

Has No One Returned to Give Thanks?

Series: What God Wants to Know
Brad Bailey – November 30th, 2014

Intro

Today... we have an opportunity to give thanks.

Most of us know that gratitude doesn't always flow like we know it should.

Personal: A couple weeks ago... walked over to see how some neighbors were doing... he extended something to me... 2 tickets to the Lakers game. My wife and I were blessed by them... and had a great time at the game. Afterwards, I had good intentions to write a note to thank them... but didn't follow through day after day... and I began to hope not to run into them. What was something that extended a relational bond... became relationally alienating... because I had not returned to the source. Finally I wrote a card and gave it to them on Thanksgiving Day... and the relational connection was restored. That is what many of us face in our relationship with God. Gratitude is not simply something owed... but defines the very nature of our relationship.

Today we I want to share one final question that God asks ... that can enlighten our lives regarding gratitude.

Luke 17:11-19 (MSG)

¹¹ It happened that as he made his way toward Jerusalem, he crossed over the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten men, all lepers, met him. They kept their distance ¹³ but raised their voices, calling out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴ Taking a good look at them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." They went, and while still on their way, became clean. ¹⁵ One of them, when he realized that he was healed, turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude, glorifying God. ¹⁶ He kneeled at Jesus' feet, so grateful. He couldn't thank him enough—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus said, "Were not ten healed? Where are the nine?" ¹⁸ Can none be found to come back and give glory to God except this outsider?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Get up. On your way. Your faith has healed and saved you."

Imagine that day. It was a **formative experience** for the **first disciples**... and **can be for us today**.

It begins with Jesus traveling towards Jerusalem... and as he neared a village... a group of lives dying of leprosy were waiting.

Leprosy was **the most dreaded disease** of that time. (Many ask if it still exists... and it certainly does... but it is a disease which has been found to require many years of contact to be contagious and that it is curable. But that is relatively recent.) It was the most dreaded disease imaginable. It would deaden the nerves... and begin by eating away a person's toes, fingertips, or scalp, but it would continue in a destructive path until it attacked the vital organs.

Over time it's contagious nature could wipe out the whole village. So if a priest saw someone suddenly wearing gloves all the time, he would insist on examining the person. And if he found leprosy, the priest would expel the leper from their village in the harshest way imaginable. (If any signs appeared or fears arose... the priests would be pawing through people's scalps, fingers, and toes. (I think we can all be glad that is not the case today.)

The emotional pain was even worse than the physical pain. You would be **removed from your family**... cast outside the **community**. There could be no contact, whatsoever, with one's **children**

or grandchildren. None. Immediately removed. One's spouse would not be allowed to kiss them goodbye.

Those now marked and dying of this disease **tended to roam together**, looking for food, **begging for assistance... from a great distance, learning to yell in loud voices, both from the need to warn others**, and to beg for help from across the way.

Imagine what would it have been like to have been **removed from family and friends** or a **lifetime**, and to have been **forced to announce that removal on a daily basis?**

So as Jesus began approaching a village...there **on the outskirts** are **ten lepers** who had word of his coming... word of how he seemed to represent God like no other.

We don't know their names, genders, social status, their backgrounds, or families. **All the distinctive things** about them have been **eaten away by the leprosy.**

We do know that at least one of them was a Samaritan. Normally, Samaritans and Jews have nothing to do with each other--unless they all have leprosy. Then nobody cares much about religion or nationality. **Now they are all just outsiders**, who live by the gates of the village.

When the lepers saw Jesus, they called out to him saying, *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."*

It is striking that they don't ask for alms...or even ask for healing. Just mercy.

Mercy is what you ask for when you face the limits of changing your life... when you are at the bottom of your barrel of plans for getting life fixed up. "Jesus, please, have mercy on me."

(These have always been the words and posture that makes on an insider with Jesus. It's what calls all of us here. Until we confess a need for mercy, we'll never understand what Jesus and his church is really about.)

Ten lives hung on the words or actions of the Man of Galilee.

Luke makes a point of telling us that **Jesus saw the lepers** as they cried out to him.

When Jesus saw them, He instantly knew of their plight, misery, and isolation. **Jesus also knew that the only way they could return to their homes and families, according to the Law, was to be declared clean by the priests.**

"Go, show yourselves to the priests." In other words, Jesus was saying, go to the priests for **certificates of cleansing.** They weren't healthy--but they were to go and get a health certificate to proclaim they were healed. Jesus said, "Go get a physical examination."

Can you **imagine their situation?** They must have **stood and looked at each other** and then started to debate this command.

Then it happened. At some point, those ten outcast lepers were changed. Every diseased cell in their bodies were changed. The **must have stood in utter amazement...** looked at their hands, their feet, at each other's ears, they were whole, they had been changed, **Jesus' reputation was true.** Ten suffering human beings had been touched by the Son of God. Ten suffering men had been **touched by the creating hand of God** that was **still very much at work in his world.**

Can you picture them **bounding down the road** to the priest, now running, now leaping, now dancing, wondering how the priest would react... anticipating the glee, the excitement of their

families as they would return home--healthy, alive, with a health certificate proclaiming to all what had happened.

All ten men caught up in the joy, the excitement of the moment.

Only one returns

Only one of the ten who were touched by the love of this man of Galilee had seen beyond the miracle of healing to the one who had dared to risk for him. **One saw Jesus for who he was.** He saw one who **cared**, one who **loved**, one who wanted a relationship with everyone on the face of the earth.

He saw the Son of God as a man of love, a builder of relationships, he saw the miracle as Jesus' way of building a bridge between the fallen creation, the brokenness of disease and the loving hand of God who wants to reach into that brokenness with his creating and redeeming power, He saw Jesus.

Then notice Jesus response. "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?"

