

FROM GREED TO GENEROSITY

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Scripture: Luke 19: 1-10

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*"**19** He entered Jericho and was passing through. **2** And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. **3** Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. **4** So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. **5** When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." **6** And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. **7** When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." **8** Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." **9** And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

This narrative begins by telling us who Zacchaeus really was. Luke says that he was a chief tax collector and a very wealthy man. That description alone would have told people a great deal about him. In that time, tax collectors were known for overcharging and exploiting their own people while working for the Roman authorities, and many of them grew rich through these practices. Scripture itself hits at this reputation. In fact, when tax collectors came to John the Baptist, he told them plainly, "Collect no more than what you're authorized to do," suggesting that taking more than was required was the norm.

Later in the story, Zacchaeus himself admits that he may have cheated people and promises to repay them fourfold. Throughout the gospels, tax collectors are frequently grouped with sinners. Even in Jesus' teaching, they are seen as morally compromised. All this shows that tax collectors were widely associated with dishonesty and extortion.

That is why Zacchaeus's transformation from a man known for greed to a man overflowing with generosity makes this story so remarkable. Luke tells us that Zacchaeus, in v.3, was seeking to see who Jesus was, suggesting that something about Jesus had already stirred his curiosity.

And by this time, I'm sure, Jesus' reputation had spread widely. He was known as a teacher who welcomed tax collectors and sinners, and Jericho itself had just witnessed the healing of a blind man. It's quite possible Zacchaeus had heard reports that this rabbi did not despise men like him. And yet, there were obstacles – the crowd, his short stature, and perhaps the invisible barrier of shame that came with his profession. So he does something startling. He runs on ahead and climbs a sycamore tree. For a wealthy chief tax collector, a public official of the Roman system, that would have been the most undignified of behaviors. Men of rank guarded their dignity and did not run or scramble up trees in public view.

But curiosity and longing overcame pride. The moment is important because it shows the first kind of crack in Zacchaeus' old life. A man once concerned with status becomes willing to look foolish simply to catch a glimpse of Jesus. In Luke's telling, this small act of humble seeking prepares the way for the greater miracle that follows. The moment when Jesus stops, calls him by name, and turns a life of

greed into a life of generosity. In vs. 5 and 6, we read, “Jesus stops under the tree and says, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’”

Scripture consistently, right through, reminds us that God responds to those who seek Him. Look at these verses.

- Jeremiah 29:13 The Lord promises: *You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me will all your heart.*
- Isaiah 55:6 urges: *Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near.*
- Matthew 7:7 Jesus Himself encouraged people with the assurance: *Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.*
- James 4:8 *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*
- Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that *God rewards those who seek Him.*
- Acts 17:27 Paul tells us that *God is not distant from us, but near, inviting people everywhere to seek Him and find Him.*

It often begins with a simple seeking heart. When we turn toward God, even with a small step, He meets us with grace. As scripture promises, seek and you will find, and draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

He came down at once and welcomed him gladly. And this moment marks the turning point. The one whom society rejected is personally sought by Jesus. There’s a radical transformation.

When the crowd saw Jesus go to Zacchaeus’s house, they immediately began to grumble and complain saying, “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” In their minds, Zacchaeus was not someone that a respected teacher should associate with. As a chief tax collector, he had grown rich by collecting money from his fellow Jews while serving the Roman authorities, and many would have seen him as dishonest and morally compromised.

But while the crowd is murmuring outside, something remarkable is happening inside. Zacchaeus stands and says to the Lord. “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.”

In that moment, we see the evidence of a transformed heart. the man who once accumulated wealth now is ready to freely give it away. And the one who may have cheated others now commits to restoring them far beyond what the law required. The law required only 20% plus the original amount. And then, in cases of theft, four times. His words reveal that an encounter with Jesus has already begun to change him from the inside out.

When we look at scripture, repeatedly we are told that this is what happens when people have a true encounter with Jesus. Change is always the result.

- i. Our hearts are exposed. In the presence of Jesus, people suddenly see themselves clearly. Peter, after the miraculous catch of fish, falls at Jesus’ feet and says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Jesus’ holiness reveals the truth about who we are.
- ii. Grace awakens repentance. When people realize that Jesus receives them, rather than condemning them, their hearts soften. Romans 2:4 reminds us that God’s kindness is meant to lead to repentance. Zacchaeus is not threatened into repentance. He is welcomed into it.

