

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

February 11, 2018

SPEAKER

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SERIES

Grace Unleashed:
The Book of Ephesians

PART

18

TITLE

Work To Give

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 4:28



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Well, good morning, Providence. I hope that you have had a great week. It's so good to see you. This week is very similar to most weeks and that have the opportunity to hear just some really cool stories of God working in the lives of people called Providence, who love Providence, and your faith and your faithfulness are so inspiring to me. It's always a joy to see on a Sunday morning and to worship the King. If you're a guest here with us, welcome. We are so grateful that you are here and pray that you would be encouraged while you are here. We love the Bible here at Providence because the Bible speaks about Christ. He's the one that we love. We love God's word as well. We're actually walking through an amazing book. If you have a Bible, if you want to turn with me to Ephesians chapter four. We're going to look at just one verse at least from this chapter. It's verse 28. If you don't have one with you, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs near you. If you don't have one at home, take that home as a gift. In that Bible, this verse is found on page 978.

It's interesting what God's word says about God's word. In it, he uses several metaphors. There's two I think that are really pertinent to the verse that we will study. God's word says that it's like a hammer that breaks down things that are hard, that breaks down strongholds, that breaks down unbelief, that breaks down sin and around our heart. It's strong for the task. It also says that it's like honey. It's like honey to the tongue that's sweet. It's encouraging. It's edifying. It builds us up even after the same book kind of tears down some of the hard parts in and around our heart. This passage is a fascinating one. It's one simple verse and there's three different phrases to it. If you'll sit under this verse, what you'll find is that it's going to hammer away at all of us, but it will also be like honey to our heart.

I want to pray and ask God that he would do just that in each of our lives. If you would, let's pray together. Father, we do love you and we do thank you, God, that we can trust you. You have demonstrated to us that you are not only worthy but that you are good and you are good to us. God, we thank you that we can trust you with our life. God, we know that sometimes we feel like your word or a sermon or a verse, that it steps on our toes. God, as a people, we lay our life under your word and ask, God, that you would, Lord, chisel away the parts of our life that do not look like Christ. We thank you that we can trust you in that process. Not only will you break down the parts of our life that are so harmful to us, but, God, we also thank you that you're going to use the same word to build us up and to edify and to encourage us. Would you speak through weakness? Would you give us the gift of belief and understanding and courage and conviction? Help us to see the glory and the strength and the generosity of Jesus in this one little verse and in your word this morning. I pray in Christ's name, amen.

Well, 20 years ago this week, I had the opportunity to join the staff here at Providence. It has been an absolute, it's been an amazing journey. I see David Horner over here. He can recall when I had all brown hair back in those days. You know, it's interesting, in those 20 years, there's been many times when someone has come, felt the need, the urge within their heart to come and tell somebody, a pastor perhaps, about maybe a sin that they had done or had in their heart where they just had to get it off their chest. Now, here at Providence, if you're not certain about kind of who we are, we're not priests where people come and confess their sin and we absolve them. God is the one who forgives. Yet, there's a truth within God's word. There's a power to confession that even when we confess our sin to God and he forgives, there's a power in our life that allows us to feel comfort and to have power the next day over sin when we confess it to each other.

Some people maybe don't have a friend that they feel like they can share some of those things with, some of their darkest secrets maybe. Often times what happens is people come and they're like, "Well, he's not allowed to tell anybody so I can tell him. I can get it off my chest." What's interesting is 20 years, this is not every day or every week that this happens, but it is frequent, but it's fascinating to me that in 20 years' time, no one has ever come to confess any part of greed. The Bible says in 1 John that all of our sin, all the things that we look at, we feel guilty about, they're all born on three different trees. It's only one of three. There's pride, there's lust, and there's greed. All the sin in our life, they're born on the back of these three trees. You can trace all of the sin in our life to one of these areas of our life. Yet it's interesting to me that we have such a hard time seeing greed in our own life.

You see, for most people, it sort of sounds like this. They come and say, "Listen, I've sinned. I'm so embarrassed. I don't have anybody. I have to get this off my chest. I can't sleep. I'm having a hard time eating. I don't have an appetite. I feel like I've hurt somebody, and I feel like I've hurt myself. I have to get it off my chest. This is my problem." No one's ever said, "I just buy too much stuff for me." No one's ever said that. "I just have too many shoes." No one's ever confessed that kind of sin. It's interesting to me, whereas in so many of the others, in the other two, whether it's pride or, in particular, lust, people readily sense and feel the weight of sin in their life. There's something about greed that camouflages itself.

