

Giving Thanks **Luke 17:11-19**

Well, we are moving along in our series through Luke's gospel and will look at the next passage of Luke 17 this morning. This will actually be the last sermon from Luke before we change gears a bit and turn our attention to Christmas. Next week we will begin our advent series looking at a specific and important prophecy of the promised Messiah, given by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 9, so we are looking forward to that.

And I know that some of you, maybe many of you, are already thinking of Christmas. You've put your tree up early this year, you're already listening to Christmas music. I've heard many people say they are going to enjoy Christmas early this year because this has been a tough year, and I get that, it has been a tough year for everyone, but before we get caught up too much in the Christmas spirit, we have Thanksgiving first!

Again, I know it's been a tough year which might make celebrating a holiday focused on giving thanks for life's blessings a bit harder for you this week, but our next passage in Luke I think will help us take some much needed time to pause and remember that giving thanks to God is always appropriate for God's people.

So let's look at the next section of Luke 17. We left off last week in verse 10 so let's pick it up in verse 11...

Luke 17:11-13

11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.
12 And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance
13 and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

So Luke reminds us that Jesus is "on the way to Jerusalem." Jesus is continuing in his earthly ministry but we are reminded along the way that this journey of Jesus from town to town would eventually end in Jerusalem where he will be arrested and crucified.

But at this point in the journey to Jerusalem Jesus enters a small village, we don't know exactly which one, but there he is met by "ten lepers."

Leprosy in biblical terms is described as a variety of skin diseases, things like psoriasis, lupus, ringworm, and others.¹ It was painful and contagious. Those who suffered from leprosy suffered physically.

But lepers suffered socially as well. Since it was very difficult to tell if someone had leprosy or something less serious, the Old Testament had very strict guidelines to make sure the person didn't expose others to the disease. So, if someone thought they may have contracted leprosy they had to be examined by the priest. You can read about this in Leviticus 13-14. If it turns out that they did have leprosy they would be isolated from everyone else, they had to wear torn clothes, cover their face and cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" when others approached. To be diagnosed with leprosy was to be condemned to a life as an outcast. You couldn't be around your family, your friends, you would be looked at with disgust by everyone else because you were now labeled as "unclean." You were an untouchable who was cast aside to the margins of society.

So these ten lepers had to stand at a distance because of their disease (they were practicing proper social distancing) and from a distance cry out to Jesus for help. Clearly, they had heard of who Jesus was. His reputation for miracles and teaching had traveled throughout the region, even to this little village. You can imagine that Jesus was a common topic of conversation among the sick, especially those like these ten lepers who had no hope for a normal life again. So imagine what would have been going through their hearts and minds when Jesus showed up. When these lepers saw Jesus, they saw a glimmer of hope. The one we have heard so much about is here! He came to our village! This is our chance! And so they yell to him for help.

Luke 17:14

14 When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.

Their boldness in yelling out to him pays off. Jesus was moved with compassion on them and tells them to go to the priests at the temple.

Again, you can read more details about this in Leviticus 14, but the priests were like the county health inspectors, they were the ones who examined someone who was sick but then believed to be healed. So the person who thought they were healed would go to the priest, they would examine the person's skin, and if they said yes this person was healed, they would observe an eight day cleansing ceremony and then be able to rejoin their family and the community.

So Jesus tells them to follow Old Testament protocol. But notice, they are told to go before they were actually healed. In telling them to go, Jesus was saying they will be

¹ Mark Strauss, *Luke*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, 53.

healed without saying they will be healed. But out of faith and in hope they turn to head towards the temple and they are healed as they went.

Luke 17:15-18

15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; **16** and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. **17** Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? **18** Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Here we see the purpose of giving us this account. The focus here is not the miracle that Jesus performed, which of course is incredible. The main lesson here is the responses of those who were healed.

The ten lepers had left Jesus and began heading to the temple and they noticed that the painful sores and terrible deformities that leprosy had given them had disappeared. While they were once unclean, they were now clean. And Luke records for us that one of the ten, in seeing that he had been healed stops, turns around, shouts praise on his way back to Jesus, falls at his feet, and gives him thanks. Before he had to keep a distance from Jesus but now that he been cleansed, he knew he could draw near.

But, he is the only one who does that. Out of ten people who were healed only the one comes back to say "thank you." And so Jesus asks some rhetorical questions. "Weren't there ten people that I healed? Why is it that only one person is now giving me thanks? Only this foreigner is back." Again this man was a Samaritan. Samaritans were not part of the covenant community of Israel, they only followed the books of Moses and not the rest of the Old Testament, they had their own forms of worship, so Jews and Samaritans did not associate with one another. But here is the Samaritan, the foreigner, back giving thanks to Jesus.

This is a story that contrasts the lives of those who exhibit a heart of **thankfulness** and those that exhibit a heart of **thanklessness**. While the one Samaritan man is back praising the Lord, the nine other healed lepers go on with their life never to return as far as we know. While one is overwhelmed with gratefulness at the mercy that was shown to him, the other nine move on. Surely they were thrilled to be healed but they were not moved by the gracious act of God to work on their behalf. If they did, they would have returned to Jesus in praise and thanksgiving.

