

Dear friends in our Savior,

I have had a lot of people come into my office over the years to confess a number of different sins. Greed is not one of them. I have never had anyone ask for a meeting to sit down and get counsel over the greed that has taken their heart. I have had people confess affairs, that they were leaving their spouse, that they had spoken harshly or unlovingly to someone, that they had stolen, that they were facing addiction and those sorts of things. But never greed.

Greed is one of those sins that creeps its way into our lives and takes over without our knowing it. It is that desire to always want more. It is the heart of someone who is never satisfied or content with what God has given them but is always striving to have what they don't have. When I was in Wisconsin a couple of weeks ago, I got to stop at Cabela's and saw people buying hundreds of dollars of outdoor gear and equipment. My parents took Micah to the Packer Pro Shop and couldn't believe the number of people buying armloads of jerseys at \$85/jersey. Credit card debt slowed for a while, but it is back on the rise again. These next weeks of frenzied shopping will insure that more people buy things they can't afford and go farther into debt. It's hard to believe that the economy is in the tank when people are spending money this way. While having any of these in and of themselves are not wrong or sinful, you can't help but ask or at least wonder, "How much of this is fueled by greed?" How much is fueled by a lack of contentment with the situation in which God has placed you? How much is fueled by a constant need for more? Are these fueled by a heart that is grateful to God for how He has blessed us or just by a need to have the latest and best and have it now!

Thanksgiving is not a time to count up what we have so that we can be sure of what we don't have. It is a time for us to step back, marvel at the blessings our God has seen fit to bestow upon us, give all praise and thanks to him for his goodness and kindness, and respond with hearts of gratitude and thanks to our gracious God. While usually it is Valentine's Day that we choose to focus on the heart, this Thanksgiving we want to take a look at what it means to have **A Thanksgiving Heart.**

Luke 19:1-10 *Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" ⁸ 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." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

Zacchaeus knew all about greed. His position was one of the most lucrative in the land. Not only was he a tax collector, but he was a chief tax collector in one of the more prosperous towns in the land. Jericho was the hub of considerable trade. In his position, he had acquired power, friends, and most importantly to him—money. Lots of it! He had accumulated a great store of wealth. But much of that was done through legal cheating and extortion. This is why tax collectors were so hated by the Jewish people. Not only did they work closely with the hated Romans, but they had the full power of the Roman army behind them to extort as much money out of the people as they wanted. This business had made Zacchaeus into a rich man indeed.

But something was missing. It is intriguing to us why Zacchaeus was so intent on seeing Jesus that day. He had all that he needed—money, power, and important friends. Why would he have made such an effort to see Jesus as he was passing through town? It's possible that he knew one of the disciples—Matthew—who had been a tax collector and it's possible that Matthew had shared with him a little of what Jesus is about. It's possible that this was just a popular person passing through and that Zacchaeus wanted to be able to say that he saw him with his own eyes. But perhaps more likely, Zacchaeus noticed that something was missing in his life. Why else would such a prominent man resort to climbing up a tree and perching in it like a young impulsive boy? All of this (and from what will come later) is proof that Zacchaeus had more than just a curiosity to see Jesus. No matter how many riches he collected, they just didn't satisfy. He still wanted more. They didn't provide for him the happiness and security that he had thought they would. Even though he had all that he could want physically, spiritually he was empty. Jesus had what he was looking for. In faith, this man wanted to see him and be filled with what Jesus could offer.

This is what greed does. It always leaves us wanting for more. It never satisfies our hearts but keeps us going after more and more. Nowhere is that seen more than with the billionaire who was asked if he felt secure now that he had accumulated a billion dollars. He replied, "A billion dollars doesn't go as far as it once did." No matter how much you have, there are still others who have more. There are things that you don't have. You can still lose it all! While riches may do things for you on this earth, they do nothing for you before God in heaven. More importantly, it takes our reliance off of our God and places it on ourselves. When you have a "want to get rich" focus, it is so easy to become self-serving, self-living, self-sufficient and in the end just selfish people who forget God. The constant searching for more and the best displays a lack of trust in God to provide for us.

