

THE
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS
OF
TRUE BELIEVERS.

X. IN RELATION TO THE HAPPY EFFECT OF CHRIST'S GOOD-WILL IN THE
WORD OF GRACE.*

LUKE xix. 5.

Zaccheus, make haste, and come down: for to-day I must abide at thy house.

THOUGH our sun of the gospel at this day is a winter sun, having light, but little heat, ye and we, ministers and people, must be doing. It is good to be in Christ's way: he loves to surprise sinners with a cast of free grace: whereof we have a notable instance in the text.

Christ passing through Jericho, and a great throng being about him, Zaccheus is taken with a mighty desire to see him: but being a little man, and our Saviour but of an ordinary stature, not like Saul, who, by the height of his stature overtopping all about him, might have been seen by a little man even in a crowd; (God shewed in Christ of how little value such things are,) he, to satisfy his curiosity, ran before, and gets up into a tree, to see what like a man he was. In his Bible, and in Christ's doctrine and miracles, he might have seen him by an eye of faith to be the Son of God and Saviour of the world: but he was spiritually blind. He had no particular business with him; he was healthy and wealthy, and felt no need of him; otherwise he would have cried to him, as the blind man did, *Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me*, Luke xviii. 38. He only wanted a sight of a man so talked of.

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Christ coming to the place makes a halt, for there was the time and place for the dawning of everlasting love on Zaccheus. And,

1. He gives him a look, and fixes his eyes on him; a sign that he had a serious purpose about him. Such a look set Peter's heart a-melting; and there is no reason to doubt but this place surprised Zaccheus, made his heart move out of its place, and set it a-trembling, not knowing but instantly he might make him drop down dead off the tree before the multitude, considering how severely God threatened gazing at mount Sinai, and how dear it cost those of Bethshe-mesh for looking into the ark.

2. He gives him a word, a word of grace, no less surprising than the look, which instantly changed and transported his trembling heart, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house." That it was such a word, a savingly-effectual call to him, joyfully closed with by faith, ver. 6. appears from (1.) The visible effect of it in true repentance, ver. 8. "Behold, Lord, (says he,) 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." (2.) The testimony of Christ as to his faith, ver. 9. "And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is the son of Abraham." Say not, that there is nothing here but about coming down from a tree; for Christ's word is like himself, that has a glory in it not to be perceived but by the spiritual eye. So it is with the word of the gospel to this day; they whose eyes are opened, and hearts touched with it, see a glory and feel a power in it that is hid to all the multitude beside. Wherefore the sense of these words was a compound one, made up of an external part, lying open to the view of the whole multitude that heard them, and an internal part, mystical and secret, and clear to Zaccheus, however hid from others. They are like Jonathan's *crying after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not.* Of whom it is said, *And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows, and came to his master. But the lad knew not any thing: only Jonathan and David knew the matter,* 1 Sam. xx. 38, 39. In the words then,

1. There is an open display of the grace and good-will of a Saviour to Zaccheus in particular, proposed to him to be believed and credited. And it consists of two parts.

(1.) Christ's readiness and willingness to meet with him, to receive and be received by him: so the grace of union with Christ was proposed to him. This was couched in these words, *Zaccheus come down;* as if he had said, "Zaccheus, come away to me, I wait you here to receive and be received by you. There is a thronging about me, but whatever is of them, I have a particular good-will to you."

(2.) Christ's inviting himself to Zaccheus' house, and so a desire and design of communion with him, though he was a sinner, such a sinner as many in that multitude would abhor being his guest. But he shows a good-will to him, to come over all that, to entertain and be entertained by him.

2. There is a peremptory call to him to embrace this grace and goodwill, proposed to him to be complied with, *Zaccheus, make haste, come down*, viz. to me. And here there is,

(1.) How it was to be embraced, viz. by Zaccheus's coming to Christ. A bodily motion was in this case necessary, but the spiritual motion of the soul by faith was the great thing aimed at. Believing the grace and good-will of Christ displayed to him in Christ's word of grace, he is required to betake himself to it, by trusting on it for his salvation, as heaven's security granted him, and claiming and using it as his own, in all the effects thereof in communion with him whose grace it is.

