospel boldly to the worst and wickedest, and say, "There is hope. Only repent and believe. Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." (Isai. i. 18.) Such doctrine may seem to worldly people foolishness and licentiousness; but such doctrine is the Gospel of Him who saved Zacchæus at Jericho. Hospitals discharge many cases as incurable; but there are no incurable cases under the Gospel: any sinner may be healed, if he will only come to Christ.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, *how little and insignificant are the things on which a soul's salvation often turns*. We are told that Zacchæus "sought to see *Jesus* who he was; and could not, because he was little of stature." Curiosity, and nothing but curiosity, appears to have been the motive of his mind; that curiosity once roused, Zacchæus was determined to gratify it. Rather than not see *Jesus* he ran on before along the road, and

“climbed up into a tree.” Upon that little action, so far as man’s eyes can see, there hinged the salvation of his soul. Our Lord stopped under the tree, and said, “Come down: I must abide at thy house.” From that very moment Zacchæus was an altered man. That very night he lay down a Christian.

We must never “despise the day of small things.” (Zech. iv. 10.) We must never reckon anything little that concerns the soul. The ways by which the Holy Ghost lead men and women to Christ are wonderful and mysterious. He is often beginning in a heart a work which shall stand to eternity, when a looker-on observes nothing remarkable. In every work there must be a beginning, and in spiritual work that beginning is often very small. Do we see a careless brother beginning to use means of grace, which in time past he neglected? Do we see him coming to church and listening to the Gospel after a long course of Sabbath-breaking? When we see such things let us remember Zacchæus, and be hopeful. Let us not look coldly on him because his motives are at present very poor and questionable; let us believe that it is far better to hear the Gospel out of mere curiosity, than not to hear it at all. Our brother is with Zacchæus in the tree! For anything we know he may go further. Who can tell but that he may one day receive Christ joyfully?

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, *Christ’s free compassion towards sinners, and Christ’s power to change hearts*. A more striking instance than that before us it is impossible to conceive. Unasked, our Lord stops and speaks to Zacchæus; unasked, He offers Himself to be a guest in the house of a sinner; unasked, He sends into the heart of a publican the renewing grace of the Spirit, and put him that very day among the children of God. (Jerem. iii. 19.)

It is impossible, with such a passage as this before us, to exalt too highly the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot maintain too strongly that there is in Him an infinite readiness to receive, and an infinite ability to save sinners; above all, we cannot hold too firmly that salvation is not of works, but of grace. If ever there was a soul sought and saved, without having done anything to deserve it, that soul was the soul of Zacchæus. Let us grasp these doctrines firmly and never let them go. Their price is above rubies. Grace, free grace, is the only thought which gives men rest in a dying hour.—Let us proclaim these doctrines confidently to everyone to whom we speak about spiritual things; let us bid them come to Jesus Christ, just as they are, and not wait in the vain hope that they can make themselves fit and worthy to come. Not least, let us tell them that Jesus Christ waits for them, and would come and dwell in their poor sinful hearts, if they would only receive Him. “Behold,” He says, “I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.” (Rev. iii. 20.)

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that *converted sinners will always give evidence of their conversion*. We are told that Zacchæus “stood, and said unto the Lord, The half of my goods I give unto the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” There was *reality* in that speech. There was unmistakable proof that Zacchæus was a new creature. When a wealthy Christian begins to distribute his riches, and an extortioner begins to make restitution, we may well believe that old things have passed away, and all things become new. (2 Cor. v. 17.) There was *decision* in that speech. “I give,” says Zacchæus: “I restore.” He does not speak of future intentions; he does not say, “I will:” but “I do.” Freely pardoned, and raised from death to life, Zacchæus felt that he could not begin too soon to show whose he was and whom he served.

