

Occupy Till I Come

"Then he commanded those servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained"—Luke 19:15

LUKE 19 continues the account of Christ's first appearance on earth. The chapter before us is a magnificent one, for it presents almost a complete picture of God's purpose in Christ. It portrays the calling of those who are seeking for salvation; the blessing of those who are truly Christ's; the rejection of those who are not; Christ's coming in great glory with the destruction of those things that are abominable; and the establishment of God's Truth for all to obey.

Vs. 1-2: *"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."*

After healing blind Bartimaeus (ch. 18), Jesus proceeded into Jericho and passed through on his way to Jerusalem. Jericho was a principal city about 18 miles from Jerusalem. It was noted for two classes of people: publicans or tax collectors, and priests. It was because of the latter that it was called the priestly city, but one full of hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees. And it was out of a city like this, a man is called by Jesus to the Truth. This was Zacchaeus.

"Zacchaeus" comes from the Hebrew word meaning pure and just, and from what he states in v. 8, it appears that he was righteous. But being a tax-collector, he was looked down on by the Jews and regarded as in a position of a heathen and a sinner. In Jesus' eyes, however, he was more worthy of salvation than any of the city. To him Christ came, for he was a true son of Abraham.

It was out of this city of corruption, both natural and spiritual, that one is drawn unto Jesus. It illustrates to us that no matter what the circumstances are, there is always someone who will come to the Truth. Christ's word knows no limit, but goes forth into all the world. Just as it went forth into Jericho, so has it gone forth to us who are living in modern-day Jerichos.

Zacchaeus wanted to see Christ because he had heard much of him. On that day there appeared many who wanted to see him. But of all those in attendance, Zacchaeus stands out as one who made a special effort. When he came to see Christ we note—

"He sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature" (v. 3).

It seems likely that he had heard of Christ's dealings of kindness with publicans and sinners, and of his power for working good. But he could not see Christ because he was small in stature and the crowd was too great. In his desire to see, he climbed into a tree.

He took time and effort to find him. He was not afraid of ridicule. He did not stand on dignity. He had but one single-minded purpose. And we note that he RAN (v. 4)—

"And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way" (v. 4).

Zacchaeus had now placed himself in a more favourable position, and waited for Jesus. In this act he is a type of those who make the effort to see Christ—who step away from the crowd and with earnest desire seek Jesus from a higher plane. This is what we have done when we accepted the Truth. We began by leaving the pressing mass and ascended to a higher position than the earth beneath. Of all in attendance it is recorded that only Zacchaeus believed. Of all the masses, only one was truly attentive to Jesus.

The sycamore tree is a variety of the fig tree. It is larger than the fig tree and is always green, bearing fruit often. But its fruit is inferior, a type of natural Israel's spiritual outlook, a goodly appearance but poor fruit. Yet of this Jewish tree one is called to God.

As Christ came to the place, he found worthy fruit on the tree, and he spoke unto Zacchaeus (vs. 5-6)—

"And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said, 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."

Although rich and a publican, yet Christ speaks to him and invites himself to Zacchaeus' house. Note the words "make haste and come down"—"and he made haste, and came down." Here was a command by Jesus, and then action by Zacchaeus. So it has been with us when called to the Truth, and the Truth is a continual calling. We must be making haste in working out our salvation and doing it joyfully, eagerly, like Zacchaeus.

The urgent and imperative nature of Christ's words is full of meaning. "Make haste"—Christ was passing through the city for the last time. Right then was the day of opportunity: any delay would be too late. That day salvation came to his house.

We each must make the utmost of our daily opportunities to see and serve Jesus—each moment that passes by will never return again. It is these daily opportunities to see Christ through reading, prayer and service that go to make up our character—that will determine at the last whether "salvation has come to our house."

Vs. 7: *"And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, that he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner."*

How typical of the flesh to hastily condemn and murmur! It was so easy to condemn Jesus for doing good, and yet the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees were completely unable to see the gross sins and unrighteousness of their own deeds.

There is a lesson here for us all. We must each be slow in condemning and murmuring about the deeds of others, and spend our time and effort in examining our OWN selves, and striving to bring our OWN lives into harmony with the righteousness and holiness of God. This is a fulltime task, needing all our attention.

V. 8: *"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 anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."*

Christ affirms Zacchaeus' account of himself, and tells him—

Vs. 9-10: *"This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

Here was a man who gave liberally to the needy, even half of his goods, and restored 4 times any unlawful exactions in business. Here was a true son of Abraham in the sense Christ explains (John 8):

"If ye were Abraham's children ye would do the works of Abraham"(39).

