



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

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SUNDAY 31 JANUARY 2016

ZACCHAEUS – REPENTANCE AND RESTITUTION

EPISTLE The Reading is from Paul the Apostle to Timothy [1Timothy 4:9-15]

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things: give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

EXPLANATION:

St Paul quotes a **“faithful word”** or saying in his letter to Timothy that he commends as **“worthy of acceptance”**, whose truth may be relied upon by all that we have **our hope set on the living God, Who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe**. It is **to this end** that Paul and his colleagues **labour and suffer reproach** – to obtain joy in this life and in the next. St Paul uses this image to describe his apostolic ministry – labouring and suffering to win the prize. He hopes in God, fixing all his **trust** on Him.

Paul knows that he serves a **living God**, not a dead and powerless one like the pagan idols. He is able to reward those who serve Him. He is the **saviour of all men**, for He is the One and only God of all the earth. God calls all men everywhere, even the pagans at the farthest of the earth, to believe in Him, for His Son died to ransom them all. Thus the **faithful**, the Christians, who accept Him are **especially** His people, for in them His ransom bears fruit. **(4:9-10)** Knowing that God is the Saviour of all, Paul toils and strives to bring the Gospel to all. As Paul strives for the salvation of all, so Timothy also must **command** (order) and **teach these things**, striving to bring all to salvation as well, assuring them that their efforts at piety will bring an eternal reward. **(4:11)** Some in Ephesus might **despise** Timothy's **youth** and look down on him. He was about 29 years of age when ordained and many may not accept counsel from a young man inexperienced in spiritual matters. But St Paul instructs him not to be intimidated by them. Yet neither should he assert his authority in a confrontational style. Rather, he must become an **example to the believers**. He must inspire them to follow him and let the moral authority of his life speak for him. In his **word** and speech, in all his **conduct**, he must prove himself their true leader, commending his authority by both his word and his deed. In particular, he must excel in **love** for his brothers, in **faith** or faithfulness to God, in sexual **purity** before the world. **(4:12)** Until Paul arrives in Ephesus, Timothy is to **pay attention** and devote himself to a ministry of education – such as public **reading** of the Scripture to the Church and also concentrate on **exhortation** (Paraklesis), encouraging to holiness in imitation of what was read. Further, after reading he must give instruction on **doctrine**, showing them how the Old Testament Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ and the Church. **(4:13)** In this task, he does not have to rely on his natural abilities alone because a **spiritual gift** of teaching has been **given** to him by God, accompanied by a **prophecy** when the **council of elders** or presbyters ordained him with the **laying on of hands**. Thus how can he **neglect** such an endowment and fail in his task? Surely he can find the courage to speak up and teach with authority, as the prophecy commissioned him to do at his ordination. **(4:14)** This work must be Timothy's constant occupation; he must **meditate on these things and give himself entirely to them** and be immersed in such work. In this way, his spiritual **progress will be manifest to all**. Then all

those in Ephesus will see his worth, despite his youth. They will begin to experience trust in him and to set their hope on God who is the Saviour of all men who believes. **(4:15)** When many feel the love of Christ, they are filled with hope. Without hope man cannot exist. Nothing can sustain the soul of man as much as hope. No matter how difficult things may seem in life, hope gives us the strength to stand up against the mood of despair. If man is without hope today, it is because he lives as if God were dead. To be without God is to be without hope. If there were no repentance or forgiveness, life would hold no hope for any of us. But in Christ we have forgiveness and life. He is our hope, our joyful hope of the resurrection and eternal life.

GOSPEL **The Reading is from St Luke [19:1-10]** Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, *“Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”* So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained saying, *“He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.”* Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, *“Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”* And Jesus said to him, *‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.’”*

EXPLANATION: Zacchaeus was a dishonest chief tax collector. He was shunned by his people as a collaborator and traitor, collecting taxes for the hated Romans. He had cut himself off from God and man. But despite his riches, he was restless, fed up with the kind of life he was living and desired to find God in Jesus; an encounter which changed the whole direction of his life. The crowd was an obstacle to Zacchaeus; it stood between him and Jesus. So he climbed above the crowd into a sycamore tree to see Him. Like

Zacchaeus, we today will never see Jesus if we remain on the level we are. There are other trees we can climb; the trees of prayer, the Scriptures, the Liturgy, Holy Communion, repentance, restitution and service. From these trees not only will we see Jesus, but He will also see us as he saw Zacchaeus. And He will also say to us, **“Make haste and come down”**. That is, “come down away from your sinful nature”, repent and make restitution for the wrongs you have done and **“salvation will come to you”**. And He will abide in our heart, in our mind and in our soul. For when the heart has been purified by the fruit of repentance, Christ will abide in us, in the house of our heart and soul. In this respect Zacchaeus is like many of us who have remained up in the tree of our own moral failure, hating ourselves for it, longing to be different but lacking the courage to come down. God sent Jesus into the world to invite us to come down. This is the great wonder of God’s love that Zacchaeus experienced when he discovered that God was seeking him. He couldn’t believe it. He expected Jesus to condemn him for his wickedness. Instead he heard Jesus call him by name and invited Himself to stay at his house. What does this mean but that the Master knows each one of us personally and by name. He knows those who are restless and have a great desire for God and draws near to those who seek Him. He does not wait for the sinner to repent, but takes the initiative as the good Shepherd to seek out the lost sheep. He did not come to invite the righteous but sinners to repentance. Who is righteous? Not one. That is, He did not come to invite people who are so self-satisfied and convinced of their goodness that they consider themselves better than others. He came to invite people who are very conscious of their sins and are desperately aware of their need for a Saviour. Zacchaeus was such a sinner. That is why Jesus invited Himself to his house. He knew he needed Jesus and was ready to accept the invitation. But it has to be a certain kind of house that can receive Jesus as a guest; a house of repentance and restitution for the wrongs; an honest attempt to undo the damage which we have done with our sins. Just as Zacchaeus says:- **“half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.”** The heart must be cleansed of sin; it must be made pure by a sincere sorrow for our sins and by a determined turning away from them before Christ can come into our home and fill us with his loving presence. **(19:1-10)**