

GRATITUDE: Giving Generously to God

2 Corinthians 8-9 (cf. Luke 19:1-10)

This, from Luke 19ⁱ

As Jesus was passing through Jericho, a man named Zacchaeus, one of the most influential Jews in the Roman tax-collecting business (and, of course, a very rich man), tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowds. So he ran ahead and climbed into a sycamore tree beside the road, to watch from there.

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name! "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick! Come down! For I am going to be a guest in your home today!"

Zacchaeus hurriedly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the crowds were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "Sir, from now on I will give half my wealth to the poor, and if I find I have overcharged anyone on his taxes, I will penalize myself by giving him back four times as much!"

Jesus told him, "This shows that salvation has come to this home today. This man was one of the lost sons of Abraham, and I, the Messiah, have come to search for and to save such souls as his."*

This indeed is one of the more famous and memorable exchanges in the recorded life of Jesus. Kids in Sunday School sing about the "wee-little-man" named Zaccheus who "climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see."

And we money-conscious adults easily remember what Zaccheus told Jesus he would do; namely, that he was going to give ½ of all his wealth to the poor, and repay anyone he may have cheated over his climb to the top as a tax collector - \$4 for every one that he dishonestly collected. All of that, it seems, because Jesus simply took the time to find him in the tree and visit him for an entire day in his house.

But my wager is that probably most of us have not thought carefully about what Jesus said in response to Zaccheus' stunning outpouring of generosity. Jesus actually explains the cause behind Zaccheus' incredible gift-and-rebate program. Lean in to verses 9-10:

*Today, it's clear SALVATION as come to this
house, to this son of Abraham.
I've come to save people like him.*

Think about Jesus' statement for a moment. Is not Jesus making two very important observations?

#1 **GENEROSITY is a KEY EVIDENCE of SALVATION**

**#2 People LOST in (a life of) POSSESSING
and ACCUMULATING need
JESUS' rescue (i.e. SALVATION)...from it!**

They need to be saved...from that.

If I may be perfectly candid, the kind of generosity we run into in the Bible can make us nervous.

- **Luke 7** ³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ And behold, **a woman of the city, who was a sinner**, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, **brought an alabaster flask of ointment**, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to **wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.**
- **Matthew 19:**²⁰ The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" ²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.
- **Matthew 26** ⁶ Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ **a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table.** ⁸ **And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? ⁹ For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor."** ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."
- **Luke 17** One returning, thankful (cleansed) leper - ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, **praising God with a loud voice;** ¹⁶ **and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet**, giving him thanks.
- **Acts 4** - ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for **as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.** ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ **sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.**

Let's face it. Such Biblical examples – including Zaccheus – make us nervous. It might even scare us. Generosity like that strikes some of us as either foolish, or unrealistic or both. In our heart of hearts we reason, "I could never give away ½ of all I own. I could never see myself selling a piece of prime real estate and give the sale price to whatever the church family needed it for. I think I'm more like that wealthy young guy who said to Jesus, 'Sorry...no can do!'"

This is the 3rd week we are asking the same question – How do you say **Thanks** to God?

What is genuine, Biblical gratitude?

Gratitude – we discovered in Luke 17, is giving genuine, eager PRAISE to God.

Gratitude – we discovered in Romans 12:1-2, is giving OURSELVES, sacrificially and with conviction, to God.

Today, do we have the courage to embrace a third truth? That GRATITUDE is giving GENEROUSLY

to God. That

**Anyone truly transformed by God's grace,
consistently expresses God's grace of generosityⁱⁱ**

You say, "Where is that taught?" I could take you to 50 places – but let's land in Paul's 2nd letter to the Christians at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 8:1(ESV) We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

All right...what's behind this?

The key is in the phrase (vs.4) "the relief of the saints." As the good news about Jesus the Christ spread east-to-west throughout the Roman empire—up into Asia Minor, then Macedonia, then Achaia and eventually to Rome—one of the things happening back in Jerusalem (where it all started) was a severe famineⁱⁱⁱ in the region (note: it had been predicted by the HS through one of the prophets in Antioch, Agabus; Acts 11:28-29). So there was a problem in Jerusalem/Judea with poverty. Historian Philip E. Hughes:

