

“Thank you, Jesus!”

LUKE 17:11-19

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Most of us here this morning have probably had the experience of doing something for someone, and yet when the other person sees what we have done, that person just flat-out refuses to say “thank you” and refuses to even acknowledge what we have done. As we studied several weeks ago, we are not to do good things for the purpose of being noticed, and yet at the same time, the Bible also teaches that when someone does something for us, it is certainly appropriate to express our appreciation.

With that in mind, I would like to share something that has really bothered me over the past several weeks, and it has bothered me to the depth of my soul. I would invite you to correct me if I am wrong. In fact, I sincerely hope that I am wrong. And yet I have checked with my highly trained and highly skilled research staff over the past week or so, and out of the four gospel accounts, I can find only one person who ever said “thank you” for anything the Lord Jesus ever did. During His 33-½ years on this earth, after feeding thousands of people, after healing large crowds, after raising at least three people from the dead, after restoring sight to the blind and hearing to those who were deaf, after all of the dozens of various other miracles, after providing all kinds of wise counsel, as far as I can tell (with one exception), we have no record of any other person ever saying “thank you” to the Lord at any point – from His birth all the way through to His death on the cross. As the nails were driven, as He suffered and died carrying the sins of the world on His shoulders, not a single “thank you.” You would think that perhaps at least one representative of the human race might have stepped forward to express some form of appreciation on behalf of those of us who were not there, and yet as far as I can tell, as far as the Biblical record is concerned, no one ever thanked the Lord for anything...with one exception.

This morning, I would invite you to turn with me to Luke 17 as we study the one man to ever thank the Lord for anything, the one man who expressed his appreciation for something the Lord had done during His earthly ministry – Luke 17:11-19,

¹¹ While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; ¹³ and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a

loud voice,¹⁶ and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they?¹⁸ Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?”¹⁹ And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

Back up in verse 11, I would point out that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. We might be tempted to miss that when we just read it once, but as we begin our study, I would suggest that that is a significant little detail. The Lord has taught, and healed, and served for nearly 3-½ years, so He is right near the end, and as He passes through this area for what will be the very last time, as He is on His way to the cross, He has a run-in with ten men.

As we study this encounter, and as we focus in on the one example of anyone ever saying “thank you” to the Lord during His earthly ministry, I would like to divide this morning’s lesson into several basic ideas. First of all, let us consider the situation these men were in and how that relates to our situation today. Then let us consider the fact that these ten men went to the right source for help. And then, let us focus in very carefully on the fact that this one man praised and thanked the Lord very publicly.

I. **But first of all, let us go back and think for just a few moments about THE PROBLEM THESE MEN WERE FACING AND THEN HOW IT RELATES TO OUR SITUATION TODAY.**

But first, notice what happens: As Jesus entered one particular village, ten men who stood at a distance raised their voices and cried out. Can you imagine what that must have sounded like? Try to imagine ten men desperately crying out for mercy. They cried out because they were in a desperate situation. They stood at a distance because they were under quarantine. The Bible tells us that the ten men were lepers. Not too long ago we studied Naaman the Leper in the Old Testament, so we won’t go into the gruesome details of leprosy. I will spare you the photos we looked at several months ago. As you can see, the picture up here is not a picture of leprosy, but we will get back to this beautiful piece of artwork towards the end of the lesson. But even without the pictures, I think most of us understand how serious leprosy was in the ancient world. Back then, there was no cure, and without a cure, the body basically rots away very slowly. Lepers would lose the feeling in their extremities, and then they would get injured, and those injuries would get infected, and those extremities would eventually fall off. From what I have read, lepers very rarely died from leprosy itself, but they would often die from secondary infections – much like AIDS patients today. It was a horrible way to die. Not only was it horrible because of the pain, but it was also a very lonely way to die. They were not allowed to go shopping. When they went anywhere in public, the law said that they had to cry out a warning – warning people to stay away. These men were cut off from their families. They were cut off from their friends. They were kicked out of their villages and forced to live in colonies with other lepers. And to add to the isolation, the men also suffered humiliation. In the ancient world, many people thought that leprosy was the result of God’s punishment for sin. And on top of all that, these men were also cut off from God - they were not allowed to worship in the temple. These men, then, were in a truly desperate situation.

