

EFFECTUAL CALLING (IRRESISTIBLE GRACE)

“When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for today must I abide at your house.”

Luke 19:5

Notwithstanding our firm belief that you are, for the most part, well instructed in the doctrines of the everlasting Gospel, we are continually reminded in our conversation with young converts how absolutely necessary it is to repeat our former lessons and repeatedly assert and prove over and over again those doctrines which lie at the basis of our holy religion. Our friends, therefore, who have many years ago been taught the great doctrine of effectual calling, will believe that while I preach very simply this morning, the sermon is intended for those who are young in the fear of the Lord, that they may better understand this great starting point of God in the heart, the effectual calling of men by the Holy Spirit.

I shall use the case of Zaccheus as a great illustration of the doctrine of effectual calling. You remember the story. Zaccheus had a curiosity to see the wonderful man, Jesus Christ, who was turning the world upside down and causing an immense excitement in the minds of men. We sometimes find fault with curiosity and say it is sinful to come to the house of God from that motive. I am not quite sure that we should hazard such an assertion. The motive is not sinful, though certainly it is not virtuous—yet it has often been proved that curiosity is one of the best allies of grace. Zaccheus, moved by this motive, desired to see Christ—but there were two obstacles in the way—first, there was such a crowd of people that he could not get near the Savior. Second, he was so exceedingly short in stature that there was no hope of his reaching over people’s heads to catch a glimpse of Him.

What did he do? He did as the boys were doing—for the boys of old times were no doubt just like the boys of the present age—they were perched up in the boughs of the tree to look at Jesus as He passed along. Elderly man though he is, Zaccheus jumps up and there he sits among the children. The boys are too much afraid of that stern old Publican, whom their fathers dreaded, to push him down or cause him any inconvenience. Look at him there. With what anxiety he is peeping down to see which is Christ—for the Savior had no pompous distinction. No one is walking before Him with a silver mace. He did not hold a golden crozier in His hand—He had no pontifical dress. In fact, He was just dressed like those around Him. He had a coat like that of a common peasant, made of one piece from top to bottom. Zaccheus could scarcely distinguish Him. However, before he has caught a sight of Christ, Christ has fixed His eye upon him and standing under the tree, He looks up and says, “Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for today I must abide at your house.” Down comes Zaccheus. Christ goes to his house. Zaccheus becomes Christ’s follower and enters into the kingdom of Heaven.

Now, first, effectual calling is a very gracious Truth of God. You may guess this from the fact that Zaccheus was a character whom we should suppose the last to be saved. He belonged to a bad city—Jericho—a city which had been cursed and no one would suspect that anyone would come out of Jericho to be saved. It was near Jericho that the man fell among thieves—we trust Zaccheus had no hand in it—but there are some who, while they are Publicans, can be thieves, also. We might as well expect converts from St. Giles’s, or the lowest parts of London, from the worst and vilest dens of infamy, as from Jericho in those days.

Ah, my Brethren, it matters not where you come from—you may come from one of the dirtiest streets, one of the worst back slums in London—if effectual grace calls you, it is an effectual call, which knows no distinction of place. Zaccheus also was of an exceedingly bad trade and probably

cheated the people in order to enrich himself. Indeed, when But, my Brethren, grace knows no distinction. It is no respecter of persons. God calls whom He wills and He called this worst of Publicans, in the worst of cities, from the worst of trades. Besides, Zaccheus was one who was the least likely to be saved because he was rich. It is true, rich and poor are welcome—no one has the least excuse for despair because of his condition—yet it is a fact that “not many great men” after the flesh, “not many mighty” are called, but “God has chosen the poor of this world—rich in faith.”

But even here grace knows no distinction. The rich Zaccheus is called from the tree. Down he comes and he is saved. I have thought it one of the greatest instances of God’s condescension that He can look down on man. But I will tell you there was a greater condescension than that when Christ looked up to see Zaccheus. For God to look down on His creatures—that is mercy—but for Christ so to humble Himself that He has to look up to one of His own creatures—that becomes mercy, indeed!

