

works itself deeper and deeper into our very core. What's the latest thing you feel you need to be happy? What's the latest jealousy in your heart about what someone else has? Greed never ends! Greed is never satisfied. Too often, we don't hold onto our money. Our money holds onto us. When money captivates our hearts more than Jesus, it robs us of the freedom and joy that Jesus came to bring. "Sinners"—that's us! Lost.

So remember these words, "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*" If others look at you and say, "Sinner!" Jesus came for you. If you look at others and say, "Sinner!" Jesus came for you. If something other than Jesus has captivated your heart for far too long, Jesus came for you. Wherever you are at today—even sitting in a tree—Jesus calls out to you, "I'm going to your house today." There is nothing that Jesus wants more than to stay at your house. Today. Always. It's amazing to think about! Of all the billions of people in the world, Jesus is seeking you! He picks you out of the crowd, calls you by name, and shows you grace. Why me? Why you? Our God is so great!

Because "*the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*" If you had a Bible, you'd see why Jesus was passing through Jericho in our lesson. He was going to Jerusalem. This very chapter of Luke ends with Palm Sunday. Just days after talking with Zacchaeus, Jesus gave too. He didn't give 10%. He didn't give 50%. He gave 100% of himself of himself for our sins on his cross, so that you are a forgiven son or daughter of God. You can't get any higher than that! You are free from your sins and guilt and shame. You are free from the stress of fighting for power or position. Free from the grasp of money over your heart.

And one way you show that is that you are freed to give. You can't know Jesus and still clutch your money the way you did before, because your life doesn't depend on your money anymore. It depends on Jesus. You are freed to give. Reflecting on God's blessings, a believer in the Old Testament wrote, "*How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?*" (Psalm 116:12). Over the next three weeks, we're going to joyfully think about that question. "*How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?*" Zacchaeus—that wee little man—starts us off with a beautiful example of the joyful generosity that comes from a believer's heart. Joyful—it can't be forced! Generous—in response to Jesus' grace. Try it—or try it even more! God gives you money to be a blessing to others.

Because you are not what you own. Understand? You are not what you own. You are so much more than your car. You are more than your house. You are more than your job. You are more than your 401K. You are not what you own, so don't let any of those things enslave you. You are a child of God. Loved by your Father. Forgiven by your Savior. Lost, but found. Enslaved, but set free. Freed to give!

Luke 19:1-10
Pastor Nathan Nass

Joyful Generosity #1
November 5, 2017

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" ⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." ⁹Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Freed to Give

You've probably heard of Zacchaeus. It's a strange name, and he's only mentioned here in the whole Bible. But you've probably heard of Zacchaeus. It's because of the song, right? Can you sing it with me? "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he. He climbed up in a sycamore tree, for the Lord he wanted to see...." Great! The story of Zacchaeus teaches a very important truth from the Bible: Jesus loves short people. If there was any doubt in your mind, just look at Zacchaeus. It's true: Jesus loves short people too!

As if that weren't wonderful enough, there's actually more! Some of the books of the Bible have very clear themes. At the end of the Gospel of John, John writes, "*These words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:31). That was John's theme: Whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. The theme of the Gospel of Luke is found right here in this story about Zacchaeus. Can you guess what it is? "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Luke 19:10). Luke is the one who records the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Son. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. That's what Luke's Gospel is about. What a beautiful, Gospel truth!

It's just that Zacchaeus himself at first glance might not seem like someone who was lost. We're told, "*He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.*" You hear that, and it sounds like Zacchaeus had it made. He had the top position in his line of work—the chief tax collector. He was like the CEO of his company. On top of that, he was wealthy. He had everything he could possibly want. For the men who are here, how often aren't we told that this is the ideal? Power and money—that's what it's about right? The top position? Zacchaeus had it. Lots of money? Zacchaeus had it. You'd expect him to be content. Happy. Loving life, right?

No! The Bible paints a different picture. *“He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.”* When the 4th of July parade happens here in town, how many wealthy businessmen have you seen sitting in trees to get a good view? None! Zacchaeus did two things that honorable men in Jesus’ day didn’t do. He ran. And he climbed a tree. Why? This man was desperate. This is not the picture of a man with peace in his heart. Despite all of his money, despite all of his power, he needed something more. So there he was—in a tree—lost.

