

Date: February 28, 2021  
Series: *A First Century Physician Introduces the Cure*  
Title: *The Grateful Leper*  
Text: Luke 17:11-19  
Preacher: Mark Adams

When I was a kid, I was a “*Royal Ambassador*.” Any other former “*R.A.’s*” present? I see those virtual hands!

In case you don’t know---or have forgotten---Royal Ambassadors is a missions organization for young boys sponsored by our denomination, the SBC. I’ve always thought of R.A.’s as “*Baptist Boy Scouts*” because like the scouts we learned camping skills and earned badges---but we also studied missions. In fact, we were taught that missions was our job---that it was our God-given task as Christians to share the Gospel---the CURE. Our theme verse was 2 Corinthians 5:20 which says, “*We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us.*”

Every summer my RA group would do something a little odd---we would celebrate Christmas in August. We decorated our classroom with Christmas stuff---and studied the Christmas story---and we talked about the importance of telling it on mountains and over the hills and everywhere---that Jesus Christ is born. In this way we learned that December isn’t the only time to tell others about Jesus’ birth.

Well---the same thing is true when it comes to Thanksgiving. November isn’t the only time we should be grateful for God’s many blessings---His mercies that are new EVERY morning. So---if today’s sermon title seems out of place---it isn’t. Thankfulness is something we should study and learn to practice all the time---not just in November.

With that in mind, take your Bibles as we continue our study of Luke’s Gospel, Turn to chapter 17---and let’s read about a leper whose example teaches us a lot about thanksgiving. Follow along as we read verses 11-19 and if able, I ask that you stand in respect for God’s Word as it’s read.

Luke 17:11-19

- 11 - Now on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.**
- 12 - As He was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance,**
- 13 - and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”**
- 14 - When He saw them, He said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.**
- 15 - One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.**
- 16 - He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked Him—and he was a Samaritan.**
- 17 - Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”**
- 18 - Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”**
- 19 - Then He said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”**

Okay---let’s review this story. Jesus is traveling along the border of Samaria and Galilee en route to Jerusalem. On the outskirts of some unnamed village, He and His followers encounter ten leprosy men in various stages of decay.

Remember---at that time leprosy was a terminal, incurable disease. It slowly ate away at the nerve endings of the body--making it impossible for the person to feel pain. This led to infection and caused lepers to lose their extremities: their fingers---their toes. Even their ears and their noses would fall off.

Lepers were often repulsive--hard to look at---because they were disfigured and deformed, often with open wounds. Since leprosy is contagious, as soon as someone had an open sore that even hinted at this disease they had to go into isolation. If the sore healed, they were to show themselves to the local priest who would declare them clean and allow them to return to society. But if it didn’t---if it proved to be leprosy---they would spend the rest of their lives quarantined from society, living in dreaded, lonely leper colonies. And when a stranger would draw near, they would have to cry out, “*Unclean! Unclean!*” What a horrible, humiliating existence!

Okay---back to the story. Try to picture this encounter in your mind's eye. Jesus and His followers are walking by and they see these ten lepers. The clothing of these poor men is torn because of repeated mourning. Their heads are skeletal---I mean, they look like they have just climbed out of their own graves---like extras on the set of AMC's *"The Walking DEAD."* But they were alive---and even though leprosy had taken away their ability to feel physical pain---their souls were hurting. Inside those decaying bodies were human beings whose existence was constant fear and hopelessness and heartbreak.