Ah, many of you have climbed up the tree of your own good works and perched yourselves in the branches of your holy actions and are trusting in the free will of the poor creature, or resting in some worldly maxim. Nevertheless, Christ looks up even to proud sinners and calls them down. “Come down,” says He, “today I must abide at your house.” Had Zaccheus been a humble-minded man, sitting by the wayside, or at the feet of Christ, we should then have admired Christ’s mercy. But here he is lifted up and Christ looks up to him and bids him come down.

Next it was a personal call. There were boys in the tree as well as Zaccheus but there was no mistake about the person who was called. It was, “Zaccheus, make haste and come down.” There are other calls mentioned in Scripture. It is said especially, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” Now that is not the effectual call which is intended by the Apostle when he said, “Whom He called, them He also justified.” That is a general call which many men, yes, all men reject, unless there comes after it the personal, particular call, which makes us Christians. You will bear me witness that it was a personal call that brought you to the Savior. It was some sermon which led you to feel that you were, no doubt, the person intended.

The text, perhaps, was “You, God, see me.” And perhaps the minister laid particular stress on the word “me,” so that you thought God’s eyes were fixed upon you. And before the sermon was concluded you thought you saw God open the books to condemn you and your heart whispered, “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?” says the Lord.” You might have been perched in the window, or stood packed in the aisle—but you had a solemn conviction that the sermon was preached to you and not to other people. God does not call His people in shoals but in units.

“Jesus said unto her, Mary; and she turned and said unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master.” Jesus sees Peter and John fishing by the lake and He says to them, “Follow Me.” He sees Matthew sitting at the table at the receipt of custom and He says unto him, “Arise and follow Me,” and Matthew did so. When the Holy Spirit comes home to a man, God’s arrow goes into his heart—it does not graze his helmet, or make some little mark upon his armor—it penetrates between the joints of the harness, entering the marrow of the soul. Have you felt, dear Friends, that personal call? Do you remember when a voice said, “Arise, He calls you.” Can you look back to when you said, “My Lord, my God”—when you knew the Spirit was striving with you and you said, “Lord, I come to You, for I know that You call me”? I might call the whole of you throughout eternity but if God call one, there will be more effect through His personal call of one than my general call of multitudes.

Thirdly, it is a hastening call. “Zaccheus, make haste.” The sinner, when he is called by the ordinary ministry, replies, “Tomorrow.” He hears a telling sermon and he says, “I will turn to God by-and-by.” The tears roll down his cheek but they are wiped away. Some goodness appears but like the cloud of the morning it is dissipated by the sun of temptation. He says, “I solemnly vow from this time to be a reformed man. After I have once more indulged in my darling sin I will renounce my lusts and decide for God.” Ah, that is only a minister’s call and is good for nothing. Hell, they say, is paved with good intentions. These good intentions are begotten by general calls.

The road to perdition is laid all over with branches of the trees whereon men are sitting, for they often pull down branches from the trees but they do not come down themselves. The straw laid down before a sick man's door causes the wheels to roll more noiselessly. So there are some who strew their path with promises of repentance and so go more easily and noiselessly down to perdition. But God's call is not a call for tomorrow. "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts: as in the provocation, when your fathers tempted Me." God's grace always comes with dispatch—and if you are drawn by God, you will run after God and not be talking about delays. Tomorrow—it is not written in the almanac of time.

Tomorrow—it is in Satan's calendar and nowhere else. Tomorrow—it is a rock whitened by the bones of mariners who have been wrecked upon it. Tomorrow is the wrecker's light gleaming on the shore, luring poor ships to destruction. Tomorrow—it is the idiot's cup which he lies at the foot of the rainbow, but which none has ever found. Tomorrow—it is the floating island of Loch Lomond, which none has ever seen. Tomorrow—it is a dream. Tomorrow—it is a delusion. Tomorrow, yes, tomorrow you may lift up your eyes in Hell, being in torment. Yonder clock says "today." Your pulse whispers "today." I hear my heart speak as it beats and it says, "today." Everything cries "today." And the Holy Spirit is in union with these things and says, "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Sinners, are you inclined now to seek the Savior? Are you breathing a prayer now? Are you saying, "Now or never! I must be saved now"? If you are, then I hope it is an effectual call, for Christ, when He gives an effectual call, says, "Zaccheus, make haste."

