

THE HONOURED GUEST (Lk. 19:1-10)

Jesus was on His journey up to Jerusalem, and He was passing through the ancient city of Jericho. The crowds were growing larger and larger for these were exciting times!

Even when you are in a crowd, somebody often stands out, - there's something about them that catches your attention ... and on this occasion, it was Zacchaeus. ... He would not have been the only person trying to get a good view of Jesus, for after all, Jesus was known the length and breadth of the country ...

On the other hand, Zacchaeus was the kind of man nobody wanted to see. He was a social pariah. He was not simply *a* tax collector, - one of those people who took the exorbitant revenue from the people ... and then 'some more' for themselves ... but he was a *chief* tax collector (v.2). That means he had worked his way through the ranks, and was so successfully unscrupulous his Roman employers used him to oversee the other tax-collectors ... To use the vernacular, he was a wee rascal nobody liked, and probably you couldn't have liked even if you reared him, as we say. ... But he was fascinated about wanting to see Jesus! For whatever reason, ³ he sought to see Jesus who he was ... ⁴ And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him.

For a moment, take your eyes off Zacchaeus and look at the crowd. They were all 'religious', - it was *that* time of the year, coming up to the Passover season. They were all excited with the many pilgrims passing through Jericho on their way to the temple in Jerusalem. On this day it was Jesus, tomorrow it would be somebody else ... and they would have been in a continuous state of religious hysteria. ... It wasn't because it was Jesus, it was simply because they were so excitable that time of the year!

... And then Jesus, ... look again at Jesus ... Lk. 19:1 [*He*] entered and passed through Jericho ... and He walked over near the tree this little fellow had climbed, and Luke makes a point of recording, ⁴ he [*Jesus*] was to pass that way. In other words, Jesus had already decided to come to Jericho because He had this appointment to keep!

Yes, He was on the road to Jerusalem, but it was not the *only* road to Jerusalem ... and He could have taken other routes and stopped somewhere else, *but* He came *that* way and stopped under *that* sycamore tree Zacchaeus was sitting in! Jesus passed *that* way, stood under *that* tree, with *that* man in it ... Then, we read even more beautiful words, ⁵ And 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. ... No one else would have gone near Zacchaeus' house, but Jesus had already planned that meeting!

There are, of course, many different directions from which we can approach this incident, but as we make preparation for coming to the Lord's Table ... let's entitle our study, **The Honoured Guest**.

We are coming to the Table, at Christ's invitation. There is nothing of ourselves which deserves His company, and yet as His children we are invited. ... Notice Zacchaeus' response to Christ's call, - he received Jesus *speedily* (v.6 he made haste), *obediently* (and came down), *joyfully* (received him joyfully). ... It did not even cross Zacchaeus' mind *not* to invite Jesus. ... And he wasn't doing it for show or financial gain. ... He invited Jesus into his home because that was how his heart directed him.

We all need the Saviour, - it does not matter who we are, or where we are from, - the world needs Jesus ... there is not a single person who does not! For your encouragement ... there is coming a time when this earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as Habakkuk prophesied (Hab. 2:14), and that is to happen *Is. 2:2 in the last days, [when] the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 ... and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.* ... This is the good news which is all to do with Jesus, for through Him we have His promise of our home in Heaven. In Him there is the escape from the judgment of God and His eternal wrath. Depending upon Him is the only conclusive guarantee of Glory, and that is what we celebrate each time we come to the Lord's table, and we shall keep on doing it "until He comes" again.

Can you see Zacchaeus up the tree? ... I wonder if he played in that tree when he was a boy ... It made him feel bigger than everybody else for he was up there looking down on the people *until Jesus called him*. And Zacchaeus had no excuse to stay up there, - Jesus had come into his town, stood underneath where he was, and called to him! Zacchaeus would not have known too much about Jesus, but he knew enough, ... that when Jesus commanded him to come down, he should come down! The personal call of God demanded his obedience!

When it comes to the subject of Jesus, some people 'fall back on' a kind of ignorance, - "Oh, I don't know about those things, I'll leave it to others" ... You see, it is not 'natural' to believe in Jesus, and that is how it is so easy to dismiss Him ... It is the most natural instinct to reject Him and to have nothing to do with Him, but here in this account, we see how the plan of God had brought Jesus into Jericho, and Zacchaeus down out of the tree!

Zacchaeus had a 'good' reason *not* to come out of that tree, - nobody liked him, and he could have thought Jesus did not like him either! "Jesus, if the people who know me hate me, why should You be different?!" ... "Jesus, I'm not coming down in case You make a fool of me, or something happens to me" ... "Jesus, you wouldn't want someone like me!" He had countless reasons as to why he should stay up in that tree ... but, Zacchaeus, if Jesus does not want you, why is He specifically calling your name! 5

Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. ... Zacchaeus, nobody pointed you out, and nobody told Jesus your name ... Zacchaeus, this is Jesus, the Son of God ... and He already knew you long before you ever heard His Name.