Well, as our Lord and His followers approached these ten lepers shout, ***"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"*** (Vs 13) Their cries were repeated---insistent. They needn't be because once Jesus saw them, He immediately responded. But this time was different from other times He had healed lepers. This time there was no physical touch---no pronouncement: ***"Be clean!"*** (Luke 5:13) No---this time, He commanded them to do as the Book of Leviticus says a person HEALED of leprosy was to do. He shouted back, ***"Go show yourselves to the priests."***

So, Jesus' command required them to have faith---and I'm thinking at first they hesitated to embrace it. Some may have thought, *"Yes---let's go now."* But, others may have thought, *"Well, it's a long way to the temple---if Jesus can heal us why not just do it? We will be seen as fools if we head that way and the priest sees we are still leprous."*

Well---perhaps realizing they had little to lose and much to gain---they all apparently reached consensus and decided to obey---to give Jesus' command a try. I can't help but think of the Syrian General Naaman, who had leprosy. Remember? Elisha told him to go and dip himself seven times in the Jordan River. After balking at that, he listened to his servant. He went, dipped---and was healed. Well, like Naaman, verse 14 says, that, as these ten lepers went, ***"...they were cleansed."***

Now, have you ever noticed that often when Jesus healed someone, he would require some act of obedience to demonstrate their faith?

- ***"Stretch forth that withered hand."*** (Luke 6:10)
- ***"Pick up your bed and walk."*** (John 5:8)
- ***"Go wash your blind eyes in the pool of Siloam."*** (John 9:7)

And when people responded in obedience they were healed. Their obedience was an act of faith that opened the door for them to experience God's healing power. That's what happened with these men. As they each took a literal step of faith toward the temple, they were suddenly, ALL miraculously cured. And when I say ***"ALL"*** that's what I mean. This was a mass healing. There were no mirrors to reflect the dramatic change their healing brought about---but they saw it in each other instantly.

Try to picture what they saw. From faces that looked like cadavers reemerged ears, noses, eyebrows, eyelashes, hairlines. Feet---toeless, ulcerated stubs---were suddenly made whole. Those new feet with new toes probably burst through shrunken sandals. Knobby appendages grew fingers. Barnacled skin became soft and supple. It was like ten new-births!

Well, a wild celebration quickly began in the bright sunlight. Can you imagine their joy!? I'm sure there were tears and hugs and statement like, *"I didn't know you looked so good!"* *"Hey---I can smell again! Someone in this group needs a bath!"*

Well, among those ten lepers was a Samaritan. As you know, normally Jews did ***"not associate with Samaritans"*** (John 4:9) and vice versa. But these men had been united by their common misery---nine Jews and one Samaritan in a suffering community.

Well, when the healing occurred, they all ran off in joy---but as this Samaritan sprinted in the direction of the temple, he was seized with an irresistible feeling of gratitude. He was so thankful that he turned around---and rushed back to Jesus. Kent Hughes writes, *"The ceremonial clean bill of health could wait. His spiritual obligation overrode his ceremonial need."*

Anyway, the Samaritan and his Jewish friends parted company. Unlike his peers this Samaritan knew he needed to thank someone---in his mind, two "Someone's" both Jesus and God. Not knowing that his Healer was both, he began by thanking God. Look at verse 15: **"One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice."** Earlier he had loudly begged for healing---now he was loud with his praise.

By the way, the Greek for **"loud voice"** would be recognizable to us. It's two words, *"phones megales"* --- flip them around and you can see that's where we get our word *"megaphone."* So, as this Samaritan was running back, he was as loud as a megaphone in his praise to God. He only stopped when, as verse 16 says, **"He fell upon his face"** at our Lord's feet, thanking Him for his healing.

Okay---what "Thanksgiving in February" lesson can this story teach us?

### 1.) Gratitude is RARE.

In this story, only one out of ten expressed gratitude---10%. Today, the percentages would probably just as low---or even lower. Syndicated columnist Harvey Mackay once said, *"When you do something for someone, their gratitude will last---as long as it takes them to say that they're eternally grateful---and then they forget about it."*

That sounds cynical, but Mackay is more right than wrong. Sadly, one of the scarcest virtues in humanity is gratitude. Jesus acknowledges the scarcity of gratitude in our text. Remember? He asked, **"Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"** (vs 17-18)

