

Luke: 19:1–10

From Catena Aurea:

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

AMBROSE. Zacchæus in the sycamore, the blind man by the way side: upon the one our Lord waits to shew mercy, upon the other He confers the great glory of abiding in his house. The chief among the Publicans is here fitly introduced. For who will hereafter despair of himself, now that he attains to grace who gained his living by fraud. And he too moreover a rich man, that we may know that not all rich men are covetous.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But Zacchæus made no delay in what he did, and so was accounted worthy of the favour of God, which gives sight to the blind, and calls them who are afar off.

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. The seed of salvation had begun to spring up in him, for he desired to see Jesus, having never seen Him. For if he had seen Him, he would long since have given up the Publican's wicked life. No one that sees Jesus can remain any longer in wickedness. But there were two obstacles to his seeing Him. The multitude not so much of men as of his sins prevented him, for he was little of stature.

AMBROSE. What means the Evangelist by describing his stature, and that of none other? It is perhaps because he was young in wickedness, or as yet weak in the faith. For he was not yet prostrate in sin who could climb up. He had not yet seen Christ.

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. But he discovered a good device; running before he climbed up into a sycamore, and saw Him whom he had long wished for, i. e. Jesus, passing by. Now Zacchæus desired no more than to see, but He who is able to do more than we ask for, granted to Him far above what he expected; as it follows, And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him. He saw the soul of the man striving earnestly to live a holy life, and converts him to godliness.

AMBROSE. Uninvited he invites Himself to his house; as it follows, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down, & c. for He knew how richly He would reward his hospitality. And though He had not yet heard the word of invitation, He had already seen the will.

AMBROSE. Let the rich learn that guilt attaches not to the goods themselves, but to those who know not how to use them. For riches, as they are hindrances to virtue in the unworthy, so are they means of advancing it in the good.

THEOPHYLACT. If we examine more closely, we shall see that nothing was left of his own property. For having given half of his goods to the poor, out of the remainder he restored fourfold to those whom he had injured. He not only promised this, but did it. For he says not, "I will give the half, and I will restore fourfold, but, I give, and I restore. To such Christ announces salvation; Jesus saith unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, signifying that Zacchæus had attained to salvation, meaning by the house the inhabitant thereof. And it follows, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For He would not have given the name of a son of Abraham to a lifeless building.

THEOPHYLACT. He said not that he "was" a son of Abraham, but that he now is. For before when he was the chief among the publicans, and bore no likeness to the righteous Abraham, he was not his son. But because some murmured that he tarried with a man who was a sinner, he adds in order to restrain them, For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. The crowd is the tumultuous state of an ignorant multitude, which cannot see the lofty top of wisdom. Zacchæus therefore, while he was in the crowd, saw not Christ, but having advanced beyond the vulgar ignorance, was thought worthy to entertain Him, whom he desired to look upon.

AMBROSE. He has well added, that our Lord was to pass that way, either where the sycamore-tree was, or where he was who was about to believe, that so He might preserve the mystery, and sow the seeds of grace. For He had so come as that through the Jews He came to the Gentiles. He sees then Zacchæus above, for already the excellence of his faith shone forth amidst the fruits of good works, and the loftiness of the fruitful tree; but Zacchæus stands out above the tree, as one who is above the law.

THEOPHYLACT. It is easy to turn this to a moral use. For whoever surpasses many in wickedness is small in spiritual growth, and cannot see Jesus for the crowd. For disturbed by passion and worldly things, he beholds not Jesus walking, that is, working in us, not recognising His operation. But he climbs up to the top of a sycamore-tree, in that he rises above the sweetness of pleasure, which is signified by a fig, and subduing it, and so becoming more exalted, he sees and is seen by Christ.