When it comes to being thankful before God, this is something that we also need to realize. Before we obeyed the gospel, we also were in a desperate situation. At one time, because of our sin, we were separated from having a close relationship with God. We were separated from the joy and confidence of being able to go to God in prayer. In Ephesians 2:12, the apostle Paul described our desperate situation before obeying the gospel by saying, “...remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Before Christ, we were separate from Christ and excluded from the close fellowship of God’s people.

In that passage we studied several weeks ago, the passage on sour grapes from Ezekiel 18, God laid out a very basic concept, an idea that continues over today, ***“The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”*** ***“The person who sins will die.”*** That includes all of us gathered here this morning – if we sin, we will die. Death is the punishment for sin. As Paul said in Romans 6:23, ***“...the wages of sin is death.”*** Death, then, is the natural consequence of sin. In the Bible sin is sometimes pictured as defiantly crossing a line that God has told us not to cross. We understand that. God says not to do something, and we do it, we deserve to be punished for that. And yet I hope all of us understand that sin is also described in the Bible as missing the mark – we aim for a target, but despite our best efforts, we miss. This week we plan on doing some archery. What would you think if we instituted the death penalty for not getting hitting the bull’s eye? And yet that is the way it is with sin. God says: Do this! And if we miss, if we deviate from perfection, if we miss the mark, then we have sinned and we deserve to die. We deserve to be separated from God.

And that is what we have in common with the ten lepers. If we have ever sinned, if we have ever crossed a line that God has told us not to cross, if we have ever missed the mark, then that means that we are infected. It starts in the heart and has a way of growing over time. We’ll be spending this entire week in the book of James. James tells us in James 1 that we are tempted when we are carried away and enticed by our own lust. He then goes on to say that, ***“...when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”*** Sin, therefore, grows, like a cancer in the soul, like leprosy. Without Christ, like these ten lepers, we are in a desperate situation.

II. **Thankfully, though, as we go back to our text in Luke 17, we find that THE TEN LEPERS WENT TO THE RIGHT PERSON FOR A CURE.**

These ten men had to stand at a distance, but when they saw the Lord Jesus, they raised their voices. They weren’t there to discuss the weather. They weren’t there to talk politics. They weren’t there to have a polite conversation, but they raised their voices and cried out saying, ***“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”*** Just a little reminder here: 2000 years ago, doctors had no cure for leprosy. But these men saw Jesus and they cried out desperately for help.

And then (in verse 14), the Bible says that when Jesus saw them, He responded. In other words, the Lord, on His way to Jerusalem, on His way to the cross, paid attention. The Lord was willing to be interrupted. The Lord was willing to listen. And that is a lesson that gives us comfort even today. We might find ourselves in a pretty messed-up situation, but the Lord God listens – the Lord God pays attention. He sees what we’re going through. He knows our struggles. He knows what we wrestle with late at night. He understands the pain that maybe no one else on this earth could possibly understand. The account of the ten lepers, only nine verses long, reminds us that no matter what we are going through, no matter how hopeless our situation may seem, no matter how unworthy or unclean we might feel at the time, if we take our concern to God, God has some way of helping us through it. And more importantly, the Lord God is able to deal with the problem of sin.

With the lepers, we find that His response was simple, ***“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”*** Under the Old Law, lepers who had been cured had to go present themselves to the priests, and upon being found clean, there were certain sacrifices that had to be offered. There was a process. And so on one level, the instruction to go to the priests did not make sense. Why go if you still had leprosy? But the men turned to go anyway, and ***“as they were going”*** they were healed. As they took those first steps of obedience, the feeling in their fingers

and toes was restored. Suddenly, their skin was smooth again. Suddenly, they had hair again. And as they looked under those bandages, the signs of decay had completely disappeared.

