

THE SECRET TO OVERWHELMING GRATITUDE
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All the people...began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" But 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."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." –Luke 19:7-10

There are times in our lives when God seems to be telling us **something's got to change**.

In his book, **364 Days of Thanksgiving**, Pastor Andrew Schroer tells the story of a woman—a young mother—who attempted suicide. Her husband had a connection with Pastor Schroer's church, and he asked him to come and speak with his wife in the hospital. So he went. As he spoke with the young woman, it became clear that she was deeply depressed about her marriage and family. The doctors prescribed medication and counseling. She also asked that the pastor visit her once a week.

Pastor Schroer agreed. But he wasn't sure how to approach the situation, so he consulted with a psychologist friend. He explained that depression is often anger turned inward. This woman was dwelling so much on the problems in her life that she couldn't see the good things God had given her. He advised the pastor to have her keep a notebook by her bed. Every morning and every evening the woman was to write down one good thing in her life—something to be **thankful** for. But there was a catch. **Each time it had to be something different**.

Over the weeks, her list grew longer...and as it did, her life got brighter. She began to notice the blessings God had given her—especially the gift of **forgiveness**. She began to see how even her problems were a part of God's plan for her life. She began to smile again. And in time she became the inspiration for the book, **364 Days of Thanksgiving**.

A lot of us are living less than satisfied lives. We find it easy to whine and gripe and complain about life. We may even be driven to act in ways we once thought were never possible. That's when we know: **something's got to change**.

We're all looking for happiness. But we need to understand this: The secret to happiness isn't getting rid of our problems. The secret to happiness isn't getting what we want. **No, the secret to happiness is just opening our eyes to see what we already have in Christ**.

Last week we heard how Jesus healed ten men with leprosy. They were all pleased. They were all thankful. But only one was filled with such **overwhelming gratitude** that he returned to give thanks to Jesus. Today we hear the story of a man whose overwhelming gratitude led him to **change course** in his life. Zacchaeus needed to learn:

THE SECRET TO OVERWHELMING GRATITUDE

- 1. It doesn't come from getting what you want**
- 2. It comes from appreciating what you already have**

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. Now, I don't know how you feel about the IRS—the people who make a living collecting your taxes. But there are times when you might feel a little like this: Snoopy's typing a letter...

- **"Dear IRS,..."** he says.
- He thinks for a moment...
- Then he says, **"I am writing to you to cancel my subscription."**
- **"Please remove me from your mailing list."**

Good luck with that. If you make a living collecting other people's taxes you're not going to be very popular. In Jesus' day, it was even worse.

The Romans occupied the land of the Jews. They demanded revenue from the people who lived there, and the way they did it was a recipe for corruption. They would get Jews from each region to serve as **tax collectors** for them. The Romans set the amount they expected from the tax collectors. But anything the tax collector made over and above that amount—that was his to keep. As you might guess, many of them took advantage of the system.

You can see how a tax collector could become **very wealthy**. And you can see how they would have been **despised**. In the minds of the people, tax collectors were the lowest of the low—they were traitors and cheats, the worst of sinners. Everybody hated them.

Now, it's just before Holy Week—seven days before Jesus' death. Jesus has made the long journey from Galilee in the north and now he's getting closer to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. The last city before Jerusalem is **Jericho**.

The people of Jericho have heard of Jesus. They know that he's on his way. So everyone is out on the streets. They crowd around to see who Jesus is. "What does he look like? What's he going to say? Will he do a miracle here? Will he stay in town? If so, where?" And this is when we meet **Zacchaeus**. He's a "**chief** tax collector," Luke tells us—he's **at the top** of a corrupt system. He wants to see Jesus, but he has a problem. He's a short man and can't see above the crowds. So he ditches his dignity, runs ahead, and climbs a sycamore fig tree just so he can see.

You can't help but wonder: What does Zacchaeus want with Jesus? What's moving him to search him out? Has something happened to awaken his conscience? Has he come to realize how many people he's betrayed and hurt? Is he beginning to see that his whole life revolves around money—that he's a slave to his wealth? **What's moving him to scurry up that tree?** I don't know. But **we all need to look for Jesus with the same eagerness**. We too are sinners. And in so many ways, we too are slaves to our wealth.

According to the website *Global Rich List*, if your household earns more than **\$52,000** a year, you are richer than 97 percent of people in the world. If you make half that—**\$26,000** a year—you're in the top 90 percent. It's not a stretch to say that the **poorest** person here today is still among the richest people in the world.

We have things the rest of the world doesn't. In fact, we have so much, one of our biggest problems is where to put it all. And yet, we're among the **unhappiest** people in the world. The secret to happiness is not getting what you want. We already have more than we need. No. The secret to overwhelming gratitude is **appreciating** what we already have.

Zacchaeus was about to learn that lesson.

"When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly" (Luke 19:5,6). The people couldn't believe it. "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner'," they said (Luke 19:7). And he had. Here was this man everyone knew was a schnook who enriched himself at the expense of others. Yet Jesus invited himself to stay with him. The whole city was offended. But Jesus didn't care. He said, "Zacchaeus, I don't want to go to their houses. I want to go to yours." And Zacchaeus welcomed him with joy.

I'd like to know what they talked about—wouldn't you? We're not told. But we know this: **something had to change**...and it **did**. Zacchaeus stopped thinking about himself. He stopped thinking he'd be happier if just got what he wanted. He put aside his pride and humbled himself.

Take note: It wasn't **Zacchaeus** who asked Jesus into his life. It was **Jesus** who welcomed Zacchaeus into **his**. This is nothing other than **grace**—God's undeserved love. That's how he saves. Not through some great act of devotion or some great monetary gift or any other kind of work or effort. Our new life in Christ is a **free gift** of **God's undeserved love**.

And a grateful heart responds. We read: “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’” (Luke 19:8). Zacchaeus committed himself to make restitution to anyone he had wronged. And he promised to give away half of his income to the poor. It seems like a lot. But he was in the presence of the One who would give **everything** to rescue Zacchaeus from his sin. His kindness touched the tax collector’s heart and changed his life. **Overwhelming gratitude** leads to **overwhelming generosity**.

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:9,10). **Jesus came to seek the lost.** The people of Jericho struggled with that. All they could see was Zacchaeus’ past. But Jesus saw his **heart**—a heart that was truly **repentant**. That’s why he came. He came into this world to save **sinners**.

He came into this world to save **you**. Open your eyes and see. See the amazing things God has done for you. Look at the blessings you have.

- Look at the food you eat, the house you live in, the car you drive, the clothes you wear...
- Look at the family you love and the memories you share...
- Look at the church family you have...the forgiveness and faith that brings us together...the hope of heaven and everlasting life.

And realize with Zacchaeus that you don’t deserve any of it. God has been **overwhelmingly generous** to us all.

So how will you respond? Let me suggest this: Every day this week **write down one blessing from God** that you’ve never thanked him for before. Thank him. And know that he wants you to have that joy!

AMEN.