He that desires to give proof that he is a believer should walk in the steps of Zacchæus. Like him, let him thoroughly renounce the sins which have formerly most easily beset him; like him, let him follow the Christian graces which he has formerly most habitually neglected. In any case a believer should so live that all may know that he is a believer: faith that does not purify the heart and life, is not faith at all; grace that cannot be seen, like light, and tasted, like salt, is not grace, but hypocrisy. The man who professes to know Christ and trust Him, while he cleaves to sin and the world, is going down to hell with a lie in his right hand. The heart that has really tasted the grace of Christ will instinctively hate sin.

Let us turn from the whole passage with the last verse ringing in our ears: “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” It is as a Saviour, more than as a Judge, that Christ desires to be known: let us see that we know Him as such; let us take heed that our souls are saved: once saved and converted, we shall say, “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?” (Psalm cxvi. 12.) Once saved, we shall not complain that self-denial, like that of Zacchæus, is a grievous requirement.

NOTES. LUKE XIX. 1–10.

- 1.—[*Entered and passed through.*] It is probable that our version does not exactly give the sense of the Greek here. It would be more literally rendered, “was passing through.”
- 2.—[*And behold.*] It is worthy of remark that this expression is frequently found in the New Testament, when something wonderful is about to be narrated. Thus it indicates that the conversion of Zacchæus was a peculiarly marvellous thing.

The connection between the story of Zacchæus and the preceding chapter, ought not to be overlooked. The difficulty of a rich man’s salvation had been strongly set forth there: the Holy Ghost now proceeds to show us, by the example of Zacchæus, that nothing is impossible with God.

Whether Zacchæus was by birth a Jew or a Gentile, is a point upon which commentators are not agreed. Cyprian, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Bede, and Maldonatus, think that he was a Gentile. The more common and probable opinion is that he was a Jew: the

publicans were generally Jews. Moreover his name seems a Hebrew name: Doddridge thinks it was Zaccai.

- 3.—[*He sought to see Jesus.*] Pellican considers that Zacchæus was under the influence of grace already, and compares him to old Simeon in the temple, rejoicing in the sight of the infant Jesus! This seems to me a very improbable opinion. I hold, with Poole, Burkitt, and Scott, that Zacchæus only sought to see Jesus out of mere curiosity, although no doubt his curiosity was overruled by God to his conversion.
- 4.—[*Climbed up into a sycamore tree.*] The ridicule that such an action would entail on Zacchæus ought to be remembered. A wealthy publican climbing up into a tree, after running along a road, in order to see a religious teacher, would doubtless call forth mockery from all who saw him! Yet the circumstance, trifling as it seems, throws light on the character of Zacchæus. He was one who cared not for man's opinion; if he took up a thing he went through with it: if he wanted to see Christ, he would not be prevented by difficulties.
- 5.—[*Today I must abide at thy house.*] Let it be noted that this is the only case in the Gospels in which we find our Lord offering Himself, uninvited, to be a man's guest. In this point of view the expression is a very precious one: Christ sometimes comes to those who seek Him not. (Isai. lxxv. 1.)

Our Lord's perfect knowledge is clearly shown in this case. He knew not only the name of the man in the sycamore tree, but the state of his heart. (See John i. 48.)

- 6.—[*Came down and received him.*] It is precisely at this point that the conversion of Zacchæus seems to have taken place. The unexpected condescension of such a famous teacher of religion in offering to be a publican's guest, was made the means by which the Spirit changed his heart. Nothing is so frequently found to turn the hearts of great sinners, as the unexpected and undeserved tidings that Christ loves them and cares for their souls. These tidings have often broken and melted hearts of stone.
- 7.—[*All murmured.*] The "all" here mentioned must doubtless be the Pharisees, and the Pharisaical portion of the crowd which followed our Lord. It cannot of course mean His disciples.

[*Murmured.*] The Greek word used here is only found in one other place. (Luke xv. 2.) It is there used in precisely the same connection, to describe the feeling shown by self-righteous Pharisees on seeing sinners received by Christ.

