

Sermon: Are We Thankful?

Text: Luke 17:11-19

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Introduction: Jesus and his biographers tend to lift up the low, the poor, and the seemingly unimportant to a place of honor. Luke is especially good at this. Women and children take center stage in some of his stories in a culture where that was rarely true. Samaritans are seen as heroes and examples of what a disciple of Jesus *should* look like. In all the gospels, Jews are typically seen as opposing forces, rejecting Jesus (**Luke 20:9-19**); and others are given *their* place at table (**Matthew 22:2-14**). John makes this clear as well.

John 1:11-12 (NIV) ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

This section in Luke is in the travel narrative section as Jesus is still on his way, and now closer, to his purposeful destination of Jerusalem. Jesus is found along the border of Galilee and Samaria (**v. 11**). Border towns are always a mixture of cultures and traditions. Even in Sault Ste. Marie the church would occasionally sing “O Canada!” Because we were near an international waterway, it was common to see anchors and lighthouses used as church logos. What is true in almost any culture is people avoid sick and contagious people. In Luke’s unique story he reminds us that both sin and disease separate. In this culture sickness was connected to sin and God’s disfavor, so there was always that stigma.

This two-part miracle story is almost in parable form as a picture of God’s unmerited grace and mercy toward his creation and how some are thankful while others are not.

It is easy to take for granted God’s daily blessings of rain and sunshine, the sounds of nature, the ability to be free from pain, the ability to be free, the taste of the same cereal in the morning because some may do not eat all day. Other people may complain about their jobs, their children, their spouse while many people would give anything for any job, or to be able to even have children, or be married rather than divorced or widowed. There is never enough money to go around, but so many of us spend more on entertainment and eating out each week than most people around the world would spend in a year. Are we thankful? Also, many people pray, but how many thank God after prayer is answered?

Thankfulness was certainly a theme after:

I. Jesus Healed Ten (vv. 12-14)

Luke 17:12-14 (NIV) ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

A. They were lepers.

Leprosy could be a variety of skin and medical conditions. It was a disease that could automatically isolate you from family and worship. Often, it was thought to be incurable. Whether it was a noncontagious ailment or something that was the cause of loss of sensation in one’s extremities resulting in fingers, toes, hands and feet rotting off, it was many times a life-sentence once diagnosed.

Leviticus 13:45-46 (NIV) ⁴⁵“The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ ⁴⁶As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.

The disease was bad enough, but to be considered unclean, untouchable, a person to be avoided, and unfit for human contact, that must have been an awful existence. Later on, lepers were allowed into the synagogue, but needed to be the first in and the last to leave. They had their own compartments to keep them separate from other worshippers. People needed to maintain a distance of six feet from anyone who was leprous (see Eldersheim, *Life and Times*, 1:493, 495).

There had only been two people in the O.T. who ever were reported to have been healed of leprosy: Miriam had leprosy for seven days as a result of speaking against Moses (**Numbers 12:9-15**), and Naaman, the pagan general from Damascus, who had been healed because he followed the instruction of God’s prophet, Elijah (**II Kings 5**). There had not been a healing like these in 700 years.

Leprosy was supposed to be a thing of the past with the coming of the Messiah. In **Luke 7:22** John the Baptist and his disciples are told as much. So in this account alone in **Luke 17**, Jesus has healed five times as many lepers as we hear about in the entire Old Testament.

This healing was a result of the lepers’ faith put into action.

B. Their faith cleansed them.

Earlier in **Luke 5** Jesus had touched a leprous man and healed him, but here it seems there is no close contact - only Jesus' instruction being followed. Jesus did not need to physically touch someone for healing to take place.

What is interesting here is that the lepers ask for pity or mercy, maybe expecting some sort of charity, but Jesus heals them as they go on their way to the priests who would officially validate the healing.

Have you ever asked God for something and received something far better? Paul is exactly right when he says to the Asian churches: **Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)**
²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

When we simply obey Jesus, wonderful things happen! Just knowing what to do is of no value in and of itself. Faith and works are both required if we truly want to be well. If these lepers would have never turned and started to go to the priests, no healing would have taken place. Just like Naaman who was required to dip himself in the Jordan 7 times. After six times he was still leprous. It is when we put our faith in Jesus and do what he asks us to do that we can be truly healed.

Luke in both his gospel and his second volume called Acts lets us see how the gospel message is given to everyone. He wants his readers to know that the kingdom is open to all who will put their faith in him whether they be Jew or Gentile.