I want to show you a really cool picture, at least to me. It's sort of hard to see. What you'll see here though is it looks like a tree but actually, if you can see it, there's a guy in front of the tree. He's in perfect camouflage. If you have a hard time seeing, in particular, if you're far back. I've had to help people throughout the morning. There's a bow and arrow. It's black. It's on sort of the right side of the tree. If you can see, he actually has a hat and he's actually drawn the bow. Now, this is very similar to greed in our own life in that it camouflages itself. Our greed tends to camouflage itself behind the trees of comparison. Have you ever thought about this? Most of you drive through your neighborhood because that's where you drive. You look around and you always see a nicer house or a nicer car or a nicer toy, a nicer jet ski or nicer whatever it is that you don't have. It's natural for us to go, "I'm not greedy. I don't have a problem in that area because, look, I'm clearly not. I don't have the most." We have a hard time seeing greed in our own life.

What happens is this. When we're busy comparing and hiding our greed, we're also busy accumulating, which is why today in America we boast of 58,000 self-storage units across the country. If you wonder like how many is that exactly? What that means is this. For every one McDonald's, there is four self-storage facilities in our country. Now, I want to you to think about these things. It's really fascinating. These 58,000 units that are littered all over the whole country, they boast of 27 million individual rental units inside of those facilities. Every single year, Americans give \$22 billion to rent out these 27 million units in order to store stuff that won't fit in our house. Now, if you were able to create one building out of all of these buildings, if you had all 58,000 self-storage facilities and they were all linked together, tied together, you would actually have 2.3 billion square feet of space, which would roughly be three times the size of Manhattan. If you look at the island of Manhattan, if you took all 58,000 of these facilities, we could actually build an island the size of Manhattan three times under a roof.

It's a phenomenal thing if you think about it. Now, granted, all of us know that these can serve more than greed. We know that. Sometimes they can be very helpful. If you're moving and there's a time delay between when one house where you move out and you have to move in and you have to move your stuff somewhere, you can rent one of these and it serves you. Often times when somebody dies in our family, if they're in an apartment or something, we have to move their furniture out. We don't know where to put it yet so we can move it into a place like this. Surely 58,000 self-storage facilities also indicates an issue that, ironically, nobody ever thinks they have a problem with. That's greed.

Here's Paul. Paul is in a prison in Rome. Paul wants to help the people of Ephesus, the unbelievers, people that don't know Christ, to see him as consequential, to believe in him, to be saved, to be forgiven by Jesus. He wants them to be able to see him. Yet Jesus is in heaven. He's not walking around Ephesus at the time. What he does though is he writes the church in Ephesus, Christ representatives, people who were supposed to imitate Jesus Christ. What he does is, for three chapters, is he lays out for them just a beautiful description of the gospel, of how we now have a new identity in Christ because of what Christ has done within us. Then what he does is he turns a corner when you get to chapter four. In verse one, he says, "Therefore," meaning in view of everything that we just talked about, of all that God has done in our life, he says, "I urge you to talk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called," to walk in a manner worthy of Christ, meaning they can't see him, but they can see you. Live your life as Christ lives his life.

You get to verse 28. After lots of different examples, he gets to a new example. This is what he says. He says, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." What you see in this one little verse is a wonderful progression towards Christ-likeness. He starts with an inferior way of living and he ends with a superior way of living. He begins by saying that every single one of us can steal in order to have stuff. This satisfies our greed, but the problem is stealing is condemned not only by God, but by every country in the world. Then he says, that's one option, let's move toward health. He says we can work to have. We can go have a job in order to have things and this work can also satisfy our greed. The interesting thing is that our work, our job is celebrated not only by God but it's also celebrated and commended by every culture in the world. Then he gets to the last. What he says here is that we can work in order to give. What this does is it strikes the head of greed and it most clearly reflects the Lord Jesus Christ.