By the way, wouldn't it be good to go back and conduct an on-the-street interview with those nine guys several days later and say, *"Why didn't you go back and thank Jesus?"* I'm sure one would say, *"Well, I went and celebrated with my family. They've gone through a hard time. I intended to go back later but it got dark and I just never made it."* Another might say, *"Well, I'm grateful but I didn't know that He expected me to go back. After all, He does that for a living. I mean, He's always healing people---right?"* Another might say, *"You know what? I didn't go back because I'm not sure that Jesus healed us. I've been taking these herbs that are supposed to cure leprosy and I just thought it was a coincidence that it happened at the same time."*

*"Well, I'm healed but I'm really not pleased with how I look. I've had leprosy for ten years and I look so much older than I did before. If He was going to heal me, why didn't he make me look younger?"*

*"Well, I'm going to go back and thank Him, but I've been so busy---talk shows, newspaper interviews."*

*"I didn't go back and thank him because I'm afraid to. I mean, Jesus has been telling people, 'Sell everything you have and follow me. Take up your cross and follow me.' I'm not sure I want to be that fanatical."*

But---before we criticize the nine---we need to look at ourselves. Most of us AREN'T as grateful as we should be.

Ask school teachers, *"How many students come back and thank you after graduation?"* One in ten? *"How many thank you for all the extra hours you have had to put in preparing virtual lessons this past year?"*

Ask nurses, *"How many patients send you thank you notes after they are discharged?"*

Ask the people behind the scenes in a church like ours---sound technicians, camera operators, website workers, custodians, secretarial staff: *"How many people express appreciation to you? How many say, 'Thanks for all you do?'"*

Ask mothers, *"How many of your children come and say, 'Mom, not only did you help me with my online classes today. Tonight, my drawer was filled with clean underwear today. Thank you so much!'"*

It doesn't happen as often as it should. As Barclay puts it, *"So often once a man has gotten what he wants, he never comes back."* Why are we like that? Why are so many of us more like the nine than the one?

a. We HAVE too much.

You see, the more we have, the less grateful we tend to be. You would think it would be just the opposite. But the more we have, the more we grumble about what we don't have. And---the more we focus on having temporary stuff---the less we focus on eternal stuff---truly important things. As a wise king prayed in Proverbs 30:8-9, ***"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown You and say, 'Who is the Lord?'"*** No doubt this is one reason for Jesus' warning in Luke 12:15: ***"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."***

This week I came across an interesting blog by a Christian named Ted Scofield. He said:

*"When I ask people, 'What is greed?' typically the first concept articulated involves the notion of abundance. Greed is when you have too much stuff (which only money can buy), or place too much importance on stuff, or spend too much time pursuing or wanting or envying stuff. A college student told me, 'When people are sleeping on the street and you have a Mercedes and four empty bedrooms in your McMansion, then you are greedy.' The late comedian George Carlin might agree for he said, 'That's the whole meaning of life, isn't it? Trying to find a place for your stuff. That's all your house is—a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get more stuff. Sometimes you've got to move, you've got to get a bigger house. Why? Too much stuff!'"*

Scofield continues, *"Sure enough, we Americans are not filling our houses with people. In 1950, the average home size was 983 square feet and 3.37 people lived in it. By 2009, the average home's square footage has ballooned to 2,700 with only 2.57 occupants. In 59 years, the average American home grew by 175% while the average family size shrunk by 24%."*

Sad---but true.

The more stuff we have the less we focus on truly important things---like others---like God--and that makes us greedy and ungrateful.

A second reason gratitude is rare is...

b. We COMPARE too much.

Remember Jesus' parable about the workers in the vineyard? There was a group of workers hired at the beginning of the day. They were perfectly content to work for a denarius, a normal day's wage, until at the end of the day they discovered there were people who worked just an hour---and they got the same amount of wage. Suddenly, they were very disgruntled about the inequity of it all.

