

The Rev. Billy Cerveny:

Thank you that we are free to gather here tonight to study it, to learn what it means to be loved by you, Jesus, to love like you, Jesus, and to impact the world. I thank you, Father, that your word is true. Give us the grace to believe it and eyes to see it and ears to hear it. I pray this all in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Y'all have a seat. Hey, everybody. How we doing?

So we had a little technical issue. We lost the television tonight, so we're down. We're flying on one engine, but it works, right? You can still see. We can all look across the room.

Now, it's beautiful today. I love it. I love living here. I love living in Florida right now. This is my favorite time of year. I lived just around the corner. When we moved here a few years ago, we found a house right around the corner, which I'm really excited. It took us forever to find a place nearby, and I love it. But a few months ago, I came home from work, and my wife, when I was walking through the door, she said, "Hey, there's something off." My wife and daughter came up and said, "Do you smell anything?" And I'm walking through. I'm like, "No, you know how that is." You're like, "No." And then you walk through a room, and then you get to one place, and all of a sudden, something hits you. And you're like, "Yes, I totally smell it." And then you become a crazy person, right? You're like, say you're on all fours. You're going around. You're like, "Smell in the closet." You smell in the couch. You smell in the dog. You're like, "Is it me?" You're doing all the things. And you're looking, you're trying to find it, and we couldn't find what it was. And I was like, "Okay." I was like, "There's nothing." And then I realized they had just fertilized outside of our house that day. So I said, "It must have been that." Next day, I woke up, didn't smell, went to work. I get a call about like three in the afternoon. My wife's like, "You've got to get home." Like she had left, and it had gotten hot out. And I went home, and I walked into the house, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, there's something, something like died." Right? And we couldn't find it. So I'm wandering around, and I'm smelling. But what happens is once you get there, it starts kicking like that. You can have the best house in the world. You can have all the greatest things in the world. But you sit there, and it's just

colored by that. That's all you can do is experience. I mean, it's just everything smells like something dead.

So I go, and I finally figured it out. It's like it's here somewhere, right? And it's behind this wall over here. It's in this ad, and I couldn't get to it. So I called this guy that does stuff for me, and he came, and he came around. He went through the ad, and I'm thinking, "It's a hippopotamus. It's like, you know, a biker gang died in my crawl space or something like this." And he calls me. He's like, "Hey, man, we got it." And I pull, and I go around the back, and it's this little dead squirrel. It was like this big. I'm like, "You've got to be kidding me. What an overachiever in death this squirrel was.

It was festering, but it was unbelievable. And then the second it was pulled out, it just kind of blew the house. It was fine. Everything was perfectly fine, and they sealed it up. We got that little dead squirrel out of there. It was unbelievable. But even as I was sitting there, and I was walking through, like, trying to smell and trying to find the thing, I'm like, "This is a living sermon illustration." I'm like, "This is such a metaphor for my life."

Because I'm sitting there, and I'm going from room to room. I've been blessed with this great family, this great community. I've got this wonderful church that I love. I've got good friends. I can pay my mortgage.

But every once in a while, I'll go through, and I'll realize, like, I'll get this sense that just something's off.

Something doesn't smell right in life. And I don't know exactly what it is, but you start just kind of looking around, and this just kind of comes with the way it feels like it's this feeling of discontent.

And you go over here, and you're like, "Is it this thing that I'm discontent with, or is it this thing over here that I'm discontent with, or what is it?" But over time, and you just kind of try to ignore it, that little it begins to fester.

And it begins to smell worse. And then in time, all of a sudden, it gets so strong, your discontentment, it covers everything.

And it doesn't matter how good you got it, or what things are like, it permeates everything. Everything is touched by this odor of discontentment. And it's terrible. Have you ever been there? And you can't figure out exactly what it was? A couple years ago, I was in that place in my life, and I remember really praying, like, "Lord, what is that in my heart, this discontent? What is it that's permeating my world and making everything just kind of smelly?"

And the Lord and the Holy Spirit began to move. My prayer was, "Lord, will you just make that go away?"

But instead of making it go away, the Lord actually made it stronger, so I could smell it, and I could find it. And eventually, where I found it, what I thought was going to be this massive hippopotamus inside the walls of my house rotting, what it realized is it was this small, little festering rodent, this thing called ingratitude.

This thing, gratitude, doesn't that sound so trite?

You've got to be grateful. Like, something you tell your kids. Have an attitude of gratitude, count your blessings.

But ingratitude, it's one of these things that's not trite or trivial, because when you read scripture, throughout scripture, be it in the letters of Paul or in the passage we just read, throughout scripture, ingratitude, into the gospel, it is poison. It is poison.

And it always starts this way. It always starts with this little, dead, tiny rodent called grumbling.

It starts with this thing that begins to fester behind the spiritual walls of our heart, and it's really elusive at first. I don't like this. Or I'm discontent with this thing in my life.

And I start blaming everything around me, but over time, in my circumstances, but over time, everything starts to stink.

And the reason it's such a spiritual poison is because ingratitude is this heart posture that keeps us from, it makes us incapable, and keeps us from relishing in the gifts that God has given us. And all ingratitude does is allow us to see the things that we have and see what they are not.

Ingratitude is the thing that allows me to compare my life to yours.

Ingratitude is the thing that gives birth to entitlement.

This idea that I'm owed something, that I will turn every blessing I have into payment for something that I am actually owed by God or by you or by my community or my family or whatever it is. And we become insufferable people when that happens in our lives, don't we? So what do we do about it? Because we all wrestle with this in some degree. Luke 17, this is a great passage we just read.