II. Jesus Saved a Foreigner (vv. 15-19)

Luke 17:15-19 (NIV) ¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Some would say here that there were nine Jews and one Samaritan in this group of ten lepers. The fact is we do not know for sure how many of each group there were. We only can say that the healed man who returned was a Samaritan (**v. 16**) or a foreigner (**v. 18**). The word "foreigner" (*αλλογενής*) is used only here in the N.T. It is the same word that was used on the sign to prohibit non-Jews from coming any closer in the temple courts under penalty of death.

Paul reminds the church: **Ephesians 2:11-14 (NIV)** ¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

Not the other nine, but:

A. The Samaritan praised God.

He did it with a loud voice, a voice healed and recreated to give praise to God. Not only is praise what is given God, but Jesus says that praise was expected. If a doctor makes you well, you tell your friends. How much more should we who have been healed by God through the blood of Jesus make a loud and joyful noise to the Lord not only in corporate worship, but also as we go out from this place. “Praise reminds us that God is not only to be understood (*if that were even possible-GLW*), he is to be honored as well.” Bock, *Luke*, p. 447

We glorify God with our mouths and our lives. Everything we do and say ought to enhance the character and reputation of God in his world.

I Peter 4:11 (NIV) ¹¹If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

I Corinthians 10:31 (NIV) ³¹So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

B. The Samaritan thanked Jesus.

We do not know whether this thankful healed man understood who Jesus was, but he must have recognized God had used Jesus to produce wholeness in his life. We do not know exactly why the others did not return to thank Jesus. It is certainly implied that Jesus was not pleased with the other nine. It may be like what Oswald Chambers noticed: “The great difficulty spiritually is to concentrate on God, and it is His blessings that make it difficult. Troubles nearly always make us look to God; His blessings are apt to make us look elsewhere” (*My Utmost for His Highest*, Jan. 22nd).

Do we thank as forcefully and loudly as we ask for help? I like what one man has called this: “boisterously thankful.” We must see that we all need help from time to time and in that recognition, humility comes - a scarce commodity these days.

C. The Samaritan is used as an example of faith.

Samaritans and lepers alike were avoided because of their threat against rules of purity. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that it is the heart that demonstrates purity. And he found that people other than the normal suspects were able to show devotion toward God. A Samaritan, who knew?

“It is often the stranger in the church who sings heartily the hymns we have long left to the choir, who expresses gratitude for blessings we had not noticed, who listens attentively to the sermon we think we have already heard, who gets excited about our old Bible, and who becomes actively involved in acts of service to which we send small donations. Must it always be so?” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 203

Physical health when restored is only a temporary experience, but spiritual health when restored can be eternally enjoyed. I like what Donald G. Miller has said about Jesus: “To have him without his mercies, would be better than to have his mercies without him.” - *Luke*, p. 126

It is clear that all ten lepers were restored to physical health, the word is *cleansed* in the text (v. 14), but Jesus uses a specific word for the thankful and praising man who returned.

Luke 17:19 (NIV) ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

The Greek word translated “made you well” (σωζω) can also mean “to rescue; to save, to heal. The perf. indicates the state or condition.” - Rienecker, p. 193

I believe what is clear is that all ten lepers were cleansed, but only one experienced salvation.

I am reminded of the man healed by the pool in John’s gospel and Jesus’ counsel to him: **John 5:13-15 (NIV)** ¹³The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. ¹⁴Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Even though important, there are far worse conditions than what physical ailments may bring. We all need to be well spiritually. Do we spend more time reading and studying God's word than we do exercising our bodies? Do we seek time with doctors, yet forget the importance of prayer with the Great Physician? Are we grateful enough to thank Jesus and tell others of what he has done? We need to be!

Conclusion: Thirteen years before his conversion, John Wesley had a conversation late one night with the porter of his college that deeply impressed him and convinced him that there was more to Christianity than as yet he had found. Wesley discovered that the man had only one coat and that nothing had passed his lips that day, except a drink of water, and yet his heart was full of gratitude to God. Wesley said, "You thank God when you have nothing to wear, nothing to eat, and no bed to lie upon. What else do you thank him for?" "I thank him," answered the porter, "that He has given me my life and being, and a heart to love Him, and a desire to serve Him" (in A. Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze [Eerdmans]*, p. 100, quoted by Steven J. Cole).

We generally live self-centered existences, and do not take the necessary time to thank God for his many blessings and mercies. We somehow feel entitled to gifts from God even without deserving them. Today, I pray that we all have a heart that appreciates God's love and salvation and for opportunities to show him how thankful we are.

I leave you with Paul's words to the Church:

Colossians 3:15-17 (NIV) ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.