It was this class that Christ had come to save, those wandering in the way of death but with good and honest hearts. As Paul says—

"Whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent" (Acts 13:26).

V. 10 is a key verse of the chapter. Here Jesus summed up the mission to which his life was devoted—

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

We, if we are truly his brethren and sisters, must be of the same mind, and seek to help the wandering and lost by preaching the Truth, setting an example to others of living the Truth, and being willing to guide, help and encourage those in need of spiritual help. This is Christ's mission now as it was then. Any who do not accept this are not like Christ.

V. 11: *"And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear."*

They knew that they were going to Jerusalem to hold the Passover feast. They knew that a crisis was imminent, either Christ would manifest himself or the Jewish leaders would arrest him. They personally expected his present journey to end in the triumphant setting up of his Kingdom. They were slow in learning that his road to glory lay only through mocking and suffering.

Christ had attempted to tell them plainly that he must first suffer—but they understood not (Luke 18:34). Christ's suffering was made greater because they did not understand. He had to carry the terrible burden alone.

So often we find in the Truth the same type of situation. Many are imbued with the glorious promises and perfect ideal of the Truth, but they are unwilling to face the fact that first must come trial and development of character—a willingness to endure the cross with Christ. Some endure for a moment, some for a time and then they are gone. But it is only those who endure unto the end that will be saved, those few who continue steadfast to death or Christ's return.

In vs. 12-27 Christ tells them the parable of the nobleman to illustrate that the Kingdom was not to be established immediately. Christ showed that he was the true nobleman and must leave them for awhile but would return—

"He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a Kingdom, and to return" (v. 12).

Christ must first go away in order to receive his kingly power, while his subjects must stay in lowly obedience, fulfilling the work he sets them to do. This has been the work of many centuries—God is still working midst the nations, calling out a people for His Name. "And to return": he WILL return, to assert his right, and to take to himself the great power as King over the whole earth.

"And he called his ten servants and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come"

(v. 13).

Knowing that he would be away for some time he gave them a pound each to occupy till his return. Such has been given to us. We each have been given the knowledge of the Truth and the ability to serve God in varying ways until Christ's return. We are to use ourselves to the uttermost in his vineyard—ever working and toiling by applying the knowledge we have to our daily circumstances.

"Occupy till I come." Occupy: trade, work, keep busy, use profitably. It is not the number of pounds that is the rule of judgment, but the use of them. All differ, some have much more native gift than others. Some gained 10 pounds, some 5, and so forth.

It is the increase by faithful use that makes us acceptable. Some will accomplish more than others, but if we have done all we could with the ability and circumstances we were under, we will be accepted. Therefore we must not measure ourselves by ourselves but must each use the opportunities provided to work out our own salvation. It is using what we have and know, that will count. Jesus says that he will give to every man according to his work—

"And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded those servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading" (v. 15).

The first thing Christ does at his return is to call the responsible living and dead to judgment. The judgment has two operations: (1) it distributes differing measures of reward and distinction among those servants found faithful in different degrees (Will we be in this class?). And (2) it decrees total rejection and death of the unprofitable servants (Or will we be in this class?).

The accepted servants of Christ reign with him, holding different positions of honour and power according to the parts they have performed in this cloudy and dark day. All will be satisfied and all will be glorious, but all will not be of equal honour and rank. The degree in which one of these stars will differ from another star in glory will be God's decision. It won't be open to question or

envy—for all who are admitted will love Christ so greatly as to rejoice in all his appointments. Vs. 16-17—

"Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained 10 pounds.

"And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over 10 cities."

'Good'—worthy. 'Servant'—slave, one whose will and capacities are wholly at the service of another. This word to us carries the thought of one being on the lowest scale of servitude: the giving of oneself completely in doing his master's service. Such was this servant, and for what he did faithfully with the "very little," he received a great reward. Vs. 20-24—

"And another came, saying, Lord, behold here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin; for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man; thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow."

"And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow;"

"Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?"

"And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds."

Let us think on these verses. Dreadfulness will belong to those who are permitted to see what they have lost. They will depart with "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," to be seen no more forever. How unimportant then will be all the present things which today appear so real and important! How vital and real will be the things done for Christ—the self-denials and sacrifices we have made in order to serve him and his brethren and sisters.

V. 26: *"For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him."*

In Luke 8:18, Jesus says—

"Take heed therefore how ye hear, for whosoever hath to him shall be given: and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he SEEMETH to have."