Again, only one comes back to Jesus, while the vast majority do not. This really does serve as a small picture of humanity. How few are the ones who give thanks to God for who he is and what he has done. In fact, according to Scripture ingratitude is a central characteristic of man's depravity.

Listen to how Paul describes this in Romans 1, a passage that describes the sinfulness of humanity...

Romans 1:21

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Paul would later warn Timothy about godlessness that will characterize these last days saying...

1 Timothy 3:1-5

1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. **2** For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, unholy, **3** heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, **4** treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **5** having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Again, to be ungrateful is listed in Scripture, along with things like unholiness, slander, treachery, pride, loving self rather than loving God, all of these as marks of godlessness. To look to God with a sense of entitlement, or indifference, is a sure sign of a heart that has not been melted by his grace. Again, the nine lepers were a picture of this reality, while the lone Samaritan brought thanks to Jesus.

Luke 17:19

19 And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

And it's important to understand, Jesus is not saying that because he had faith, he was healed. When Jesus says that he was made well, he is using a word that refers to salvation. In other words, not only have you been healed physically, you have been healed spiritually.

This is similar to other miracles accounts in the gospels, for example, the woman who had been suffering from a bleeding disorder who in faith touches the hem of Jesus' robe and is healed. Jesus speaks with the woman and ends by saying this in Mark 5:34...

Mark 5:34

And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

In other words, you can now live in peace with God **and** be healed of your disease. The same thing could be said of the healed leper in Luke 17. Because of his faith, he now had peace with the Lord and was healed of his leprosy.

What is important to notice there is that he enjoyed something the other nine did not. Yes, they were all physically healed but only the one Samaritan leper enjoyed the most important healing and that came by his faith expressed through his thankful praise of Jesus.

There is clearly a lot to learn from this particular account in the ministry of Jesus, especially as we approach Thanksgiving. Let me offer just a few lessons we should take away from this passage...

Applications:

1. We have much to be thankful for and the proper response is praise.

I know it may seem hard for you to be thankful to God this year. I mean we are still in the middle of a global pandemic that has affected all of our lives. You may have experienced a job loss or health struggles because everything this year. We all have witnessed much societal turmoil over the last number of months. I know that to say regardless of everything happening we should be thankful might sound inconsiderate or maybe naive, but if we are careful to pause and consider that God has given us in Christ more than we could ever hope or imagine, our hearts can be renewed knowing that hasn't changed in the difficult year that has been 2020.

I mean, just consider briefly this morning what you have been gifted with by God:

- You have life today. Your heart is beating, you have breath in your lungs. That is a gift from your Creator.
- You have God's Word in your hands (probably multiple copies at home, certainly on your phone or tablet)
- You have the good news of the gospel: rather than being justly condemned for your sin, God looked on you with love and mercy and sent His own Son to live the perfect, righteous life you could not, and went to the cross, crucified in your place with your sins placed on his shoulders. And now by grace through faith you have been reconciled back to God. Like the Samaritan leper, you no longer have to keep a distance between you and God, now you can draw near.

And you have all of the other things the gospel brings:

- You have unconditional forgiveness for all of your sins, past, present, and future.
- You can trust in the never failing faithfulness of God in your life.
- You have been shown grace and mercy when you deserved the opposite.
- You can rest in God's steadfast love for you which never changes.
- You have been adopted as God's child, given the full rights and privileges of the family.
- You have been gifted the indwelling Holy Spirit who comforts you and guides you.
- You have peace with God, eternal hope, sure promises, a home among the people of God, a future, eternal home with Christ, you have the opportunity to pray to the Creator

of all things, even in your suffering you have the promise of His presence and sovereign plan

We have all of this and more in Christ through the gospel, and these are ours every. single. day.

Understand, every day as a Christian is like waking up on Christmas morning. We have good gifts with our names on it every day. So, to harbor a heart of ingratitude would be like saying, “Yeah, but, God still hasn’t done enough.” I mean, really? He hasn’t done enough?

If that is the condition of our hearts, then we are living with the an improper view of ourselves and an improper view of God and His gifts. We are seeing ourselves as too important, as if we are entitled to anything from God, and we are seeing God and his gifts as too small and trivial.

But when we put those things in their proper perspectives, we can’t help but live a life of gratitude. It will be the regular practice of our hearts to praise the Lord with thanksgiving. Understand that gratitude is the fuel of praise. So, when worship is absent thanklessness is sure to be found.

Again, we have much to be thankful for and the proper response is praise.

But a second lesson we cannot miss from this passage:

2. It is possible to enjoy the gifts of God without acknowledging God Himself, but that is a grave mistake.

Theologians have termed the good gifts of God for all people everywhere as “common grace.” The idea is that whether you are follower of Jesus or not, we all benefit from God as our Creator. Common grace is the presence of “God’s universal, gracious blessings that are not related to salvation.”² It is based on the fact that God has created all of humanity in his image and so we all enjoy gifts because of that.