2. The manner of the coming required. [1.] It is a coming down. Zaccheus was sitting on high, and looking down on Christ, when Christ began with him. So is every sinner before the good work is begun on them. But the word of power calls them down from their heights; and coming to Christ is coming down from them. Humiliation of soul is twisted with true faith, and runs through the whole of it. [2.] A speedy coming down, *Make haste, &c.* "Haste as if the tree were breaking and falling with your weight, and you could not sit safe there one moment longer." Whatever off-puts the sinner makes as to coming to Christ, while the heart is not touched with the power of grace, as soon as efficacious grace touches it, the sinner can no longer resist, but comes to Christ like a sandy brae sliding down in a break.

The doctrine I observe from the words is,

Doct. When Christ and the sinner have the happy meeting for union and communion. Christ gives the sinner a word of grace, that discovers a good-will in him to the sinner in particular, and hales the sinner down from his heights away to the Lord Jesus. Thus the happy meeting is brought about.

In handling this doctrine, I shall consider,

I. The Lord's discovering a good-will to the sinner by a word of grace.

II. The Lord's haling down the sinner from his heights to himself by his word of grace.

III. Apply in an use of exhortation.

I. I am to consider the Lord's discovering a good-will to the sinner by a word of grace. This ye may take up in these five things.

1. The word of the law goes before the word of grace to the sinner. Zaccheus got a piercing look, before he got the word of grace. The holy law glances into the dark soul, and awakens it: the Sinai lightnings lighten the sinner who was going on in darkness, and give him a broad view of the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, the sinfulness of his life, heart, and nature, Psal. l. 21. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence (says God to the sinner): thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." The word of grace is not valid without this previous effect of the law.

2. The sinner begins to fear a design of ruin upon him. Therefore the law is called *the ministration of death*, 2 Cor. iii. 7. The prodigal presently cries, *I perish*. Guilt lying on the conscience stings, and makes secret whispers within the man's breast, that fill him with jealousies of a design in heaven for his destruction, as we find in the case of the Israelites in the wilderness, Numb. xvii. 10, 12. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again, before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not. And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish." And this may haunt the man like a ghost many a day; and can hardly miss to do so, after an awakening, till the soul come to Christ by believing.

3. The Lord sends the gospel to the fearful jealous sinner. That is the word of grace, wherein Christ's love and good-will to self-destroying sinners is held forth. And it is a proper mean to cure the sinner of his secret jealousies of him, and to bring him to believe his good-will towards him. There he is represented as Saviour of the world by office, and consequently as his Saviour, 1 John iv. 14. *We have seen and do testify*, says the apostle, *that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world*; an endearing, heart-quieting character: the good design of his coming in that character, John xii. 47. *I came not to judge the world, but to save the world*: and of his Father's sending him, John iii. 17. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*: his good-will to the work of their salvation, 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Yea, there down-right promises of life and salvation to sinners indefinitely are held forth as Christ's legacies, left them to be enjoyed by believing and applying them; hence says the apostle, Heb. iv. 1. "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Nay, the

benefits contained in these promises are declared to be so far theirs, that they may come to Christ as their own Saviour, and take possession of them by faith, as their own mercies, 1 John v. 11. *This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life: and this life is in his Son.*

4. The Lord makes the word of grace touch the sinner's particular case. The blessed words of the gospel holding in general to the man, are like so many arrows flying over his head: he thinks they may be very true to others, but he finds them not directed to him; and the good-will in them, he thinks, is to others, but not to him. At length the word touches his particular case, as surely as if such a word had been put in the bible just for him, or as if the minister had known his case, and were speaking just to him. *Zaccheus*, says Christ; he names him as if they had been acquainted. Hence the spouse relates in her case, Cant. iii. 3, 4. "The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth." Thus the sinner perceives that Christ has something to say to him.