Next, it is a humbling call. "Zaccheus, make haste and come down." Many a time has a minister called men to repentance with a call which has made them proud, exalted them in their own esteem and led them to say, "I can turn to God when I like. I can do so without the influence of the Holy Spirit." They have been called to go up and not to come down. God always humbles a sinner. Can I not remember when God told me to come down? One of the first steps I had to take was to go right down from my good works. And oh, what a fall was that! Then I stood upon my own self-sufficiency and Christ said, "Come down! I have pulled you down from your good works and now I will pull you down from your self-sufficiency."

Well, I had another fall and I felt sure I had gained the bottom, but Christ said "Come down!" And He made me come down till I fell on some point at which I felt I was not savable. "Down, Sir! come down, yet." And down I came until I had to let go of every branch of the tree of my hopes in despair. Then I said, "I can do nothing. I am ruined." The waters were wrapped round my head and I was shut out from the light of day and thought myself a stranger from the commonwealth of Israel.

"Come down lower yet, Sir! You have too much pride to be saved." Then I was brought down to see my corruption, my wickedness, my filthiness. "Come down," says God, when He means to save. Now, proud Sinners, it is of no use for you to be proud, to stick yourselves up in the trees—Christ will have you down. Oh, you that dwell with the eagle on the craggy rock, you shall come down from your elevation—you shall fall by grace, or you shall fall with a vengeance one day. He "has cast down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble and meek."

Next, it is an affectionate call. "Today I must abide at your house." You can easily conceive how the faces of the multitude change! They thought Christ to be the holiest and best of men and were ready to make Him a king. But He says, "Today I must abide at your house." There was one poor Jew who had been inside Zaccheus' house—he had "been on the carpet," as they say in country villages when they are taken before the justice and he recollected what sort of a house it was. He remembered how he was taken in there and his conceptions of it were something like what a fly would have of a spider's den after he had once escaped.

There was another who had been restrained of nearly all his property—the idea he had of walking in there was like walking into a den of lions. "What?" said they, "Is this holy man going into such a den as that, where we poor wretches have been robbed and ill-treated? It was bad enough for Christ to speak to him up in the tree, but the idea of going into his house!" They all murmured at His going to be "a guest with a man who was a sinner." Well, I know what some of His disciples

thought—they thought it very imprudent—it might injure His character and He might offend the people. They thought He might have gone to see this man at night, like Nicodemus, and give him an audience when nobody saw Him! To acknowledge such a man publicly was the most imprudent act He could commit.

Why did Christ do as He did? Because He would give Zaccheus an affectionate call. “I will not come and stand at your threshold, or look in at your window, but I will come into your house—the same house where the cries of widows have come into your ears and you have disregarded them. I will come into your parlor, where the weeping of the orphan has never moved your compassion. I will come there, where you, like a ravenous lion have devoured your prey. I will come there, where you have blackened your house and made it infamous. I will come into the place where cries have risen to high Heaven, wrung from the lips of those whom you have oppressed.

“I will come into your house and give you a blessing.” Oh, what affection there was in that! Poor Sinner, my Master is a very affectionate Master. He will come into your house. What kind of a house have you got? A house that you have made miserable with your drunkenness—a house you have defiled with your impurity—a house you have defiled with your cursing and swearing—a house where you are carrying on an illegal trade that you would be glad to get rid of? Christ says, “I will come into your house.” And I know some houses now that once were dens of sin where Christ comes every morning. Husband and wife, who once only could quarrel and fight, bend their knees together in prayer. Christ comes there at dinnertime, when the workman comes home for his meals. Some of my hearers can scarce come for an hour to their meals but they must have word of prayer and reading of the Scriptures.