What I want to do is I want to show you how he leads us through these series so that our life, in these areas of life, in these practical areas, that we can look more like Christ. The first thing that God does is that he commands that we no longer steal. He says this is not in balance. Some of the new believers in Ephesus whom he is writing, they had a previous way of life that includes stealing. All of us have things in our life that were not godly before we came to know Jesus Christ the Savior. Isn't it true that those patterns of life, those ways of life, it's really hard to change? It takes a lot of time in order to get out of those ruts. Paul, speaking to believers, he says, "Look, let the thieves stop stealing." I can see him saying, "Guys, look. This is the eighth commandment. Thou shalt not steal. You can't do this. This is a no-no. You can't share the gospel with someone when you're stealing their stereo. You can't rob a man and share the gospel with him at the same time." This is our calling, to represent Christ. You can't be stealing.

Stealing is something that's really a fascinating thing. It's basically where you take something that's not yours. You use it and you call it your own. It can have lots of different fruits on this one tree called stealing. It's sort of like a neighborhood. There's lots of different homes and yet they're all very similar. The same thing with stealing. You can have armed robbery. You can get a gun. You can go to a bank this afternoon. You can say, "Hey, I want all your money." Well, that's a pretty aggressive way to go about stealing and a few people in our land, that's the end that they choose, but most of us, that's not necessarily where we're at. There can be shoplifting. That's another. When I was five years old, I remember I was at the store with my mom. She turned the corner and I was on the aisle and I looked over and I saw these marshmallows. I was a little five-year-old. Those looked just exceptionally good. She was gone. Literally, I'm looking around. I don't see anybody. I'm pretty small and so I can't, five years old, I can't put the big thing of marshmallows in my shirt and get away. I just busted open one of those packs, I grabbed a couple, and I started eating. Lo and behold, there's another mother that wasn't my mother that watched me. That became a teachable moment in my life of shoplifting.

You can also steal with your taxes. There's a lot of us who are doing our taxes. You should do your taxes. If you're not, that's called stealing also. If you are, there's ways to do it to where you can be honest with them and you can be dishonest with them. The Bible also talks about there's a real possibility of stealing even in the area of tithing. In Malachi chapter three, God comes to the people of Israel and he says, "Why are you guys robbing from me?" They're like, "Robbing from you? How are we robbing from you?" He says, "Well, in your tithes and offerings." In other words, "I gave you 100% and I asked you to give me back 10 as an expression that you know that I own everything, as an expression that you believe that I can do in your life with 90% more than you can do with 100%." He says, "But you're not giving what is mine. It's all mine, but what I'm asking for is this." God says, "You are robbing from me."

You can also do it in the workplace, you see. Some of you are employers. You have a big team of people. You can actually steal from people by not offering just wages. For most of us in the room, we're employees. We can steal from our employers by doing shoddy work or fudging on the time sheet or taking home office supplies or whatever it is that we may want to do. All of this is stealing. The question that comes and what Paul really has on his heart is: How does God change these ways of life? How does the thief stop stealing? What you've noticed, I hope, by this time, this is the third week in a row where we looked at a case study, he's just going to keep going through Ephesians, is that God really is passionate about our heart. He cares so much about our life, but what we normally do is when we're trying to change our life, our way of life, what we do is we look at our sin problem like I look at my engine. When there's a problem, I pop the hood up and I look at it. I'm not much of a mechanic. I'm like, "Wow. Look at all that stuff." Wires everywhere and I get confused. Normally what that means is I call somebody else because I don't know how to fix it.

It's interesting that when it comes to our sin sometimes, we look at our sin patterns and go, "I don't want to do this anymore." We pop the hood up and we're like, "Wow. All these things that are connected. How am I going to change?" Because we get confused, what happens is we settle for the easiest thing. The easiest thing is moralism. If you're a thief at heart, your heart wants to steal stuff. What we do is we're like, "Okay. I'm going to walk in the store. Don't steal. Don't steal. Grit your teeth. Put your hands in your pockets. Just don't steal." You see, that kind of moralism will keep you out of a state prison, but it sadly will not keep you out of hell. It won't change your heart and God is after our heart. You see, if you have to look at what God really wants when he puts down Ephesians 4:28, what you need to understand is that God's aim is not honest capitalism with a splash of philanthropy. He desires a renovation of the heart. Why? Because he says when he was on the earth in Matthew 15:18, he says, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft." Why do we steal? It's because we want to.