This quotation in Luke 8 perhaps makes the meaning of v. 26 a little clearer. "Take heed HOW ye hear." Just hearing the Truth and agreeing to its first principles will not save us. We must have a humble childlike faith and seek to grow in the knowledge of God's Word in order to be given more understanding.

Those who do not seek to GROW will find any knowledge they had will be taken away in the end. It is those who have—who have spiritual fruit—who have grown in knowledge, and in faith, and in works—who will be given everlasting life. Those who have no fruit will have life itself taken away. V. 28—

"And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem."

Ascending to Jerusalem, the Holy City—so it is a climb to the Kingdom of God, a constant struggle against the flesh. In order to receive a place in Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem, as kings and priests with Christ, we must now daily struggle and labour to reach a higher level of spiritual development and perception.

Many begin to climb and fall back, some give up and say it is too hard—but we must not do so. If we fall or slide backwards, let us pick ourselves up and seek forgiveness and help in Christ until at last we reach the pinnacle and see that glorious promised land, to enter therein with immortality. Ps. 24:3-4—

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place ? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully" (Psa. 24: 3-4).

In vs. 30-38 Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem, is acclaimed by the crowds in triumph and gladness and expectation. This popular ovation was a fulfilment of the prophecy in Zech. 9:9—

"Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy king cometh unto thee; he is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

This would be a source of strength to Christ—to have a foretaste of that glorious future, when the whole nation would receive him with blessing. It was a view of the future when the whole earth would bow down before him. To have this moment and receive adoration before the terrible ordeal of suffering, would strengthen him.

The views we obtain of the Kingdom from God's Word should have a like effect on us. They should encourage us in our trials; as Christ was strengthened to endure, so also we are.

V. 41:*"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it."*

As the city came in view, Jesus halted, beheld the city and wept. It was not for his own suffering he wept—but for the terrible calamity to befall Jerusalem. Within 40 years these buildings would be crumbling and burning with the cries of agony and terror.

When we review the war of Rome against Jerusalem—the invasion of the Holy Land under Vespasian and Titus, we get a full view of the devastations, the horrors, slaughters and ruin that overwhelmed the land. It enables us to see and to feel what the outburst of long-restrained divine wrath means.

Vs. 42-44: *"Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes."*

"For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee, and keep thee in on every side."

"And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Do we realize, brethren and sisters, that a far greater judgment is about to befall the world of our own day? We have God's own Word about this, as well as about Israel. God's anger is destined to come to a terrible head in the last days of the Gentile dispensation—

"The whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury—a continuing whirlwind; it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked."

"The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return until He have done it, and until He have performed the intents of His heart. In the LATTER DAYS ye shall consider it" (Jer. 30:23:24).

We walk not wisely, brethren and sisters, unless we walk with a full view of what is coming. This is the latter day. Let us consider it. We are walking on the crust of a slumbering volcano, for the world is on the verge of judgment.

The world with all its man-made hopes and ideas will laugh it all off. But the gathering elements of calamity will not be laughed away, but go on gathering from year to year. They will at last reach their bursting point, and then what desolations will be poured out upon all the earth! David in Psalm 2:10 exhorts—

"Be wise now therefore."

Be wise, walk in patience, in faithfulness, in obedience, in fear. Be sober. Refuse the moral drunkenness which fills all hearts with frivolity and heedlessness. We must wait and live godly. We must not render evil for evil and railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing, doing good to them that afflict us.

All this is commanded; and it is ONLY the OBEDIENT that will be rewarded by God at Christ's advent soon to be the sudden fact of the hour. There is a world of meaning in the words of James—

"Be PATIENT, brethren; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

This patience is a patient continuance in well-doing, a quiet, persistent, inextinguishable industry in the keeping of the commands of God. It is hard work for human nature, but the hardest of work can be done when there is sufficient reason. We have the best of all reasons for working—the present will certainly pass away, the future of God's purpose will certainly come. His judgment will be poured out, His Kingdom established, His chosen—although for long ages dissolved in dust, like Abraham—will stand before Him "with exceeding joy," as if at the end of a single night's sleep.

Then shall the righteous be glad—they will no longer be restrained and mocked at by a godless generation, no longer burdened with sin and mortal nature. Then they will be joyfully established in righteousness everywhere in the strength and freedom of spirit nature. To them the day they have long waited for will have come at last. The Sun of Righteousness will have shined upon the earth with life and praise.

It is for this day we look, work and struggle now. Let us hold fast and work patiently until the cry goes forth—

"THE LORD HAS COME!"

Taken from November 1972 Berean: —D.C.