Christ comes to them. Where the walls were plastered up with the lascivious songs and idle pictures, there is a Christian almanac in one place. There is a Bible on the chest of drawers—and though it is only one room they live in—if an angel should come in and God should say, “What have you seen in that house?” He would say, “I have seen good furniture, for there is a Bible there—here and there a religious book—the filthy pictures are pulled down and burned. There are no cards in the man’s cupboard now. Christ has come into his house.” Oh, what a blessing that we have our household God as well as the Romans! Our God is a household God. He comes to live with His people! He loves the tents of Jacob.

Now, poor rag-muffin Sinner, you who live in the filthiest den in London, if such an one be here, Jesus says to you, “Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for today I must abide at your house.”

Again, it was not only an affectionate call, but it was an abiding call. Today I must abide at your house. “A common call is like this, “Today I shall walk in at your house at one door and out at the other.” The common call which is given by the Gospel to all men is a call which operates upon them for a time and then it is all over—but the saving call is an abiding call. When Christ speaks, He does not say, “Make haste, Zaccheus and come down, for I am just coming to look in.” No. He says, “I must abide at your house. I am coming to sit down to eat and drink with you. I am coming to have a meal with you. Today I must abide at your house.”

“Ah,” says one, “you cannot tell how many times I have been impressed, Sir. I have often had a series of solemn convictions and I thought I really was saved—but it all died away—like a dream. When one awakes, all has vanished that he dreamed. So was it with me.” Ah, but poor Soul, do not despair. Do you feel the strivings of Almighty Grace within your heart bidding you repent today? If you do, it will be an abiding call. If it is Jesus at work in your soul, He will come and tarry in your heart and consecrate you for His own forever. He says, “I will come and dwell with you and that forever. I will come and say—

*“Here I will make My settled rest,
No more will go and come;
No more a stranger or a guest,
But Master of this home.”*

“Oh,” you say, “that is what I want. I want an abiding call, something that will last. I do not want a religion that will wash out, but a fast-color religion.” Well, that is the kind of call Christ gives. His ministers cannot give it—but when Christ speaks, He speaks with power and says, “Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for today I must abide at your house.”

There is one thing, however, I cannot forget and that is that it was a necessary call. Just read it over again. “Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for today I must abide at your house.” It was not a thing that He might do, or might not do—it was a necessary call. The salvation of a sinner is as much a matter of necessity with God as the fulfillment of His Covenant that the rain shall no more drown the world. The salvation of every blood-bought child of God is a necessary thing for three reasons:

It is necessary because it is God’s purpose. It is necessary because it is Christ’s purchase and it is necessary because it is God’s promise. It is necessary that the child of God should be saved. Some divines think it is very wrong to lay a stress on the word “must,” especially in that passage where it is said, “He must go through Samaria.” “Why,” they say, “He must needs go through Samaria because there was no other way He could go and therefore He was forced to go that way.” Yes, Gentlemen, we reply, no doubt. But then there might have been another way. Providence made it so that He must go through Samaria and that Samaria should lie in the route He had chosen.

“He must needs go through Samaria.” Providence directed man to build Samaria directly in the road and grace constrained the Savior to move in that direction. It was not, “Come down, Zaccheus, because I may abide at your house,” but “I must.” The Savior felt a strong necessity. Just as much a necessity as there is that man should die. As strong a necessity as there is that the sun should give us light by day and the moon by night—just so much a necessity is there that every blood-bought child of God shall be saved.

“Today I must abide at your house.” And oh, when the Lord comes to this—that He must—then He will. What a thing it is with the poor sinner, then, at other times we ask, “Shall I let Him in at all? There is a stranger at the door. He is knocking now—He has knocked before—shall I let Him in?” But this time it is, “I must abide at your house.” There was no knocking at the door, but smash went the door into atoms! And in He walked—I must, I shall, I will—I care not for your protecting your vileness, your unbelief. I must, I will—I must abide at your house.”

“Ah,” says one, “I do not believe God would ever make me to believe as you believe, or become a Christian at all.” Ah, but if He shall but say, “Today I must abide at your house,” there will be no resistance in you. There are some of you who would scorn the very idea of being a canting Methodist—“What, Sir? Do you suppose I would ever turn into one of your religious people?” No, my Friend, I don’t suppose it—I know it for a certainty. If God says “I must,” there is no standing against it. Let Him say “must,” and it must be.