What you're going to find in life is this. When God begins to renovate the desires of your heart, you'll begin to see changes in the way that you live your life. You see, God wants to work on the inside. How does God renovate the heart? This is where I go back once again. You're going to be tired of this probably. Say once again we need to go back to verse 17 to 24. What we find there is the blueprint for how to change. What does God do in our life in order to help us change? The first thing that we see that he does there is he reveals our darkness, the darkness within our own heart. You see, as we gasp at the symptoms, in particular the unsanitized symptoms of our greed or sin, God is always the one who's digging deeper to the source.

Let me say it like this. What would you do on Wednesday if you turned on the news and you saw my mugshot and it said, "Local pastor caught stealing cases of marshmallows." First, you'd laugh because that's silly or I robbed a bank. Let's just say that I'm going to rob a bank Wednesday. I'm not, but let's just say I did. What would you do? You would gasp then you'd fire me. You'd gasp first, "I can't believe he did it." Let me ask you this. What would you though if on Wednesday we happened to meet at the mall and I have three pairs of shoes and we start talking. You smile, "Oh, you got some shoes. It's so good to see." I said, "Yeah, actually, I really like this shoe. I got 26 pairs just like it at home." You see, one form of greed is sanitized and one is unsanitized. We tend to gasp at the unsanitized, smile at the sanitized, and God says they both come from the same source. It's all greed.

What he does is he says, "So let me trace your greed back to a source or your symptoms to a source." What we learn there in verse 18 and 19 is this. When we are far from God, when we're alienated, it says that our mind gets darkened and our heart gets thirsty. The reason is because God has created us to have cravings that only he can fill. When we're far from God, those cravings are unmet but we get really thirsty. The mind gets dark, meaning our thinking. We don't see things. In verse 22, it says that we develop deceitful desires. Satan comes to us and he tempts us with desires that really are not desirable. They're lies. He starts saying, "You know what? If I had three iPods, if I could go on this vacation, if I could do this, if I could have that," this is the lie that the thief believes. They don't know that God is the only one that can satisfy that craving so they settle for a toy.

The second thing that God does after he reveals the darkness is that he shines light into that room. He shines light. That light is Christ. You see, in Christ, we hear a better promise. This is absolutely critical because idols in our life, like greed, they can not be removed. They must be replaced. You pull a weed and don't plant a flower, you're still going to have a weed. It's going to come back. This is what he says. He says, "Look, until you find a superior pleasure and satisfaction in the promises of Christ, you're going to always return to that idol called greed, always." Then the third thing that he does is he renews our imagination in order to fuel our obedience. We saw this in verses 22, 23, and 24 where he says, "Look, put off that old self, be renewed in the spirit or the imagination of your mind, and then put on the new self which is being created in true holiness and righteousness." What's he doing here? It's like this.

Your imagination is critically important because whatever you imagine being pleasurable is going to determine your behavior. If you spent a tremendous amount of time online at a mall or shopping or thinking, “Man, I got to have that. I got to have that,” and you vividly imagine having something even though you don’t have the money in order to pay for it, it raises the possibility that you’re going to steal it. If, however, you hear in Christ a superior promise, maybe one like Hebrews chapter 13 verses five and six where it says, “Keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for he has said,” meaning Christ has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” You see, if you can vividly imagine the Lord God who gives life and breath and rain and food and sunshine and his Son and this God has promised he will never leave you, he will never forsake you, if you can vividly imagine the promises of Christ, then you will see the silliness of stealing in order to build security for your life. This is how he encourages us to change.

Christ commands us that we no longer steal. The second thing is that God calls us to work hard with our hands. He says, “Let him who labor, doing honest work with his hands.” In other words, God has ordained work is the means by which we get what we need. Work is not a curse. God works. God called Adam to work before there was sin in the world. Surely, sin in the world, the fall of mankind, it certainly complicated. It made it difficult. It made it futile and it made work boring. Yet, what we find is that work is still a tremendous gift in this world and next. You think about what work does. After a hard day’s work, you look at and you can see the productivity and it creates within you some level of gratification. You get to beautify. You get to cultivate. You get to work with your hands.