5. *Lastly*, The Lord opens and applies the word of grace secretly to the sinner in particular, though it be spoken to all in general; which is as it were an internal word. This is called the *demonstration of the Spirit*, 1 Cor. ii. 4. Christ breathes grace and good-will to sinners in the gospel: but they cannot perceive it, men cannot make them see it: but the Spirit demonstrates it to them powerfully. He shines on the word of the grace of the gospel, and illustrates it, on the dark mind of the sinner, and illuminates it, so that he sees that word of grace and the good-will in it is really to him in particular, and firmly believes it, ver. 5. the Spirit with the word attesting the good-will of Christ to the sinner in the word of his grace. Thus the same Spirit, who before applied the doctrine of the law to the sinner in particular, for his conviction, applies the gospel to him in particular, to bring him to Christ by faith. And the effect of it is, he believes the gospel with a particular application of the grace and good-will in it to himself, howbeit it may be attended with doubts and fears still, Mark ix. 24. *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.* But the faith of Christ's good-will to the sinner is so far above the doubts of it, that it hales the sinner down from all his heights to Jesus Christ and this is his free grace, to venture his all there.

II. I proceed to consider the Lord's haling down the sinner from his heights to himself by his word of grace: which we may take up in these four things.

I. The soul is humbled by it, and tumbled down to the dust of Christ's feet. And this appears in these things.

(1.) The soul finds it has nothing but the grace and good-will of Christ, left to it, to trust to now, either for a rest to the conscience or to the heart. All its law-righteousness, all its big expectations of satisfaction from the creature, tumble down like a shooting brae under its feet, Jer. xvi. 19. *The Gentiles*, says the prophet, *shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit.*

(2.) The soul sees its utter unworthiness of Christ and his grace, that it has nothing to commend it to him, Matth. viii. 8. *Lord*, says the centurion to Christ, *I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof*; and wonders at the matchless freedom of grace to such a wretched creature. The glory of Christ and of his grace and good-will shines so bright, that it sinks the sinner to nothing in his own eyes.

(3.) The soul is content of Christ on any terms, and with Paul says, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Acts ix. 6. The man used to be off and on with Christ before; he would be his on such terms, but not on such terms: but all the exceptions and reserves are thrown by now, and now he would have Christ and his grace at any rate.

2. The soul is drawn by it, John xii. 32. *I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* There is grace in the Mediator's lips, heavenly oratory which the sinner can no more resist. His former backwardness is killed with Christ's good-will appearing in the word of grace: he is a captive to the love of Christ.

3. The soul is impressed with divine authority by it, requiring it to believe on Christ, 1 John iii. 23. *This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.* The sinner sees glorious Christ held forth to him in that word, and feels not only upon his heart the weight of absolute need pressing him forward, but also upon his conscience the weight of the authority of heaven pressing him forward; and as by the former he may not, by the latter he dare not but embrace him, over the belly of felt unworthiness.

4. *Lastly*, The soul is hastened by it to Christ, Psal. lxxviii. 31. *Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.* The sinner puts off not a moment longer, but comes freely away to Christ, like water that has got a free vent, Is. ii. 2. *All nations shall flow unto it.* The soul lets go all its other holds, and casts itself on the Mediator's grace and good-will in the word of grace for all, and holds by that,

resolved never to let that hold go. Thus Christ and the sinner meet.

I come now to apply this in an use of exhortation, in two branches.

First, If ever ye would have union and communion with Christ, discern now and believe the grace and good-will of Christ towards you in particular, in the word of his grace which he is sending you this day, viz. the gospel. Do not think that he is overlooking you, however sinful and miserable your case is; but open your eyes and see, and believe him breathing grace and good-will to you in particular.

Object. What warrant have I to believe Christ's good-will to me, who am a poor unholy creature? *Ans*. If ye were holy, sanctified by faith, you might believe not only his good-will to, but complacency in you. But as it is, you have a warrant to believe his good-will to you, since he is holding out himself to you to be believed on as one who *justifies the ungodly*, Rom. iv. 5. washes the unclean in his own blood, seeks and saves the lost.