I will just tell you an anecdote proving this. “A father was about sending his son to college, but as he knew the influence to which he would be exposed, he was not without a deep and anxious solicitude for the spiritual and eternal welfare of his favorite child. Fearing lest the principles of Christian faith, which he had endeavored to instill into his mind would be rudely assailed, but trusting in the efficacy of that Word which is quick and powerful, he purchased, unknown to his son, an elegant copy of the Bible and deposited it at the bottom of his trunk.

The young man entered upon his college career. The restraints of a pious education were soon broken off and he proceeded from speculation to doubts and from doubts to a denial of the reality of religion. After having become in his own estimation, wiser than his father, he discovered one day, while rummaging his trunk, with great surprise and indignation, the sacred deposit. He took it out and while deliberating on the manner in which he should treat it, he determined that he would use it as waste paper, on which to wipe his razor while shaving. Accordingly, every time he went to shave, he tore out a leaf or two of the holy book and thus used it till nearly half the volume was destroyed.

But while he was committing this outrage upon the sacred book, a text now and then met his eye and was carried like a barbed arrow to his heart. At length, he heard a sermon, which discovered to him his own character and his exposure to the wrath of God. It riveted upon his mind the impression which he had received from the last torn leaf of the blessed, yet insulted volume. Had worlds been at his disposal, he would freely have given them all, could they have availed, in enabling him to undo what he had done. At length he found forgiveness at the foot of the Cross. The torn leaves of that sacred volume brought healing to his soul—for they led him to repose on the mercy of God, which is sufficient for the chief of sinners.

I tell you there is not a reprobate walking the streets and defiling the air with his blasphemies. There is not a creature abandoned so as to be well-nigh as bad as Satan himself—if he is a child of life—who is not within the reach of mercy. And if God says, “Today I must abide at your house,” He then assuredly will.

Do you feel, my dear Hearer, just now, something, in your mind which seems to say you have held out against the Gospel a long while, but today you can hold out no longer? Do you feel that a strong hand has got hold of you and do you hear a voice saying, “Sinner, I must abide at your house. You have often scorned Me, you have often laughed at Me, you have often spit in the face of mercy, often blasphemed Me, but Sinner, I must abide at your house. You banged the door yesterday in the missionary’s face. You burned the tract, you laughed at the minister, you have cursed God’s house, you have violated the Sabbath—but, Sinner, I must abide at your house and I will”?

“What? Lord,” you say, “abide at my house! Why it is covered all over with iniquity. Abide in my house! Why there is not a chair or a table but would cry out against me. Abide in my house! Why the joists and beams and flooring would all rise up and tell You that I am not worthy to kiss the hem of Your garment. What? Lord, abide at my house!” “Yes,” says He, “I must. There is a strong necessity, My powerful love constrains Me and whether you will let Me or not, I am determined to make you willing and you shall let Me in.”

Does not this surprise you, poor Trembler—you who thought that mercy’s day was gone and that the bell of your destruction had tolled your death-knell? Oh, does not this surprise you, that Christ not only asks you to come to Him, but invites Himself to your table, and what is more, when you would put Him away, kindly says, “I must—I will come in”? Only think of Christ going after a sinner, crying after a sinner, begging a sinner to let Him save him—and that is just what Jesus does to His chosen ones.

The sinner runs away from Him, but free grace pursues him and says, “Sinner, come to Christ.” And if our hearts are shut up, Christ puts His hand in at the door and if we do not rise, but repulse Him coldly, He says, “I must, I will come in.” He weeps over us till His tears win us. He cries after us till His cries prevail—and at last in His own well-determined hour He enters into our heart and there He dwells. “I must abide at your house,” said Jesus.