On Friday, in our backyard, there’s a little path that I’m building. I’m not much with this kind of stuff, but we’re working hard. Friday, I worked like a bunch of hours in order to put out gravel, the base of this sidewalk. The fact is I got done, it’s not finished yet, but I go inside, I shower. I probably went out, looked out at that thing probably five or six times, “Look how cool that looks.” It really doesn’t look all that good. If you came over, you’re like, “This doesn’t look so good.” After that much time, there is gratification that God has planted in our heart as a result of a good hard day’s work. It is a gift. As Christians, we should do what we read in 1 Thessalonians 3:12. We should do our work quietly and we should earn a living. We should work. It’s a good thing. Yet we must be careful.

The reason we must be careful is because deceitful desires can take work, which is a good thing, and make it a God thing, which is a really bad thing. Jesus, when he was on the earth in Luke chapter 12 verse 15, he says, “Take care and be on your guard against all kinds of greed.” It’s interesting. He says be careful twice in one sentence. Take care and be on your guard. Why would he need to say this? I think this is why. When someone’s robbing a bank, greed is not so camouflaged, is it? They know they’re being greedy. We know they’re being greedy. Everybody knows that greed is involved when you rob a bank. Isn’t it also true though that when greed is motivating, this is cool, that when greed is motivating work, that the greed is harder to see in our life because work is so commendable. Have you ever thought about that? You can actually have a really hard job and do a whole lot of work, but if greed is motivating that work, you never see the greed because

God says, "You've got a job. You're doing a great job." We need to be careful.

Let me share with you in my own life, what does greed look like to me most often? When greed grabs my throat and I feel tempted to be greedy, you know how it most often manifests in my life? It's not stealing nor is it spending. In my life, when greed is manifested, what it looks like is I work hard and I save a lot so that I can feel secure. He says be careful. To help us to be on guard as well to make a strategic strike on our greed, what God does in the last part of this verse is he addresses the motives of our work. The third thing I want you to see is that God commends working with the motive of giving. You see, it's good to be moral, but being moral is not necessarily being Christian. What I mean by that is this. It is moral and celebrated in our culture to stop stealing and to get a job, but it is distinctly and uniquely Christian to stop stealing, to get a job so that you can share with those in need.

Our model is Jesus Christ, isn't it? Jesus Christ came to earth with a mission on his heart. That is to forgive us, to save us, to die for our sin, to rescue us, you and me. He did this. In the verse that we read earlier in our service, what it says there is though he was God, it says that he did not count equality with God something to be grasped. Did you know that the word grasp is the same word translated stolen? In other words, what this is saying is he was God, he was worthy of worship, he was worthy of adoration, he was worthy of comfort just like God the Father in heaven, yet for a period of time, he allowed himself to be reviled. He allowed himself to go without a pillow, without a home, without the comforts. While he was here, he didn't steal it in order to have it now, the glory. No, he became servant to all of us. While he was on the earth, he was tempted by Satan. Satan tempts him. It's the second one. He says, "Hey, let's go to the temple." He takes him up top and he says, "I tell you what. Why don't we bypass all this work? Why don't you just jump off? The angels are going to save you. You'll be glorified now. No reason to wait." Jesus says no. He goes, "We're not going to put the Lord to the test."

Then what does he do? He goes about his work. What was that work? He lives a righteous life and then he goes to a cross in order to pay for your sin and mine. He does good work. He satisfies all the rest, all of the punishment, everything, all the cup. The flame is extinguished. He goes to the grave. He rises from the dead. He's the victor. What does he do with the spoils of war? He shares them with us. You see chapter four verse eight? It says when he ascended upon high, when he resurrected, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. He gave us his earnings. This is why if we're going to reflect Jesus Christ on the earth, it has to include not stealing, it has to include working hard, being diligent with our labor, and it must include sharing a portion of what we've earned with people who are in need. You see it? We move from stealing to have to working to have to working to give. He says this is the path towards Christ-likeness in this area of your life.

I want to close with three applications and then we have the privilege to commission two mission teams this morning. The first thing I would encourage you to do is identify the symptoms of our greed. Let me just be totally honest with you. This is not because I don't love you or respect you. It's because I know that you're a human and humans, what this means is that about 5% are going to do this. This is the heavy lifting application of the three. Most of us, we're going to bypass this. We're going to say, "Let me just give somebody five bucks today and I'll feel better about this greed issue and it will all be done." I want to encourage you to go beyond, be one of the few that's actually going to do this, to trace, to find the symptoms of greed in your life and to trace them to their source. Let me ask these kinds of questions.