- iii. A new heart produces new desires. The transformation is not merely external obedience, but inward renewal. God had promised through the prophet Ezekiel, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.” When the heart changes, priorities change. Zacchaeus’ relationship to money, once a tool of exploitation, becomes now a means of generosity.
- iv. True repentance results in tangible change. In scripture, encountering Jesus always affects the way people live. Paul would later write, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.”
Zacchaeus does not merely feel sorry. He acts differently. Behaviour changes

Why does encountering Jesus change us? Because we’re not merely encountering a teacher or a moral example. We’re encountering the living Son of God, whose presence itself confronts our sin, whose grace heals our shame, and whose spirit begins the transformation within us. When Jesus enters a life, He does not simply forgive the past. He reorders the heart, and when the heart is reordered, the life follows. He reorders the heart and our priorities, and when that happens the change in our life follows.

Jesus then declares in vs 9 and 10, “Today, salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. Zacchaeus’ response reveals a heart that has been genuinely changed. When he declares that he will give half of his possessions to the poor and repay fourfold anyone he has cheated, it is more than an act of generosity. It is evidence of repentance and transformation, and Jesus immediately responds with words of restoration. “Today, salvation has come to this house because he too is a son of Abraham.

That statement would have meant far more to Zacchaeus than we first might realize. As a chief tax collector, he had aligned himself with the Roman system and had grown wealthy by collecting money from his fellow Jews. In the eyes of his community, he was a traitor and a sinner.

Tax collectors were often treated as religious outcasts. They were despised socially and viewed as morally compromised, and one can imagine how difficult it must have been for Zacchaeus to walk into a synagogue or to stand among his own people. Instead of being welcomed as a fellow worshipper, he would likely have been met with cold stares, whispers, and contempt. Many would have assumed that a man like him had forfeited his place among the people of God, even though he was a Jew.

But Jesus overturns that judgment in a single sentence by calling him a son of Abraham. Jesus publicly restores his identity and his dignity. He affirms that Zacchaeus is not beyond the reach of God’s covenant mercy. In effect, Jesus is saying to the crowd: You may have written him off, but God has not. The man you despise is still part of the family of faith, and today salvation has come to his house. What the crowd denied him – belonging, acceptance, and spiritual identity – Jesus restores. And in that moment, Zacchaeus is not merely forgiven; he is reclaimed, reinstated, and welcomed back into the people of God.

And then, Jesus ends by summarizing this entire moment: For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

Jesus’ closing statement in this narrative functions as more than a concluding remark. It’s really a theological explanation of what has just taken place. The word ‘for’ introduces the reason behind his actions. The crowd has been murmuring because Jesus has chosen to enter the house of a man they

regard as a sinner. In their minds, a righteous teacher should avoid such people. But Jesus responds in effect by saying: What you are criticizing is actually the very reason that I've come.

The transformation of Zacchaeus is not an unfortunate association with a sinner. It's the fulfilment of His mission. In that sense, the story then becomes a living illustration of the gospel itself. Zacchaeus represents the lost, a man alienated from his community, morally compromised by his greed, and spiritually distant from God. And yet, Jesus does not wait for Zacchaeus to reform himself before approaching him. Instead, He seeks him out, calls him by name, and enters his home. The initiative belongs to Jesus.

What follows, repentance, restitution, and restoration, is a fruit of that divine pursuit. He continues to seek the lost. Zacchaeus' changed life becomes the visible evidence that Jesus' mission is working exactly as it was intended, to save the lost.

So, Luke presents Zacchaeus as a microcosm of Jesus' entire ministry. What happens in this one house in Jericho explains why Jesus came to earth at all. The murmuring crowd sees only a scandal, a holy man associating with a sinner. But Jesus sees a mission accomplished. A lost man found, a sinner restored, and a life transformed. In Zacchaeus, we see the heart of the gospel, the Son of Man seeking out those who are far from God and bringing them home.

When we apply the story of Zacchaeus to our lives, the question becomes:
What desires might eclipse our love for God until Jesus transforms them?

GREED:

Greed is broader than money. In scripture, greed, often translated as covetousness, refers to an excessive desire that displaces God from the center of our lives. Paul even says covetousness is idolatry in Colossians 3:5. In that sense, greed is any desire that grows so strong that it begins to rule us.

Greed can take many forms. Let me give you a few examples so that we can bring it home for us this evening.

- Greed for money or possessions, and this is the most obvious form. An endless desire for more wealth, more security, more accumulation, even when we already have enough.
- Greed for status or recognition, a longing to be admired, respected, or seen as important. We may crave titles, influence, or the applause of others.
- Greed for success or achievement, an ambition that slowly becomes controlling, where accomplishment begins to define identity and our worth.
- Greed for power or control, the need to dominate situations, people, or outcomes, struggling to surrender control to God.
- Greed for comfort, a desire for ease and convenience that resists sacrifice, obedience, or stepping into costly discipleship.
- Greed for approval, the longing to be liked by everyone, which can lead to compromise, truth or avoid obedience.
- Greed for experiences or pleasure, a pursuit of constant stimulation, entertainment, travel, enjoyment that slowly crowds out devotion to God.
- Greed for time for ourselves, a reluctance to give our time to God's work, to others, or to service because we guard it for ourselves.
- Greed for security, a deep need to feel safe and in control of the future that replaces trust in God's provision.