And now, lastly, this call was an effectual one, for we see the fruits it brought forth. Open was Zaccheus’ door, spread was his table, generous was his heart, washed were his hands, unburdened was his conscience, joyful was his soul. “Here, Lord,” says he, “the half of my goods I give to the poor. I dare say I have robbed them of half my property—and now I restore it. And if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I will restore it to him fourfold.” Away goes another portion of his property. Ah, Zaccheus, you will go to bed tonight a great deal poorer than when you got up this morning—but infinitely richer, too!

Poor, very poor, in this world’s goods, compared with what you were when you first did climb that sycamore tree. But richer—ininitely richer—in heavenly treasure. Sinner, we shall know whether God calls you by this—if He calls, it will be an effectual call—not a call which you hear and then forget—but one which produces good works. If God has called you this morning, down will go that drunken cup, up will go your prayers. If God has called you this morning, there will not be one shutter down today in your shop, but all and you will have a notice stuck up, “This house is closed on the Sabbath-Day and will not again on that day, be opened.”

Tomorrow there will be such-and-such worldly amusement—but if God has called you, you will not go. And if you have robbed anybody (and who knows but I may have a thief here), if God calls you, there will be a restoration of what you have stolen—you will give up all that you have—so that you will follow God with all your heart. We do not believe a man to be converted unless he does renounce the error of his ways—unless, practically, he is brought to know that Christ Himself is Master of his conscience and His Law is his delight.

“Zaccheus, make haste and come down, I must abide at your house.” And he made haste and came down and Jesus received him joyfully. “And Zaccheus 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. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Now, one or two lessons. A lesson to the proud. Come down, proud heart, come down! Mercy runs in valleys, but it goes not to the mountaintop. Come down, come down, lofty spirit! The lofty city—He lays it low even to the ground and then He builds it up. Again, a lesson to the poor despairing soul—I am glad to see you in God’s house this morning—it is a good sign. I care not what you came for. You heard there was a strange kind of man that preached here, perhaps. Never mind about that. You are all quite as strange as he is. It is necessary that there should be strange men to gather in other strange men.

Now, I have a mass of people here. And if I might use a figure, I should compare you to a great heap of ashes, mingled with which are a few steel filings. Now, my sermon, if it is attended with Divine Grace, will be a sort of magnet—it will not attract any of the ashes—they will keep just where they are—but it will draw out the steel filings. I have got a Zaccheus there. There is a Mary up there. A John down there, a Sarah, or a William, or a Thomas there—God’s chosen ones—they are steel filings in the congregation of ashes and my Gospel, the Gospel of the blessed God, like a great magnet, draws them out of the heap.

There they come, there they come. Why? Because there was a magnetic power between the Gospel and their hearts. Ah, poor Sinner, come to Jesus, believe His love, trust His mercy. If you have a desire to come, if you are forcing your way through the ashes to get to Christ, then it is because Christ is calling you. Oh, all of you who know yourselves to be sinners—every man, woman and child of you—yes, you little children (for God has given me some of you to be my wages), do you feel yourselves sinners?

Then believe on Jesus and be saved. You have come here from curiosity, many of you. Oh, that you might be met with and saved. I am distressed for you lest you should sink into Hell. Oh, listen to Christ while He speaks to you. Christ says, “Come down.” This morning go home and humble yourselves in the sight of God. Go and confess your iniquities that you have sinned against Him. Go home and tell Him that you are a wretch, undone without His sovereign grace. Then look to Him, for rest assured He has first looked to you. You say, “Sir, oh, I am willing enough to be saved, but I am afraid He is not willing.”

Stop! Stop! No more of that! Do you know that is part blasphemy? Not quite all. If you were not ignorant, I would tell you that it was full blasphemy. You cannot look to Christ before He has looked to you. If you are willing to be saved, He gave you that will. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized and you shall be saved. I trust the Holy Spirit is calling you.

Young man up there, young man in the window, make haste! Come down! Old man, sitting in these pews, come down! Merchant in yonder aisle, make haste. Matron and youth, not knowing Christ, oh, may He look at you! Old grandmother, hear the gracious call. And you, young lad, Christ may be looking at you—I trust He is—and saying to you, “Make haste and come down, for today I must abide at your house.”