If---like these guys---we compare our circumstances with other people who seem to have it better, we can become very discontented, thankless people. 2 Corinthians 10:12 says, ***"When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise."***

I read that a few years ago at a computer expo, Microsoft's Bill Gates compared the computer industry with the auto industry and said, *"If GM had kept up with technology like the computer industry has, we would all be driving \$25 cars that got 1,000 miles per gallon."* General Motors responded to Gates by releasing the statement, *"Yes, but would you want your car to crash (like a hard drive) twice a day?"*

My point is that sadly, for various reasons, being grateful can put you in the minority. This story challenges us to STAND OUT by thanking God.

Here's a second thing we can learn about gratitude from this story.

2.) Gratitude is an EXPRESSION not just an emotion.

Being grateful is not just something we feel---it's something we do. Many people say, *"It's not that I don't feel gratitude, it's just that I'm not very good at expressing it."* That's a copout---the whole purpose of gratitude is not that you feel it, but that you show it. If you aren't expressing gratitude, then your gratitude does no one any good.

Look back at this story. The lepers call out to Jesus for help, saying, ***"Have pity on us."*** What if Jesus had said, *"OK. I'll have pity. I have strong feelings of pity and compassion for you in my heart. Unfortunately, I'm not very good at expressing it. But I can assure you that I feel it."*

Would that have done those ten people any good? No---of course not. It's the same with gratitude. Gratitude is useful only when it's expressed, and demonstrated, and put into action.

One of the things I love about this story is that the leper did that. He expressed HIS gratitude by coming back and praising God in a LOUD voice. I think everyone in that village heard him doing the megaphone thing---thanking God.

I got to thinking about that this week. Do I do this often enough? Do I make it a point to thank in a loud voice? I know that I can complain in a loud voice. I know that I can give orders in a loud voice. I know that I can tell jokes in a loud voice. But do I, often enough, say "thank you" in a loud voice? Do I truly EXPRESS my gratitude?

The point is the best expressions of gratitude are a little over the top. Tom Hanks got his start in a silly, short-lived TV show called *Bosom Buddies*. If I remember right the sitcom was built on the premise that only NYC apartment he and his buddy could afford was one that only allowed women to live in the building---so Hanks and his buddy, played by Peter Scolari, pretended to be women by wearing wigs and dresses. Well at this point in his career Hanks was so broke that he had to ask the show's producer, Tom Miller, for a \$5000 loan---even before the show went on the air. Miller said that as soon as Hanks started getting paid, he started paying the money back until the loan was fully repaid. More importantly, though, Tom Miller said that even now, when he runs into Hanks on a sound stage or in the studio parking lot, Hanks will drop to his knees and loudly say, *"Thank you for helping me with my career!"*

I like that! That's a good example to follow! If you're sincerely grateful, it's OK to be a little loud in expressing it. Children---try that with your parents. This afternoon run to the, fall on your knees and YELL, ***"THANK YOU FOR FEEDING AND CLOTHING ME!"*** Husbands---try it with your wives. Before you get in bed get on your knees before her and YELL, ***"THANK YOU FOR PUTTING UP WITH MY SNORING!"*** Congregation, try it with the tech team. I know YELLING in this room during COVID is not safe---but send them a text message or e-mail in all caps saying, ***"THANK YOU FOR WORKING SO HARD TO MAKE SURE WE CAN WORSHIP!"*** My point is that thanksgiving must be EXPRESSED---and the louder, the better. Just like Tom Hanks. Just like this Samaritan.

And remember, just as people enjoy our gratitude---God enjoys ours. So as Hebrews 12:28 says, ***"Since we have a Kingdom nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving him with thankful hearts and with holy fear and awe."*** (TLB) Isaac Walton once said, *"God has two dwellings--- heaven and a humble, thankful heart."*

Quick review of our "Thanksgiving in February" lessons:

Gratitude puts you in the minority.

Gratitude is something that is expressed---the louder the better.