In the same way, when we find ourselves broken down in sin, when we realize what we have done, when we turn to God, God forgives our sins as we go down into the waters of baptism – our sins are forgiven as we are buried with Christ – our sins are forgiven as we are raised up to live a brand new life. In 1 Peter 3:21, the Bible describes baptism as *“an appeal to God for a good conscience.”* Baptism, then, is our way of crying out to God. Baptism is our *“appeal to God.”* Baptism is our way of crying out, *“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”* And when we obey, the Lord God tells us that at that point our sins are forgiven. We are born into the family of God, born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). The lepers, then, went to the right person for a cure, just as we also take our sin to God and cry out for mercy through the act of baptism.

III. As we continue looking at this passage, we come to what seems to be the main point as we discover that after being cured, ONLY ONE OF THE TEN MEN CAME BACK TO PRAISE GOD AND THANK JESUS PERSONALLY.

As these men walked away, and as they saw that they had been healed, only one of the men stopped right there in the path, only one man turned around, and only one man came back to say “thank you” to the Lord. In fact, the text tells us that the man *“began glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at [Jesus’] feet, giving thanks to Him.”* Here was a grown man, apparently in public, shouting out praise to Jesus for what the Lord had done. He throws himself down at the Lord’s feet – overwhelmed with thankfulness! Out of ten men, this Samaritan (a foreigner) was the only one who apparently saw Jesus for who He really was – the Lord was someone who cared, someone who was looking for more of a relationship. And, as we notice the Lord’s emphasis on this man being only one out of ten, we see a little bit of disappointment here. In other words, the Lord is letting us know in this passage that He appreciates praise – He appreciates a “thank you” from time to time. The Lord is letting us know how disappointing it is to be forgotten or ignored by those He has blessed. And so, if I decide not to worship, do you think God notices? If I decide to stay home and mow my grass instead of assembling with God’s people to worship, do you think that that affects God in some way? Absolutely! He is disappointed.

And so, as we look at the tenth leper, as we look at this man’s attitude and what this man did, we are overwhelmed with the reminder that this is how we ought to live. In fact, that is why we are assembled here this morning – to worship and thank God for what He has done for us. And I would suggest that the tenth leper has some kindred spirits here in this room. We have come here this morning to say “thank you” to God. By assembling together here this morning, we have given up doing certain things for the express purpose of coming together to worship. By being here together, we are saying: This is not a laundry day! This is not a day to go to a ball game! This is not a day to stay in bed watching TV! This is not a day to eat a leisurely brunch with our families! What about the other nine? After years of isolation, do you think that maybe they were pretty eager to get home to see their families? Do you think they had some catching up to do? The tenth leper did as well, and yet he understood that he had something more important to do. The tenth leper saw beyond the gift and saw the Giver. The tenth leper did not get so wrapped up in the blessing that he forgot the One who blessed. He put his friends, and family, and fellowship on hold so that he could worship the One who made those things possible. And so, the tenth leper actually *“gave thanks”* to the Lord.

By the way, our English word “thank” actually goes back to an old German word meaning, “think.” In other words, when we receive a gift, if we stop to really think about where that gift came from, literally we are thankful – we are “thankful.” We are mindful of the significance and the meaning of the gift. We are thinking of

the giver of the gift. When we think, then, about what the Lord has really done for us, we are thankful, and the only natural and appropriate response to that gift is to fall down on our faces in thanks and praise to God. The Lord notices when we do, and He also notices when we do not.