1. I ask you, Are ye not warranted to believe the gospel? Mark i. 16. Can ye believe the gospel, and not believe Christ's grace and good-will to sinners of mankind? Surely not; for it is the word of his grace. Then I ask, Can ye think ye are not required to believe more than devils believe? they believe the gospel in the general, and Christ's good-will to sinners of mankind, but not to them: and this is that which fills them with rage against him and them. Therefore ye are required to believe it with particular application to yourselves, namely, Christ's good-will to you.

2. The venom of unbelief lies in making God a liar, not believing the record that God hath given of his Son, 1 John v. 10. But the most desperate unbelievers believe Christ's good-will to sinners in general, but not to them in particular: therefore Christ's good-will to them in particular is a truth, and it is their crying sin and ruin that they will not believe it.

3. It is impossible to believe on Christ for salvation, unless we believe his good-will to us in particular; therefore since ye are warranted for the one, John iii. 16. ye are for the other.

Object. But how is it possible for me to see Christ's good will to to me, seeing I can neither look into his heart, nor into the decree of election? *Ans*. How do you see an honest man's good-will to you, since you cannot look into his heart, nor see what thoughts he had towards you when you were in the womb? Do you not see it in his words and carriage to you? So you may see Christ's good will to you in his word of grace and dealing with you. He declares

he came to save the world, John xii. 47. consequently to save you who are of that society. Is not that good-will to you?—to save that which was lost, Luke xix. 10. and you are lost. He is come in the character of *Saviour of the world*, 1 John iv. 14. and therefore he is become your Saviour. He holds out to you his righteousness, his promise to be believed on by you for your salvation. Is not that good-will?

Object. But there is not a word of me in particular in the gospel.

Ans. There is just as much of you in particular in the promise of the gospel, as there is in the curse of the law. John iii. 16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life," is a proposition as universal as Gal. iii. 10, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But the natural conscience of sin helps to believe the latter, but makes it hard to believe the former.

Object. But there is one thing I can never get over, and when I would be most serious, then it is sure to be upon me: so I think the Lord has even left it to be a secret sign that he has no good-will to me, and that I must perish in the end. *Ans.* If that thing be the burden of your soul, as it seems to be, you will be making recourse to Christ's blood and Spirit against it; and though you lose many battles, you will certainly be victorious in the war. See the case of the apostle Paul, Rom. vii. 21, 24, 25. "I find a law, that when I would do good evil is present with me. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The evil design of the divine dispensation in leaving it, is a malicious insinuation of the serpent, Matth. xxv. 24. to discredit the gospel. But the gospel gives you an honourable account of it, 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, (says Paul) that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." To see a poor creature maintaining an obstinate battle with the serpent, after many a fall rising with the tear in his eye, and falling to it again, declares the power of grace more than his going with an even-up back during the chaining of the enemy, would do.

Secondly, If ever ye would have union and communion with Christ, come down then from your heights, and receive Christ breathing good-will to you, trusting on his grace and good-will in the word for your salvation. And,

1. Come down from the height of your expectations from the law,

your own righteousness, whatever ye can do or suffer: and receive Christ for righteousness, for a rest to your conscience.

2. Come down from the height of your expectations from the creature, and receive Christ for a rest to your heart.

3. *Lastly*, Come down from the height of your jealousies of Christ, by which ye are climbing up to heaven presumptuously, and breaking in to God's secret things, and receive Christ who is down here in his word of grace, breathing good-will to you. Harken to what the apostle says, "The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above): or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach," Rom. x. 6, 7, 8. Make haste down, or ye will fall headlong into the pit; for the law will not bear your weight, the creature will fail you, and the sheet of the gospel, wherein Christ's grace and good-will to you is spread out, will be drawn up to heaven, and ye will see no more of it for ever.