[From its earliest days, the Jerusalem church] had been confronted with the problem of extreme poverty of the Christians in Jerusalem...the conversion of thousands of souls (cf. Acts 2:41-42...resulted in) material cost [that] must have been immense. Coming as [new converts] did from the background of Jewish fervor and exclusivism, [these early, new Christians] must have become, in consequence of their conversion, the victims of social and economic ostracism, [Jewish] excommunication, and national disinheritance. Their business enterprises must in most cases have collapsed in ruins and family bonds heart-breakingly severed. The situation was initially met by the touching and spontaneous manner in which members of this young fellowship demonstrated their oneness of heart and soul by sharing their possessions and resources (Acts 4:32ff).^{iv}

The problem with poor Christians in Jerusalem was compounded by famines which plagued the Roman Empire, and one very difficult one experienced in Judea in A.D. 45. Very much aware of this need, the Apostle Paul not only spread the gospel throughout the Roman empire and planted churches, but he also asked those churches – which had gotten the blessings of the gospel "from Jerusalem" – to respond back with a monetary gift "for the relief of the [Jerusalem] saints. And Christians in churches from all over - in Asia, in Macedonia, in Rome – were giving \$ to Paul and a team of men who would be taking the famine relief gift back to Jerusalem.

Now...nose back in the passage! Paul is again writing to the church in the city of Corinth, full

of Christians living in a city that was economically flourishing. And these Christians, about 1 year earlier, had made generous pledge to Paul to give to “the relief of the saints” (cf. 9:1-5). You can sense the problem. The Corinthians *said* they would give. But one year later, most of those Corinthian believers were still holding on to their gift.

Now, let’s go back to chapter 8. Paul now writes to the Corinthian Christians and says, “Let me tell you about your brother and sister Christians in Macedoniad. They decided to – and followed through on – being **GENEROUS WITH GOD**. It’s a great passage of Scripture on what it means to be generous with God. Notice **the 6 marks – Biblically identified and defined – of a generous disciple of Jesus Christ?** 2 Cor 8:1-6

1. Generosity happens when **God’s grace freely flows through us** (8:1)
We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,
2. Generosity is not pulled-in under adversity; **adversity actually stimulates generosity** (8:2)
For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part
3. Generosity **always voluntarily exceeds what is normal** (& expected) (8:3)
For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord

When my wife and I were talking about this verse the other day, she asked the question, “What does Paul mean by ‘beyond their means’?” My wife is usually more generous than I want to be, so it prompted some deeper digging. Literally Paul writes that the Macedonians gave not only “in keeping with” their means (i.e., “power” or ability, *δυναμιν*), but then Paul adds (lit.) “contrary (*παρὰ*) to their means”. Not just “above and beyond,” but “against” what their means suggested a reasonable person would do. If you will “in hurt of” what they might need. The Holy Spirit is communicating this in Scripture to us...about true generosity. One commentator said,

A reasonable person would size up the opportunity to give this way. First, what do I need for my own basic, immediate existence, and Second, what do I need to hang on to as a measure of future of future security.^v Such evaluation is justifiable and reasonable. The Macedonians, however, poor as they were, had shown a complete disregard for their own requirements, both present and future.^{vi} In this sense they had given “contrary to their ability.”^{vii}

Ah...generosity toward God, generosity that exceeds what is normal, is a step of faith!

4. Generosity **wants “in” when there is true need.** It *refuses to ignore* need; it rather *readily responds* to need (8:4)
begging us earnestly^{viii} for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints
5. Generosity is the (**super**) **natural expression of something larger** -- a whole-life given to God (8:5)
and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.
6. Generosity in some is something **God uses to stimulate generosity in others** (8:6-7)
But as you (Corinthians) excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

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In such a disciple (or couple following Jesus together)

- God’s grace freely flows
- Adversity (personal) prompts more generosity
- Their giving exceeds what is normal
- They always want in when there is true need
- They give out of a whole life that belongs to God
- Their giving stimulates others to be generous with God as well

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

FINISHING UP

I have every reason to suspect that Zaccheus himself would eagerly pray this prayer:

O Lord God

Teach me to know grace precedes, accompanies and follows my salvation

That it sustains the redeemed soul

That not one link of its chain can ever break

From Calvary’s cross wave up on wave of grace reaches me

Deals with my sin,

Washes me clean

Renews my heart,

Draws out my affection

Kindles a flame in my soul,

Consecrates my every thought, word, work,

Teaches me Thy immeasurable love.

How great are my privileges in Christ Jesus!

Without him I stand far off, a stranger, an outcast;

In him I draw near and touch his kingly sceptre.