When greed grabs your neck, what does it look like? Don't forget, it's always camouflaged so you have to look carefully. Do you steal? Do you self-promote? Do you work excessively? Do you save excessively? Do you shop with money that you don't have? Then, once you identify the symptom, like, "When I am tempted with greed, this is often where the symptom comes," then I would encourage you to ask another question to get to the source. That is this, "What is the deceitful promise that captures my imagination when I do that? What's the promise that I'm listening to when I buy things when I don't have any money? What's the promise that I'm listening to when I'm working excessively or when I'm stealing? It's a deceitful desire, it's a lie, and yet I keep listening to it." I just want to encourage you. Let's identify, dig deep, allow God to reveal the darkness. It's there. This is where the hammer comes in. It's hard, it's uncomfortable, but it's so good for us.

The second thing is this. Let's make a strike on our greed by giving. You see, God tells us to share with others, first, because it imitates Jesus Christ, but, second is because it mortifies greed. It's our giving, it's like driving a great big nail through the heart of our greed. If you're sick with greed, giving, it's the medicine. It's the antidote. What you find here is verses like this one, 1 Timothy chapter six verse 17 through 19. He starts with this sentence. He says, "As for the rich in this present age." Now, let me just pause right here because some of us are like, "Okay, this one's not for me. This is for somebody else." Yesterday, I went online and they have all these cool calculators online just to see sort of how much if you make a certain amount, where do you stack in terms of world wealth, of what everyone else in the whole world makes? I just said let me just put this number in, \$40,000. If you make 40,000 US dollars today a year, at least one calculator said that you're actually within the top 1% of the entire population of the world. Now, I realize there's a whole lot of people that make more than \$40,000, but that's simply the people that are in that 1% higher than you, but there are 99% of the people in the world that make less than that.

I say that so that you can look at this verse and go, “Hey, this one applies to me.” Let’s keep reading. “As for the rich in this present age, they are to do good and to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share. Thus storing up treasure for themselves is a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.” Friends, in particular if you’re a believer in Jesus Christ, I want you to know that if you are not giving, you are missing out on what the Bible says is truly life. You’re leaving yourself terribly vulnerable to that poison of greed within your heart. Let me just take just a moment, and literally, it’s just a moment, to commend so many of you because it is absolutely obvious to me and so many other people here at Providence that God has clearly opened up your heart and has captured the imagine, your imaginations with the amazing privilege of generosity because your generosity is just remarkable to me. I’d just encourage you to excel still more. If there’s greed in your heart, make a strike with giving.

The third thing is this. Let’s fix our eyes on Jesus. It’s interesting that in Paul’s letter to Corinth, the second one, he actually asked them to take up an offering, not to give to him, but to give to poor people. He said, “Man, these people, they’re really in need. I’m asking you to have an offering so that you can give to them.” It’s interesting. He knows he’s an apostle so he can ask them to do stuff. He can say, “Look, I’m an apostle. Just do it.” He doesn’t want them to give out of guilt. He wants them to give out of love. This is what he says to them, 2 Corinthians chapter eight verses eight and nine. He says, “Look, I said this not as a command, for ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that by his poverty, you might become rich.” You see what he’s leveraging? He’s saying, “Don’t you see what God has given to you?” What an amazing privilege. You see, when you see Jesus dying on a cross to make you his treasure, money will cease to be the currency of your security or your significance and you’ll find yourself inclined to bless other people in similar ways that God has chosen to bless you.

We see this worked out in the life named Zacchaeus. Don’t you love Zacchaeus? We never hear about Zacchaeus. He was like Zacchaeus and goldfish. It’s like the coolest kids story because he’s little. Zacchaeus was a thief. He was a government-backed rich thief. He was a tax collector. One day, Jesus came through town, Jericho. He wants to see him but he’s really short so he gets up in a tree. Jesus stops and says, “Hey, I want to have lunch with you.” The town’s like, “Are you kidding me? We hate him.” He goes, “Yeah, but he needs a lot of help.” They have lunch. By the time they finish lunch, we don’t know exactly what all they talked about, but he’s so captured with the picture. He has such an imagination. It’s been stirred within his heart towards Jesus Christ and towards grace that he believes in Christ. He’s forgiven of his sin. He repents of his theft. Then he promises to give half of everything he has back to the poor and everybody’s he’s ripped off, to give them four times the amount that he took from them. Jesus looks and he goes, “Salvation has come to this house.”