For example, simple physical provision of life is a gift of common grace. We have food, water, shelter, and other basic needs.

All people everywhere are able to fulfill the cultural mandate, to build, create, use their intellect to make the world better. That is a gift of God’s common grace.

² Gregg R. Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christians Faith*, 204.

Also, the fact that we have a human conscience is part of common grace. We all have an “innate sense of ethical duty”³ which enables us to know the basic principles of right and wrong.

Common grace is shown in our family structures as well. Procreation is a gift that is given universally. Common grace is shown in our governmental structures to promote prosperity for people everywhere. It is shown in just laws, protection against harm, the restraining of evil, and punishment of wrong doers.

All of those good gifts are manifestations of God’s common grace. Obviously, that does not mean they are given in the same measure everywhere. Some experience greater gifting, some governments are better than others, not every family enjoys peace and harmony. We know that because of sin, every area of life is affected, and that includes the area of common grace.

Nevertheless, God has extended his favor on all of humanity **BUT common grace is not the same as saving grace.**

Again, it is possible to enjoy the gifts of God without ever acknowledging God Himself. But this is a failure to properly respond to common grace. Common grace, the good gifts of God to the world are meant to spur the world on to seek the Provider of the gifts and respond in repentance and faith.

This is what Paul meant when he wrote in Romans 2...

<p>Rom. 2:4 4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?</p>

To enjoy God’s gifts without turning to Him in repentant faith and a heart of thankfulness is to presume upon his goodness shown to you. It is taking for granted the One who has offered life to you.

Ultimately this is what the nine lepers demonstrate for us in the story. They enjoyed the good gift of Jesus’ healing, something all ten of them enjoyed, but only the one leper responds to Jesus in saving faith. The other ten continue on in life without knowing Jesus as he ought to be known, not only as Healer but as Savior.

And again, this is shown in their thanklessness to Jesus.

“The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has no one to thank.” -GK Chesteron

³ Ibid., 205.

What Chesterton is getting at is that everyone of us was made for worship. The book of Ecclesiastes says that God put eternity in the heart of man so we naturally long for the eternal. And those who deny God are suppressing this natural purpose of their heart to give thankful praise to God. Now, they will certainly worship something or someone, but it will be a worship that settles for far less than what should be.

Again, you can enjoy God's gifts without ever acknowledging God Himself, who has given those gifts, but that truly is tragic.

And the tragedy of the thanklessness of the nine lepers is only highlighted by the ritual that takes place with the priests. Let me explain...

The Gospel in the OT Ritual Cleansing

After crying out to Jesus for help, for a miracle, Jesus sends them on their way to the priest for examination. You can read all about the ins and outs of the examination in Leviticus 14 but part of the ritual of cleansing lepers was that the one who was to be cleansed was to bring a guilt offering. For those who had enough money they were to bring a few birds and a few lambs, along with some other things. For those who weren't as wealthy, they could bring just one lamb along with some other things.

So, they would bring their offering to the priest and part of the ritual was that a lamb would die, its blood shed for atonement and placed on the person symbolically cleansing the former leper. After which, the person would be pronounced clean able to rejoin the community, no longer an outcast.

Now, consider those lepers that day in that small village. All ten of them were speaking with the true lamb who was heading to Jerusalem to shed his own blood for his people. Only one of the ten came back in faith and fell at the feet of Jesus. The other nine surely went to the temple and walked through the ritual as they were supposed to, but while they had the blood of the lamb applied to them, they missed out on the blood of the true Lamb of God.

Understand, we all are lepers because of our sin. You have a terminal disease, as it were, that keeps you outside of the camp of God. But the good news of the gospel is that because of the death of the Lamb of God you can be cleansed.

Hebrews 9:13-14

13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

All of this comes by repentance and faith expressed by a thankful heart for mercy of God on your life.

You can probably identify many good gifts in your life, but you need to recognize that God is the giver of those good gifts. You may have enjoyed those gifts without ever letting them drive you to faith in the Lord. Turn to Christ today even if the other nine in your life continue on without you, turn to Jesus in faith today.

But let's all look to the Lord today, and certainly this week especially, with thankful hearts, for who He is and what He has done for us through Jesus and the Spirit.

VERSES

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Luke 17:15-18

Romans 1:21

1 Timothy 3:1-5

Luke 17:19

Mark 5:34

Romans 2:4

Hebrews 9:13-14

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

The next account given to us by Luke is the story of Jesus healing ten lepers in a small village. As the ten lepers go and are healed, only one returns to give thanks to Jesus. This story serves as a wonderful reminder that we ought to be on guard that our hearts don't turn thankless when we have every reason to be thankful.

The discussion and reflection for the sermon this week is very simple but very important for us all:

1. *Reflect on any possible hints of thanklessness in your hearts toward God.*
2. *Confess and repent of that thanklessness.*
3. *Spend time giving thanks to God for his abundant gifts in your life.*
4. *Discuss: How might the church community help one another guard against thanklessness?*