It's almost like the difference between a dog and a cat. You feed a dog, and they think you are the greatest, most wonderful being in the world. You feed a cat, and they wonder what took you so long. The dog thinks YOU are a god, but the cat thinks that IT is the god. In many ways, we as humans are more like cats than we are like dogs. It is difficult to really understand the debt of thanks that we owe to God.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, as we sometimes do, we really need to step back and ask ourselves: So what? In other words, what does this passage really mean for us? How do we express our thanks to God? Earlier, I said that we would get back to the picture on the wall back here. Some of you might remember that back in December, Madison Police had to shut down Willy Street during the morning commute. For those of you who are from out of town, you need to know that downtown Madison is on an isthmus, a narrow strip of land between two lakes. And as you can imagine, as thousands of people commute downtown to work each morning, it can get a little bit congested. Well, Willy Street is one of those very important routes into the downtown area on the isthmus. And I would point out that Willy Street can be a rather interesting area – it has quite a history. Well, on the morning of December 16, a man started throwing things out of his apartment window onto Willy Street before barricading himself in the house. Police were called, and when they arrived on the scene they weren't too sure what was about to happen, the man was obviously unstable, so they shut down an entire block of Willy Street in front of this man's apartment for several hours as they worked to calm down the situation. They talked him down, and eventually that street was reopened. About five weeks later, one of the officers involved in that scene was working as a volunteer at a community meal program, and the officer said that "...a man tapped him on the shoulder to apologize for how he had treated Madison officers on that cold December morning" (this is according to police spokesman Joel DeSpain). According to DeSpain, "The officer didn't recognize the man, for on that morning he was covered in [nothing but] orange sienna paint, in handcuffs, talking wildly." The man told the officer he was so very thankful for the treatment he received from all the officers he dealt with and that he remembered all that kindness even while being consumed with his own personal demons. According to the article in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, the man then gave the officer this painting on behalf of all the officers and asked him to display the painting somewhere where his thanks could be remembered. That painting is now hanging in the Madison Police Department's briefing room at the central headquarters downtown. The artist credits Madison police with saving his life by taking him into protective custody on a very cold December morning. The painting now hangs next to a poster displaying the core values of the department. By the way, Core Value #1 is, "We acknowledge the value of all people and carry out our duties with dignity, respect, and fairness to all." That value certainly takes on a deeper meaning when people know the story behind the painting. Under the painting is a short statement with the artist's name and the words, "With thanks to the officers for saving my life." This man gave thanks with a painting.

How do we give thanks to God. Earlier this morning, Tyler read a passage from the book of Hebrews, ***"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name"*** (Hebrews 13:15). As Christians, we thank God through the songs that we sing, ***"...the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."*** Perhaps only one man ever said thank you to Jesus during His life on this earth, but we can change that this morning by praising Him with the songs that we sing!

Before we close our thoughts on Luke 17, I would point out one more thing from verse 19. After this man had come back to praise God, to thank the Lord face-to-face, Jesus said, ***“Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”*** But wasn't the man ***“well”*** already? Wasn't he already cured? When we look at the word ***“well”*** (in this verse), it goes back to a word referring to being saved, cured, preserved, or restored. In fact, it is the same word used by the Philippian jailer in Acts 17:30, when he said, ***“Sirs, what must I do to be saved/cured/well/restored?”*** The Philippian Jailer wasn't looking for any kind of physical healing, but he was looking for salvation. He wanted to know what he needed to do to get his soul right with God. As I compare those two passages, I believe Jesus was affirming that the tenth leper was blessed with a whole lot more than being cured of leprosy. Ten men were cured, but 90% received only a small part of what could have been theirs that day. Only one man became truly ***“well”*** in the eyes of God.

In my file on this chapter, I ran across a report from brother Don Iverson, a Christian artist in North Carolina who spends six months each year doing mission work in India and the other six months selling his artwork to pay for his mission work. On one of his recent trips, he reported baptizing four men into Christ, one of whom was a leper. In his report, he included a picture of the man being led down into the water. The report explained that the man had no fingers or toes. The other brothers were actually surprised that the taxi driver allowed the man into the car. This was the second man with this disease baptized in this particular congregation. But the report went on to point out that, ***“On this day, this man was healed of a far worse disease than leprosy as his sins were washed away by Jesus' blood.”***

If you have any questions about what the Lord is asking you to do in the Scriptures, we would be more than happy to sit down and study with you. If you would like for us to pray about something, write it down and bring it to the front in just a moment, and we would be honored to take your concerns to God in prayer as a congregation. On the other hand, if you are ready right now to make an appeal to God for a good conscience, if you are ready to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins, if you are ready to say ***“thank you”*** to God by making this appeal, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com