And finally,

### **3.) Gratitude opens the door for JOY.**

As I read about that 10<sup>th</sup> leper---I can't help but feel the thrill in his heart. He learned what it feels like to truly REJOICE! Gratitude does that. Not only does it make GOD happy---it makes us happy. In fact, let me ask, how happy are you right now? If you were to say, *"Well, I'm not all that happy right now,"* you'd probably explain that there are some circumstances in your life that are kind of dragging you down. We think happiness is directly related to what happens to us. But it really isn't. Happiness is more determined by mindset and attitude than it is by circumstances.

In fact, I could make you exuberantly happy with exactly what you have right now in life within 24 hours. But it would be a brutal 24 hours.

Here's what I would do.

- I'd have a lawyer call you and inform you that you're being sued and all of your possessions are in jeopardy.
- Then I'd have your doctor telephone you and say, *"I took another look at those latest X-rays and I think you have a terminal disease."*
- I'd have a close friend that you trusted call you and say, *"The four people that you love most in life have just been killed."*
- Then I'd have a theologian that you trust in say, *"I can prove that the Bible is wrong. I've changed my mind. There is no hope of life after death."*

And after 24 hours of those devastating things happening to you, I would call you and say, *"None of those things is true. Your loved ones are alive. Your possessions are intact. You still have your health and you still have your hope in Christ."* After you had recovered from the shock you would feel two emotions.

First---anger at me for what I did and then ecstatic joy for your current state.

Your circumstances wouldn't be any different, but your attitude would be transformed. You'd be thankful---and JOYFUL.

And the thing that gives us the MOST thankful---joyful mindset---is Jesus. Do you remember how Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15:14ff?

***"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God---for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead. If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.***

***And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."***

Wait for it...

***"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep! For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive!"***

When we have faith in Christ---we can be thankful---and joyful---in all circumstances.

A couple years ago I read about Tom Schmidt, a Christian who visited a nursing home once or twice a week. Schmidt related that one day he went down a hallway in this convalescent home that he didn't normally go down. And he said, *"You know, sometimes the worst cases are people who sit in wheelchairs out in the hall and aren't able to function."*

But he was giving these people flowers who were capable of holding them and he said he noticed one woman who seemed to be the worst of all. He could tell by her blank stare that she was blind and she had a big hearing aid on, so he knew she could barely hear. Cancer had eaten away at a good section of her face and deformed it. She appeared repulsive, constantly drooling because her mouth drooped. But he said he bent down and put a flower in her hand and he said, *"Happy Mother's Day."* And her response, though garbled, revealed a very keen mind. She said, *"Thank you very much. It's lovely. But do you mind if I give it to somebody else because I'm blind and I can't see?"*

Schmidt said: *"I wheeled her down the hallway to a section where there were some people who were more alert, and as she stretched out to give it and somebody took it, she said, 'This is from Jesus.' I knew right then that this was no ordinary human being, so every time I came back---sometimes once or twice a week---I would stop and visit with her. I learned her name was Mable. She grew up single and living with her mother on the farm. Her mother died and then she became blind and had to be put in a home and then cancer threatened her. She was with a roommate who was just a human vegetable and her existence was horrible.*

*But I also learned that she really knew the Lord. I would read her Scripture and she'd quote the rest of the verses. Sometimes she would sing a hymn. Her name was Mable and she had been there for twenty-five years now. She was 89-years-old. I asked her one day, 'Mable, what do you think about all day long?' And she said, 'Well, I just think about my Jesus.' I would have a hard time thinking about Jesus for five minutes at a time and she thinks about Him all day long!*

*I said, 'Well, what do you think about Him?' And she said, 'Well, I just think about how good He has been to me. He's been awful good to me, you know? Jesus, in fact, is all the world to me.' And then she began to sing, 'My life, my joy, my all. He is my strength from day to day, without Him I would fall. When I am sad, to Him I go. No other one can cheer me so. When I am sad, He makes me glad. He's my friend.'"*

Schmidt said this lady was not denying reality. She was joyful because she KNEW Jesus---KNEW of His sacrifice---His love---His promise of eternal life.

Let's pray.