THEOPHYLACT. The Lord said to him, Make haste and come down, that is, "Thou hast ascended by penitence to a place too high for thee, come down by humility, lest thy exaltation cause thee to slip. I must abide in the house of a humble man. We have two kinds of goods in us, bodily, and spiritual; the just man gives up all his bodily goods to the poor, but he forsakes not his spiritual goods, but if he has extorted any thing from any one, he restores to him fourfold; signifying thereby that if a man by repentance walks in the opposite path to his former perverseness, he by the manifold practice of virtue heals all his old offences, and so merits salvation, and is called the son of Abraham, because he went out from his own kindred, that is, from his ancient wickedness.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

19:1 Introduction: Jesus Enters Jericho

Zacchæus and the Blind Man Receive Mercy.

Ambrose: "And, behold, there was a man named Zacchæus." Zacchæus in the sycamore; the blind man by the wayside. The Lord waits for the one to have mercy on him and honors the other with the radiance of his visit. He questions the one before healing him and attends the other's house as an uninvited guest. He knew that his host's reward was to be rich. Although Christ had not yet heard his voice of invitation, he has heard his good will. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 8.82.

19:2–4 Zacchaeus Seeks Jesus

The Sinfulness of Zacchaeus.

Cyril of Alexandria: Zacchaeus was leader of the tax collectors, a man entirely abandoned to greed, whose only goal was the increase of his gains. This was the practice of the tax collectors, although Paul calls it idolatry, possibly as being suitable only for those who have no knowledge of God. Since they shamelessly, openly professed this vice, the Lord very justly joined them with the prostitutes, saying to the leaders of the Jews, “The prostitutes and the tax collectors go before you into the kingdom of God.” Zacchaeus did not continue to be among them, but he was counted worthy of mercy at Christ’s hands. He calls near those who are far away and gives light to those who are in darkness. Commentary on Luke, Homily 127.

A Rich Man Who Enters the Kingdom.

Jerome: There certainly is much truth in a certain saying of a philosopher, “Every rich man is either wicked or the heir of wickedness.” That is why the Lord and Savior says that it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Someone may raise the objection, “How did wealthy Zacchaeus enter the kingdom of heaven?” He gave away his wealth and immediately replaced it with the riches of the heavenly kingdom. The Lord and Savior did not say that the rich would not enter the kingdom of heaven but that they will enter with difficulty. Homily on Psalm 83 (84).

To See Christ.

Cyril of Alexandria: Come and let us see what was the method of Zacchaeus’s conversion. He desired to see Jesus and therefore climbed into a sycamore tree, and so a seed of salvation sprouted within him. Christ saw this with the eyes of deity. Looking up, he also saw Zacchaeus with the eyes of humanity, and since it was his purpose for all to be saved, he extends his gentleness to him. To encourage him, he says, “Come down quickly.” Zacchaeus searched to see Christ, but the multitude prevented him, not so much that of the people but of his sins. He was short of stature, not merely in a bodily point of view but also spiritually. He could not see him unless he were raised up from the earth and climbed into the sycamore, by which Christ was about to pass. The story contains a puzzle. In no other way can a person see Christ and believe in him except by climbing up into the sycamore, by making foolish his earthly members of fornication, uncleanness, etc. Commentary on Luke, Homily 127.

Zacchaeus, Unable to See Jesus Through the Crowd, Was Unashamed to Climb the Tree of Folly.

Augustine: Zacchaeus climbed away from the crowd and saw Jesus without the crowd getting in his way.

The crowd laughs at the lowly, to people walking the way of humility, who leave the wrongs they suffer in God's hands and do not insist on getting back at their enemies. The crowd laughs at the lowly and says, "You helpless, miserable clod, you cannot even stick up for yourself and get back what is your own." The crowd gets in the way and prevents Jesus from being seen. The crowd boasts and crows when it is able to get back what it owns. It blocks the sight of the one who said as he hung on the cross, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." ... He ignored the crowd that was getting in his way. He instead climbed a sycamore tree, a tree of "silly fruit." As the apostle says, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block indeed to the Jews, [now notice the sycamore] but folly to the Gentiles." Finally, the wise people of this world laugh at us about the cross of Christ and say, "What sort of minds do you people have, who worship a crucified God?" What sort of minds do we have? They are certainly not your kind of mind. "The wisdom of this world is folly with God." No, we do not have your kind of mind. You call our minds foolish. Say what you like, but for our part, let us climb the sycamore tree and see Jesus. The reason you cannot see Jesus is that you are ashamed to climb the sycamore tree.