Without him I dare not lift my guilty eyes;

In him I gaze upon my Father-God and friend

*Without him I hide my lips in trembling shame;
In him, I open my mouth in petition and praise.
Without him all is wrath and consuming fire;
In him all is love and the repose of my soul.
Without him is gaping hell below me, and eternal anguish;
In him its gates are barred to me by his precious blood.*

*Without him, darkness spreads its horrors in front;
In him an eternity of glory is my boundless horizon.
Without him all within me is terror and dismay;
In him every accusation is charmed into joy and peace.
Without him all things external call for my condemnation;
In him, they minister to my comfort,
And are to be enjoyed with thanksgiving.*

*Praise be to Thee for grace,
And for the unspeakable gift of Jesus.^{ix}*

How do you say “thanks” to God? Deep, heartfelt, regular and enthusiastic PRAISE...is important. Giving OURSELVES to God in the convictions that I will not be pressed into the world’s mold, but I will be renewed by the Spirit in the way I think so that I live out the very will of God...is important. And, having been

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Being a Zaccheus. Being like one of those “beyond their means” Macedonian Christians who simply believed God would be absolutely faithful to them^x if they were unreasonably generous. Believing Proverbs 11:25 The **generous** man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered.

Believing and demonstrating that being generous toward God with your time, with your giftedness, with your resources – there is no clearer demonstration that SALVATION has come into your house.

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ⁱ Taken from *The Living Bible* paraphrase, by Kenneth Taylor

ⁱⁱ Other similar statements:

*When the heart changed is by the grace of Jesus,
the life grows in the flow of the generosity of God*

*a life transformed by the grace of Jesus
refreshes others with the generosity of Jesus*

*the true transformation of grace
produces the grace of generosity*

*(Our Savior’s generosity toward us
powerfully produces our Father’s generosity through us)*

bounty, kindness, big-heartedness, liberality

ⁱⁱⁱ Claudius Caesar was the fifth Roman emperor, and ascended to the throne in the year 41 A.D. His reign covered a period of thirteen years (41-54 A.D.) and was brought to a rather spectacular conclusion when one of his wives, Agrippina, poisoned him in order that her son could take the throne. During the reign of Claudius, several different famines are known to have occurred. The first famine during this period was centered around the city of Rome in the years 41 and 42 A.D. The second famine known to have occurred during the reign of Claudius was in the fourth year of his office (45 A.D.), and was particularly centered in Judea. It is this famine to which Luke makes reference in Acts 11:28, and to which we hope to give further attention in this discussion. The third famine during the time of Claudius was centered in Greece in about A.D. 50. The fourth famine took place in 52 A.D. and once again, plagued the city of Rome. Josephus, the Jewish historian, supplies further information concerning the intensity of this famine, with its great distress and many deaths. In a footnote, it is indicated that it may have lasted for a three-year period. The reason for considering this particular famine is due to the fact that it served as an occasion for many of the New Testament congregations to co-operate in the giving of material aid to the "brethren which dwelt in Judea." (Acts 11:29.) Just before this famine, prophets had journeyed from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one by the name of Agabus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed that there would be a "great dearth throughout all the world," and then Luke says. . . "which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar." (Acts 11:28.) http://www.wordsfityspoken.org/gospel_guardian/v7/v7n30p2-3a.html

^{iv} Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* – NICNT series (Eerdmans, 1962), 284.

^v This in italics is a paraphrase of Hughes, 290.

^{vi} CBS on Sunday evening, November 11, 2018. In a recent episode of CBS's *Madam Secretary*, several government delegations – including one from the United States and one from Turkey, returning home from a testy international conference – found their planes forced to the land on the runways of an airport on Iceland. An erupting volcano made it too dangerous to fly through, or even around. The volcano disrupted everything, including food supplies within the airport. As the delegations began settling in on the uncomfortable seats in the terminal, the sandwich resources offered by a lone food cart were at a premium, and before the United States delegation fully realized it, the Turkish delegation had not only purchased some of the available sandwiches (i.e., the number they needed), but they had snatched up all of them. All of the other delegations grounded for several days in the airport had nothing to eat...because the leaders of the Turkish delegation refused to share. Their hoarding of food prompted reciprocal hoarding. In retaliation, the US delegation hogged all the electrical outlets, so that only they could recharge their phones and computers and continue to handle their government's matters and via remote communication. And "No," they were not about to share the outlets. "You've made us go hungry; we'll make you go powerless." And all the while, these countries were also arguing about whether or not to spend money on desperate refugees.

^{vii} This a direct quote from Hughes, 290-291.

^{viii} Plummer, *II Corinthians* (ICC), 235-236. "St. Paul had possibly been unwilling to take much from people who were so poor."

^{ix} Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*

^x Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."