Only one in ten came back to give thanks. Only one in ten. Why, Jesus is asking, why only one in ten?

There is a sadness in those words...a divine sadness. It is the sadness of One who has come to have relationship. They had not just received healing...they had received mercy....something so much more ultimate. He wanted them to come into a relationship with him.

In the midst of this amazing moment...Jesus asks a question that relates to us even now:

Where are the nine?

Can none be found to come back and give glory to God?

Or to state the point in general...

Why do so few return to the Giver?

It's certainly striking... 10 healed from a life devouring disease...and only one returns...nine don't even come back to honor the source of such blessing.

I wonder if the ratio has really changed much.

How easy it is to not give glory to God.

We don't know what kept the other none from returning to Jesus.

Maybe they saw in this act of healing **something they were due**. We have developed such an **inflated sense of our rights**... that we think of life as owing us. One tendency is a fundamental **lack of humility**.

We can also have a tendency to take the blessing and as somehow our own... quiet pride... Perhaps they thought, *A lot of people have leprosy, and it takes their lives. But we had the power to overcome it.*

We like to feel special more than thankful. To have gone back and given thanks...shift the attention. (While I appreciate what is implied when someone is described as a "self-made man"... I also realize that no one is self-made.)

Or maybe they were grateful, but they had **been away from home a long time**. They had families they hadn't seen in a while. (I have had times where I was thankful... planned to write a note...but it just got lost... and I could feel that the blessing was missing something.)

I've also heard people say, *"I'm thankful, but I'm not the kind to say so."*

I wonder how the Lord looks upon my life... the blessings of life I have been given...and whether they are returned to the Source?

There is a **sober reality** in this story. When Jesus asks about the others... we can **sense a divine sadness** that is significant. This **isn't a matter of his being unappreciated** in his human nature...**but of these lives still being lost spiritually**.

This has always been true. Our souls lose orbit.... And become consumed by what we don't have.... The Scriptures call us back...and especially the Psalmist....speak to our souls. ...to maintain an attitude of gratitude.

We can tend to think of ungratefulness as simply a bad trait...sort of the respectable sin of ingratitude.

But the Scriptures point to this as the most fatal part of our nature.

Romans 1:21 (NIV)

"...although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

First steps of man's downward slide away from God

When an individual...church... Or a nation becomes unthankful, they have signed their spiritual death warrant.

2 Timothy 3:1-2 (NIV)

"Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

Perhaps **being here today is a significant step**. It can represent a **choice** to come offer God our worship. You could have done something else this morning, but you know that there is a source to return to with thanks...and **to give glory to**.

The one who returns...comes back to give thanks... and there is blessed by Jesus. Before he was healed...but now he is blessed.

Notice that with a loud voice he glorified God. With the same loudness and intensity he cried for mercy, he glorified God. Many times we cry loud for help and low with praise. But with the same zeal we sought help we should praise him. And he fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan.

Here is the tragedy... only one ended up close to God.

All received a physical blessing... from a distance... and a dramatic and propound one...but only one ended up close to God. The one we are told was a Samaritan...which means he was considered far from God... He was deemed unworthy to receive God's help. But by grace he was healed and he comes to worship the one who unconditionally healed him. And he got more than the others did. They received physical healing from a distance. But this one knew that there was a bigger blessing... and it was relational.

Only he received the spiritual blessing in relationship to God.

Spiritual blessings are more important than physical blessings. Sometimes we don't believe that. But look around at the people you know and ask yourself, *Do physical blessings make them happy?* Most of the time, the answer is no. When they receive the physical blessing they desire, they fail to give thanks and, as a result, fail to receive a spiritual blessing.

That's where this whole account ends. In Luke 17:19, Jesus said to this leper at his feet, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." We think, *What faith?* I mean, there was no recitation of the Apostles' Creed. No great statement of the divinity of Jesus. What matters is **honoring God with what we know.**

That is what we have an opportunity to do today....to honor God with what we know.

A few key things to grasp...and guide us...in gratitude...

- 1. Gratitude recognizes that we are not owed anything. We are all at a distance...unclean...and in need of mercy.**
- 2. Gratitude recognizes that the greatest blessing is God's desire for relationship with us.**
- 3. Gratitude recognizes that it is ultimately about returning to God as the source of goodness and glory.**

Luke 17:18 - "***Can none be found to come back and give glory to God except this outsider?***"

It is good to thank others... but to only thank fellow human lives...will never connect us to the ultimate source of blessing. Many good things have a fellow human lives to honor...and we should...but all blessings have God. Whatever blessing have come...that others have been involved in...there is a gratitude that is deeper and wider... a gratitude that binds us to the source of all goodness...a gratitude to God.

Jesus sees the real goodness that reigns...that loves...that gives...and he wants every life to enter that reality....a reality that he refers to as the glory of God...which we can join.

TIME OF GIVING THANKS:

We are going to have a time of open sharing of thanks. As we do...I want to note a few helpful things.

- Don't feel you have to have something dramatic... breathing is dramatic.
- Please be thoughtful of others by summarizing longer stories to a half minute or so.
- Let's focus on honor to God.

Resources: Charles Allen, M. Craig Barnes, Michael Belcher (Re Law keeps us separated but Jesus reaches us); Tim Zingale (Re description of Jesus not immediately healing them), Tony Bazen (re how ungratefulness is the respectable sin that is at the root of spiritual fatality.)

Notes:

1. It has been noted that the labeling a person a “leper” reflects the nature of identifying one with their disease. (It would be akin to saying someone is a “cancer” rather than that they “have cancer.”) Today it is more appropriate to speak of one as having the disease of leprosy rather than as being a leper.

2. While in this event, Jesus chose to allow the natural distance between them, we know that Jesus elsewhere reached out and touched those with leprosy. Read Matt. 8:1-4