Let Zacchaeus grasp the sycamore tree, and let the humble person climb the cross. That is little enough, merely to climb it. We must not be ashamed of the cross of Christ, but we must fix it on our foreheads, where the seat of shame is. Above where all our blushes show is the place we must firmly fix that for which we should never blush. As for you, I rather think you make fun of the sycamore, and yet that is what has enabled me to see Jesus. You make fun of the sycamore, because you are just a person, but "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." Sermon 174.3.

19:5–8 Jesus Must Stay in Zacchaeus's Home

Zacchaeus Welcomes Jesus to His House.

Augustine: The Lord, who had already welcomed Zacchaeus in his heart, was now ready to be welcomed by him in his house. He said, "Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down, since I have to stay in your house." He thought it was a marvelous piece of good luck to see Christ. While imagining it was a marvelous piece of luck quite beyond words to see him passing by, he was suddenly found worthy to have him in his house. Grace is poured out, and faith starts working through love. Christ, who was already dwelling in his heart, is welcomed into his house. Zacchaeus says to Christ, "Lord, half my goods I give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone of anything, I am paying back four times over." It is as if he were saying, "The reason I am keeping back half for myself is not in order to have it, but to have something from which to pay people back."

There you are. That is really what welcoming Jesus means, welcoming him into your heart. Christ was already there. He was in Zacchaeus and spoke through him. The apostle says that this is what it means, “For Christ to dwell by faith in your hearts.” Sermon 174.5.

Zacchaeus Leaves the Law for Salvation.

Ephrem the Syrian: Zacchaeus was praying in his heart as follows, “Happy the one who is worthy that this just man should enter into his dwelling.” The Lord said to him, “Hurry, come down, Zacchaeus.” Seeing he knew his thoughts, he said, “Just as he knows this, he knows also all that I have done.” He therefore said, “All that I have unjustly received, I give back fourfold.” Hurry and come down from the fig tree, because it is with you that I will be staying. The first fig tree of Adam will be forgotten, because of the last fig tree of the chief tax collector, and the name of the guilty Adam will be forgotten because of the innocent Zacchaeus. Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron 20.

Zacchaeus Used His Property to Express Gratitude for His Salvation.

Maximus of Turin: Zacchaeus must be praised. His riches were unable to keep him from the royal threshold. He should be greatly praised because his riches brought him to the threshold of the kingdom. From this, we understand that wealth is not a hindrance but a help to attaining the glory of Christ. While we possess it, we should not squander it on wild living but give it away for the sake of salvation. There is no crime in possessions, but there is crime in those who do not know how to use possessions. For the foolish, wealth is a temptation to vice, but for the wise, it is a help to virtue. Some receive an opportunity for salvation, but others acquire an obstacle of condemnation. Sermons 95–96.

19:9–10 Jesus’ Pronouncement About His Ministry

One Man Without Sin.

Augustine: “The Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.” All were lost. From the moment the one man sinned, in whom the whole race was contained, the whole race was lost. One man without sin came. He would save them from sin. Sermon 175.1.

Zacchaeus a True Son of Abraham.

Cyprian: Finally, he also calls sons of Abraham those whom he perceives are active in helping and nourishing the poor. Zacchaeus said, “Behold, I give one half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” Jesus responded, “Today salvation has come to this

house, since he too is a son of Abraham.” If Abraham believed in God and it was accounted to him as righteousness, then he who gives alms according to the command of God certainly believes in God. He that possesses the true faith keeps the fear of God. Moreover, he keeps the fear of God by showing mercy to the poor. Works and Almsgiving 8.