- A greed for knowledge or influence, even spiritual pursuits can become self-focused if they are about appearing wise or influential rather than growing closer to God.

What makes Zacchaeus' story powerful is that Jesus doesn't merely restrain greed. He replaces it with generosity. The same passion that once drove Zacchaeus to accumulate wealth now drives him to restore and bless others. That is often how transformation works. The very intensity that once fuelled our misplaced desires become redirected towards God's purposes.

So, the story of Zacchaeus ultimately invites us to look beyond his life and quietly examine our own. It's easy to identify greed in someone else, but the deeper invitation of the passage is more personal. What desire in my life has grown large enough to compete with my love for God? Zacchaeus' life had been shaped by a powerful desire for wealth, but when he encountered Jesus, that desire was exposed and then transformed.

Beloved, in the same way, the Holy Spirit often uses moments of encounter with Christ to reveal the things that may quietly be ruling our own lives. so, perhaps the questions we must ask tonight, are honest ones. What occupies my thoughts the most? What do I pursue with the greatest intensity? What do I find hardest to surrender to Jesus? Is there something I feel I must have in order to feel secure or fulfilled? Is there something that, if taken away, would shake my sense of identity or self-worth?

Sometimes these desires are obvious, but more often than not, they are subtle. Success, recognition, comfort, approval, or security. They are not always sinful in themselves, but when they grow large enough to eclipse our love for God, they begin to shape our lives more than our devotion to God does.

So, another question we might ask is: What area of my life would Jesus want to transform today? Zacchaeus did not come to Jesus offering a carefully prepared confession. He simply encountered Him, and in that encounter, the Spirit revealed what needed to change.

And beloved, the same thing happens to us as well. When we allow Jesus to step into the hidden places of our lives, He gently but clearly shows us what needs to be reordered.

And perhaps the most hopeful question is this: What might my life look like if Jesus transformed that desire? In Zacchaeus' case, greed became generosity. The very energy that once drove him to accumulate wealth now drove him to restore and bless others. That's the beauty of the gospel. Jesus does not merely remove what is wrong. He redeems and redirects our hearts.

So, Zacchaeus' story shows us that when Jesus enters a life, He doesn't simply forgive the past. He begins to reorder and reprioritize our heart. The man who once built his life around wealth finds that wealth no longer owns him. Instead of taking, he starts giving. Instead of exploiting, he begins restoring. Instead of taking from people, he finds that his greed has turned into generosity because his heart has encountered Jesus.

Interestingly, the writer of Proverbs offers this very honest prayer.

Proverbs 30:8-9 "Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is my portion, lest I be full and deny you and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God."

It's the prayer of someone who understands how easily our desires can take over our lives. Too little can tempt us. too much can deceive us. What we really need is not more or less. We just need a heart that belongs fully to God.

That's exactly what happened to Zacchaeus. His encounter with Jesus exposed the desire that had been ruling his entire life. And in that moment, his heart gets redirected. The same passion that once drove him to accumulate wealth, now drives him to bless others. And that's still what Jesus does even today.

So perhaps the question for us is not simply whether we struggle with greed, but maybe something deeper. What desire in my life has grown large enough to compete with my love for God? What is it in my life that quietly shapes my decisions, occupies my thoughts and promises the satisfaction that only God can give? Because when we encounter Jesus, He does not merely ask us to manage those desires. He transforms them. And when He does, beloved, the things that once held our hearts begin to loosen their grip and our lives start to reflect the generosity, freedom, and joy of a heart that has been found by Christ.

That is the great hope of this story. When Jesus enters a life, greed does not have the last word; grace does.

Heavenly Father, Lord, how evident it is that there are times in our lives when we allow things to grow to such an extent that they take away devotion from you. And Lord, we quickly want to confess that that is true in our lives. But Lord, this evening, all of us are here and are serious about all loving transformation in our lives, allowing you to transform us, reordering our lives, giving us fresh priorities. So Lord, would You show us? Would You put Your finger on the things that are potentially taking away time from You, devotion from You, preventing us from fulfilling Your plans and purposes in our lives? And Lord, through the power and the movement of Your Spirit, would You bring conviction upon our hearts that we may quickly confess them and invite You to touch that area, take control of that area, and once again let it be a place of sacred space devoted only to the Almighty God, His will and His purposes. Lord, in the quietness of these moments, would You hear our individual prayers?

Amen.