What I would simply want you to know is this. If you're here today and you've never trusted Christ and you're waiting on more dollars or more possessions in order to make you happy, I would encourage you to look to Zacchaeus who's going to point you to Jesus. Have you ever said yes to Jesus's invitation to follow him? Have you ever said yes to Jesus's invitation to literally be forgiven of your sin by trusting in his accomplishments, in his work, instead of your accomplishments morally and your work? I want you to know that he's better than money. He's better than your possessions. He's also better than the money and possessions that you wish you had. Look to Jesus Christ today. You can trust him today. It's my privilege now to be able to introduce to you a bunch of people who have learned just this.

The guys in the back, they're going to be walking down right now. Come on up, Thomas. These are two teams. They're going to be going to Portland and Toronto. We have the opportunity to pray and to just send them out, to actually commission them. Now, if you were here several months ago, we shared with you there's 16 different options this year for you to go on a mission trip to go and to share the gospel with other people. These are the first two. They'll be leaving March third and they'll be coming back March ninth. These two teams will actually be going to partner with two different church plants in these cities that we as a church family, we support. We partner with them as they are trying to grow in order to reach their cities. It really is an amazing privilege that we have.

As you look at them, as they're up here, they're all great-looking people. You're like, "Wow. We're sending out some great people." Here's the reality. They're just like you and me. Before Christ came into their life, they had patterns of life that were not healthy. Some of them may have been thieves. I don't know. I've not talked to them all. Some of them, actually all of them, are tempted by greed just like all the rest of us. Yet Christ intervened in their life. He saved them. He forgave them. Now captured by a vivid imagination of grace that's come to them, their hearts are inclined to go and to share what God has given to them, to share the gospel of other people.

What we find in the New Testament is that when teams would go out from the church is the church would literally pray for them. What they would do physically is they would put their hands on them and then pray for them and they'd send them out. That was really symbolic. It was a great reflection of body life where, as one body, is that we're sending them out. They're part of us. We care for them. We're going to help them go. We're going to support them going financially. We're going to pray for them. Then when they come back, we're going to look forward to the stories of what God did in their life. We can't come all up at the same time. We have people from all over and homes and other venues that can't be here. What we ask you to do is symbolically just raise your hand up and set it on one of their shoulders, even from where you're sitting, and then we're going to pray for them.

If you would, let's join. Father, thank you so much for your grace. Thank you so much for how you have reached us with the gospel, how you shared your victory and the spoils of your victory with us so that we could be forgiven, that we could be gifted to be able to serve you with spiritual gifts. So many things that you've done for us, we're thankful. We thank you, Jesus, that you are the model of not stealing and working hard in order to be able to give and share with people who are in need. I pray for this team of people whom you have saved, you've forgiven, you've redeemed, and now you've called. You've put it on their heart to be able to go and help other people. We pray, God, that you would protect them, that you would provide for them. I pray for their leaders, Thomas and Daniel. Would you give them wisdom? Would you give them understanding?

I pray for the team, that they would have courage, that they would have unity, they would have humility. God, we pray for the people that they will encounter. We pray, God, that you would open up their hearts so the gospel would be planted or watered or maybe some people, even on these weeks while they're there, God, we pray that some people would come to faith in Jesus Christ so they would be forgiven, that they would begin to worship you with their life as a result of the investment of going and sending and praying. As a church family, as a body, we look to you. You're our head. You're our leader. We want to follow you to the ends of the earth. God, we pray that you would bless them and bless people through them. We pray in Christ's name, amen. Amen.

Aren't you grateful for the grace of God in their life? I am so thankful. Thank you guys so much. We're for you. We love you. We can't wait to hear what God does in your life. What I want to ask you to do is actually just to take a minute. It's rare sometimes that we hear a message like this and we see teams come up and then they walk up one side, walk down the back. You're like, "Well, that's interesting." Let me ask you. For those of you who know Christ, what would God do in your life, all the blessings that you've received? I want you to take a moment and actually just think about what God might be calling you to do. You've heard some things today. You may need to confess your sin. You need to confess to him that you trust him. Why don't you just take a moment? Why don't you take a minute and just pray, think about what you've heard?



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