[*A man that is a sinner.*] This expression goes far to indicate that Zacchæus was not a Gentile but a Jew. If he had been a Gentile, that circumstance would surely have been cast in our Lord's teeth, as well as the fact that he was "a sinner."

- 8.—[*And Zacchæus stood.*] Some have thought that our Lord tarried a day or two at the house of Zacchæus, and that the speech here recorded was made at the end of His stay. There seems, however, no sufficient reason for supposing that this idea is correct. It is far more probable that our Lord accepted the hospitality of Zacchæus for a meal, and then passed on His journey.

[*My goods.*] We must, in reason, assume that Zacchæus first made restitution to those he had robbed, and *afterwards* gave half of what was justly and honestly his own to the poor. Otherwise he would have given away what was not his.

[*I give to the poor.*] The contrast between the readiness of Zacchæus to distribute to the poor, and the unwillingness of the rich ruler described in last chapter, ought not to be overlooked. Our Lord had required of the ruler nothing but what grace can enable man to do.

The use of the present tense in the speech of Zacchæus ought to be noted. He says, "I give," and "I restore." There was no deferring and putting off in his conduct.

Ford on this verse quotes a fine passage from Basil, exposing the meanness of those who are only liberal to the poor in their wills, and give away their money in charity when they can no longer keep or enjoy it. Zacchæus gave away during his own

[*Taken by false accusation.*] The word so translated is very peculiar. It is only found in one other place in the New Testament. (Luke iii. 14.) It is there applied to the soldiers, and is rendered “accuse falsely.”

The Greek word from which it is formed is the origin of our English word “sycophant.” It is said to have been originally applied at Athens, to persons who informed against those who illegally exported figs. Afterwards the word seems to have been applied to everyone who wronged another by false, or frivolous, or vexatious information, and finally, to any extortion under pretence of law.

[*I restore fourfold.*] This expression deserves notice. It shows how thorough and complete was Zacchæus’ repentance for his past life. It was restitution far exceeding what the law of Moses required.

Burgon remarks, “Zacchæus imposed upon himself the severest measure enjoined by the law concerning anyone convicted of theft. ‘It is written, he shall restore four sheep, for a sheep’ (Exod. xxii. 1); but even this was exacted only of him who had made away with the property he had stolen. If the theft be found in his hand alive, he was only to restore double.’ (Exod. xxii. 4.) But with respect to him who confessed his crime it is only said, ‘He shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed.’ (Numb. v. 7.) Zacchæus therefore judged himself most severely.”—Let us do likewise, when we repent.

9.—[*Salvation come to this house.*] Some commentators maintain from this expression that Zacchæus’ family were all converted together with himself. Such an interpretation appears needless and groundless. The simplest idea is, that salvation comes to a “house” when the head and master of it is saved.

[*He is a son of Abraham.*] This expression was probably used with a reference to the sneers of Pharisees against publicans and sinners, as being unworthy of eternal life. Our Lord declares that however much the self-righteous Pharisees might despise Zacchæus, he was a genuine son of Abraham, if any one was. He was one by natural descent; but, better than that, he was a son of Abraham in a way the Pharisees were not: he walked in the steps of Abraham’s faith and works, which they did not do. He was one in heart with Abraham as well as in blood.

10.—[*The Son of man is come, &c.*] This sentence seems to be a general reply to the uncharitable remarks of those who had wondered at Jesus, for going to be “guest with a man that was a sinner.”

Our Lord declares that such persons had only displayed their ignorance of the great purpose for which He came into the world. He had come into the world to save sinners. He was not ashamed to visit such people as Zacchæus, and to receive them into the number of His disciples. In short, He had come “to seek and save that which was lost.”

There is a close resemblance between our Lord’s argument in this place, and that which we find Him using in the 15th chapter of St. Luke, where the Scribes and Pharisees accused Him of “receiving sinners, and eating with them.”