It is not God who erects barriers of unbelief. It is not God Who says "No". ... It is yet another of the devil's tactics to make you think Jesus would never want you. He 'screws' up your mind and tells you that you are not worthy. It is other people Jesus wants, but He is not interested in you! ... *But that is a lie for the devil is a liar!* Every word which proceeds out of his mouth is a lie! ... Jesus *does* want you, - He went to the cross of Calvary to die for you, - that is how much He wanted *and loves* you.

The more we look at this man Zacchaeus, the more we begin to see the real person, and the more we see he is not any different from the rest of us. Take away the outer garments of his loathsomeness, and his detestable job, and those riches he has gathered by deceitful and unscrupulous means ... and you will see an ordinary man, empty and searching for more than anything he can ever gain from this world by good means or bad ... Here is a man who was 'at the end of his tether' ... and Jesus has entered and passed through Jericho (v.1), for he was to pass that way (v.4), and He came to the place, He looked up, and saw where Zacchaeus was. ... *That was an appointment made in eternity!*

When the Lord called him, - the irresistible call of the Saviour, - Zacchaeus came down from the tree outside Jericho, but on another tree, outside of Jerusalem, - the tree of Calvary, - Jesus was lifted up to take his place! ... Out of all the crowd around Jesus in Jericho, Zacchaeus was the least worthy ... and yet God chose the one others would reject. Even before Jesus entered Jericho, He had this meeting already planned.

Jesus never does anything by accident. He leaves nothing up to chance or coincidence ... and when Christ called him, Zacchaeus could stay in the tree no longer. He *had* to come down, - he climbed up (v.4), but he jumped down (v.6). Jesus *first* opened the door of His heart to Zacchaeus so that Zacchaeus would open the door of his own heart, - it began with Jesus, - and Zacchaeus went on to open the door of his home and all its contents to the Saviour.

Zacchaeus would not have been expecting for this to happen, - he was not planning to meet and speak with Jesus, he was not expecting to have Jesus in his home for he was only reckoning on seeing Jesus at a distance ... Anyway, he could have said, "Wait Jesus, I have to run home and tidy my house. I've got to prepare and make things ready." ... No, we don't read that. Instead, we see here how Jesus went to this man's home as it was ... *but* notice the change which came out of that meeting. Previously this unscrupulous tax-villain had been out for all he could *get*, ... but now, it was all he could *give* since Jesus came into his life, ⁸ **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.
 ... By the time this man had given back what wasn't his, his bank account would have been empty, but his heart would have been full.

Jesus did not go into his home, sit him down, and ignore what kind of a house this was ... Neither did Jesus go into his house and *command* him to get rid of it all. No, when Zacchaeus met Jesus his life and values changed because he became intent on leaving behind his old ways and practices ... the sinful pleasures, for he now possessed the new privileges in Christ.

There was not a single word from Jesus to this man about his ill-gotten gains, or how he got them, but such was the holy presence of the Saviour the man knew what he had to do. He had to get rid of the possessions Jesus would not approve of because when you become a Christian you become brand new in the Lord Jesus, and you cannot be doing with the old when it conflicts with the new. You cannot have anything in your life He would not have in His ... but, at the same time, He gives you far more than you could ever imagine and it *more* than makes up for what you have given away, - *ask Zacchaeus!*

This was one of the highlights of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, and it included a man no-one else would have bothered with. One of the most precious statements Christ made was with this man on His mind, **10 the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.** ... And it didn't matter how others thought, or even how Zacchaeus thought, but Jesus made His way into Jericho, and stood at the bottom of that tree the wee man was up ... "They" say men came out of trees, for they came from monkeys ... but no, men did not come from monkeys for they were created in the image of God and for God's glory ... and rather than 'swinging about' a tree, Jesus called Zacchaeus out of one! ... He called him out of the *nonsense* which was his old life, and He called him into a new experience with God which would last for time and eternity.

It is good to be thinking about how Zacchaeus met the Saviour for it reminds us of how we met Him also. And it is our privilege to come to His Table on which are the emblems of the bread and the cup, - symbols He used to describe how His body would be broken and His blood would be shed on Calvary ... Our Table was formed out of wood which came from a tree ... and it was upon a tree our Saviour died. He died for sinners, - He died for people like Zacchaeus, and He died for you and me,

All my iniquities on Him were laid ...
 Though poor and needy I can trust my Lord
 Though weak and sinful I believe His Word ...
 He that believeth, O the good news shout,
 Hath everlasting life.