What joy filled Zacchaeus' heart when Jesus stopped his procession, looked up at him and called him by name instructing him to come down. Imagine that: of all that whole crowd of people, he was only one that Jesus picked. Jesus called him by name and then invited himself to his house. That call completely changed Zacchaeus. Jesus knew him and called him by name. Not only did he know him, but he knew his heart and saw faith there. Zacchaeus was painfully aware of the sins that he had committed and surely Jesus knew them too. He could scarcely hope to be accepted by the sinless Messiah. Yet here Jesus was, urging him to hurry to his side and inviting himself to be a guest in the house of a sinful wretch like this. The reports of the Messiah's love were true. His readiness to receive sinners was true! Indeed, Zacchaeus had been one of the lost, but by the grace and love of Jesus he was found and saved.

And it is here that we see what a truly thankful heart does. A thanksgiving heart does not hold tightly to itself what it has graciously been given by God. It recognizes along with the psalmist that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. It knows that everything belongs to the Lord and that he simply gives it to us to use while we are here for his glory. Zacchaeus responded with a heart of thanksgiving. He responded to the peace, comfort and joy he had found in his Lord by giving a thank offering. It is remarkable. We often talk about offerings of 10%. Zacchaeus chose to give 50%. Half of what he had he gave to the poor. In addition, he vowed to make restitution to those he had cheated. In fact, he went over and above in what he did. The law required that when one was cheated, they were to give back what was cheated plus 1/5. Zacchaeus' grateful response was 4 times what he had cheated the people. A true heart of thanksgiving makes amends for wrongs, uses what God gives to give thank offerings to God and to help others. Rather than a heart of greed that is focused on get, get, get. A thanksgiving heart is one that gives, gives, gives.

What we are thankful for most this Thanksgiving is that like Zacchaeus, our Lord has come to each one of us lost, wretched sinners and called us by name. Through the waters of baptism, he called us or invited us to be his children. He gave us the privilege of being part of his family and of looking forward the eternal inheritance that is ours. Doesn't it just blow your mind to think that of the 6 billion people in this world, God knows you! He saw you, picked you, and through baptism called you who were lost and saved you! Through the waters of baptism God washed away all of our sins, including the greed that rules our heart by nature and the selfishness that goes with it. He cleansed us to live as his people. If that were all that God had done, that in itself would be enough for us to give thanks. Then we step back to see how God has blessed us! Start counting the cars in your driveway, TV's in your house, and dollars in your bank account. Start counting the clothes in your closet, food in your refrigerator and roof over your head. Start counting the shoes on your feet, trips and vacations you have taken, and the activities that you are blessed to enjoy! How blessed we truly are! How good the Lord has been to us. Can't the same thing be said of us that was said of Zacchaeus—we are rich people?

This Thanksgiving, we pray that as we ponder the goodness of our God, that he give to us a Thanksgiving heart. We pray that the Lord keep us content and satisfied with what he has given to us. We pray that God lead each of us to respond to that goodness with generous offerings of thanks to praise and worship him. You have the opportunity to display that thankful heart every time you come to worship as we bring forward our offerings. The insert in your bulletin helps to guide you in that joyful response by sharing some of the need we face here. With joy filling your heart as you come to know more and more the peace that is yours in Jesus, use what God has given you not for your selfish gains, but to help others and to bring him glory. As you have seen Jesus give himself for you, be welled up in generosity and give from what he has given you to help others. It was such a great outpouring that I witnessed just last week. I was just blown away. I sent out an e-mail that we had a member with some needs. Within 24 hours, we had so much I had to say to some, "Please hold some for the next time." These are generous, thanksgiving hearts. While there is so much for us in this world, let's set our priorities to follow God's agenda and be generous and giving as we respond to his goodness. God blesses us more abundantly than what we pray for and than what we can possibly understand. This Thanksgiving, step back to count the blessings you have from a gracious and loving God. As you are filled with joy at the goodness of God, respond with a Thanksgiving Heart. Amen.