We’ve heard this before: Money doesn’t solve life’s problems. We know the warning from our second lesson today: *“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil”* (1 Timothy 6:10). We’ve heard Jesus words: *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”* (Luke 12:15). We know that, but how often don’t we think, “If I just had a little more money... A lot more wouldn’t hurt. But if I just had a little more, I’d be happy...” Even if you had all the money and power in the world, you might still find yourself climbing trees, desperate for something more—like Zacchaeus.

Until he met Jesus. There were crowds of people wanting to see Jesus as he walked through Jericho. But in the middle of all those people, Jesus was searching for just one person. *“When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’”* Who was really seeking whom? Zacchaeus thought he was the one seeking Jesus, but Jesus was really the one seeking him. Jesus knew his name. Jesus knew his need. So why him? Of all the people, why did Jesus talk to Zacchaeus? Jesus didn’t see a wealthy tax collector. He saw a lost soul in need of grace. And *“the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

Isn’t that beautiful? I think so, but the people hated it! They got angry. *“All the people saw this”—all the people!—“and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”* You can hear the disdain in their voices. You can see their fingers pointed: “Sinner!” Tax collectors were the worst. Some things don’t change, right? Nobody likes tax collectors. Why? Could it be because tax collectors then and now go after the most important thing in our lives—our money? That attitude showed what they—and we—treasure, right? *“He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”* Jesus’ reaction? *“Of course I have! The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost!”*

We love Jesus’ grace for us, but we don’t always love Jesus’ grace for others. One of our Wisconsin Synod churches in Milwaukee made it into the newspaper recently for an unfortunate reason: There’s a huge prostitution business going on right in front of the church. If that were to happen here, what would our first reaction be? Call the police. “Get them away from here!” When the pastor there saw the prostitutes again and again in front of his church, he decided to do something crazy. Can you guess what he did? He talked to them! He asked how his church could help them. He called up city organizations and lined

up clothes and food. Even for *them*? That’s grace, isn’t it? Our Savior Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost. Do we?

Zacchaeus got it! In one day, he understood Jesus’ grace better than we often do. Suddenly, he realized what had been missing in his life. It wasn’t more money. It wasn’t more power. It was Jesus. It was real love. It was real forgiveness. It was real grace. Jesus’ love and forgiveness meant more than all the treasures in the world. He didn’t have to climb trees anymore. He didn’t have to cling to his money anymore. He had Jesus! This was going to change things... You can almost see the wheels spinning in Zacchaeus’ mind. This once greedy man said, *“Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”*

What was going on? Zacchaeus realized that money had been at the root of his sin and unbelief. So he realized that the best way to show his new faith in Jesus had to revolve around what? Money! It was joyful generosity. Nobody forced him. Nobody commanded him. In fact, he gave way more than anyone would have expected. In the Old Testament, a tithe—or 10%—was commanded. To Zacchaeus’, that wasn’t enough, not with all that Jesus had done for him. He wanted to give 50%! In the Old Testament, people were commanded to pay back double what they stole from somebody else. To Zacchaeus, that wasn’t enough, not when compared to Jesus’ grace. He wanted to pay back four times! Joyful generosity was welling up in Zacchaeus’ heart.

How could he do that? Before he met Jesus, there was no way he would have given up his money like that. In last week’s sermon, Jesus told us that *“everyone who sins is a slave to sin”* (John 8:34). Zacchaeus now realized that he had been living in slavery his whole life. Oh, he had thought that he was free. He had thought that he had the money and the power to live how he pleased, to do whatever he wanted to do. But now he realized that he had been a slave. He wasn’t controlling his money. His money had controlled him—his decisions, his relationships—until he met Jesus. Jesus set him free! Jesus’ grace turned Zacchaeus from a money collector to a money giver. He was freed to give, because he had found something so much greater in Jesus.

Does that describe your life right now—“freed to give”? What is it that captivates your heart? What is it that dominates your dreams? What is it that drives your decisions? Is it money? The way we use our money reflects our faith in Jesus. So we need to talk honestly about greed. It’s a not so hidden sin possessing our culture. We never have enough, do we? Never enough money. Never enough stuff. We always need more! Do you see what Jesus meant when he said, *“Everyone who sins is a slave to sin”*? Are you too much in debt? Do you always need one more thing? Do you buy what you can’t afford? You may think you’re free, but you’re really a slave.

Sometimes people think money is only a problem for those who are rich. That couldn’t be further from the truth. Greed is like a cancer that affects everyone—rich, poor, and everyone in between. The less you think about it, the more dangerous it is. Greed