Jesus and the apostles, it says in verse 11, Jesus and the apostles are on their way to Jerusalem, passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And at this point, when Luke talks about Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, what he's doing, what the reader knows, if you've read the Gospels all the way through, what you realize is that he is on, he is headed towards the cross. And he's in between Samaria and Galilee, so he's in between Samaria and Israel, and he's in this no man's land.

Okay, it's sort of where no one lives, this kind of wasteland. Picture I-10 between Jacksonville and Lake City, just kind of scrub pond and stuff like that, except it's a desert. That's where he is. And he's going through, walking with his disciples, and they come across this village in the middle of nowhere. It's a very peculiar place for a village. And he walks in, all of a sudden sees 10 lepers standing there. And the lepers are way off, and they yell to him. Now, what we realize in that moment is, because there are lepers, if you don't know what leprosy is, it was this terrible disease back in the day where your body would begin to decay and rot, and your appendages would begin to fall off on you, and you would begin and you would die.

And there was no cure for a leprosy. So as a result, what they would do is, in the book of Leviticus, they commanded that all the lepers would be driven

out, and they would live in these colonies, out away from everybody. And if anyone came near you, they would have to bang pots and pans, and they would yell, "Unclean, unclean!" So here comes Jesus, and he's walking into this village. And it's not just a village, it's a leper colony.

And all of a sudden, these 10 men, one of whom is a Samaritan, which is very odd, because Jewish people and Samaritans didn't blend together. They were mortal enemies. They were dogs and cats. They did not get along. But they had this common disease, and as a result, that brought them together. And in their disease, that was the great equalizer; they lived in this village, and it was a place of desperation.

And Jesus walks in, in verse 13, it says, "They lifted up their voices, saying, Jesus, master, have mercy on us."

Like, heal us. Come on, we've heard about you.

And Jesus, in his smooth style, like he always does, he goes, "Go show yourself to the priests."

So the men say, "Okay." The lepers turn, and they begin to walk, and it says, "As they were going, they began they were cleansed."

And as they were cleansed, one of them is the Samaritan. He does a button hook. He stops, and he turns around, and he goes back to Jesus, because he's a Samaritan. He has no business going to the priests of Israel, because they didn't like the Samaritans. So he turns around, and he, as the others kept going, and it says he was praising God with this loud voice, and he fell at Jesus' feet, and he's giving him thanks.

And Jesus asked these rhetorical questions, like, "So it's just you, huh? There were nine other guys that got healed, but they didn't seem to be very thankful about this. But you came back. Is it only you?"

And what he's saying in this moment, he's saying, "This guy right here, he gets it." This non-Jewish person, this Samaritan, this one that the religious ruling

class, the people that I know something you don't know crowd, Jesus looks at him and says, "This guy gets it."

The one who's been rejected by all those people.

And he tells them, he says, "Stand up. Rise. Go on your way. Your faith has made you well."

So what's going on in this story? You see in verse 14, it says, "They were all cleansed," right? When it said, "All the lepers were cleansed as they were walking towards the high priest." It's a Greek word there. It means "katharizo." That's where we get our word "katharsis" from. It means, like, to make clean or to purify. Now they are ceremonially clean. The implication is they've had this massive physical healing.

So when the other nine go on their merry way, the Samaritan returns, and this soul-wrenching expression of gratitude, he falls at Jesus' feet. And what does Jesus say? He says, "Rise. Your faith has made you well."

Now wait a second, because I thought he was already well.

Because a second ago, he had already been healed, and that's why he came back.

But the Greek word that Jesus is using here is not the same one. He's using "sozo," which is, you don't care. It's a Greek word that means "salvation."

Saved. And what Jesus is saying in here is he's delivered. He's saying, he's declaring that you've not just had a physical restoration. You have had a spiritual restoration. You have had a spiritual salvation.

All ten received the same healing grace from Jesus, but only one received the saving grace from Jesus. Why? What was different? The nine men were overjoyed. They were even grateful. They had gratitude. They were happy. But their gratitude was transactional. They were happy over the gift that they had been given, understandably. But this man, the Samaritan, came back. He fell at Jesus' feet, and he was demonstrating this gospel-fueled gratitude.

Because what he was experiencing there wasn't transactional. His gratitude was relational.

That he came back to Jesus, his gratitude was aimed and anchored in the giver of the gift, not the gift itself.

His gratitude was aimed at Jesus, and that's what saved him, that his gratitude was in Jesus.

Now, wait a second, because you read the passage. And in the passage, Jesus said, after he's fallen on his feet, he said, "It's your faith that made you well, not your gratitude." It was his faith.

But what is gratitude in that moment? Yes, the Samaritan's gratitude it wasn't just good manners.

It was worshipful. He fell on his face before Jesus as this external expression of an inward faith,

this saving faith made visible through this act of worship called gratitude. Have you ever thought of gratitude as an act of worship? That's what we do. When we sing songs and we worship, we are giving gratitude.

It is the external expression, the overflow of an inward reality in our hearts. Thank you, Lord. Praise you, Lord.

Good God, none but you is good.

I find this stuff. When I read this, it's so convicting, man. It's so convicting about what we get, what can hold my gratitude, and what cannot hold my gratitude.

It puts its finger in the middle, so let me ask you a question here. How many of you, and I'm not talking to any of you in this room that are struggling with having your life turned upside down, or you've lost a loved one, or anything like this,

but what I am saying this is most of you are in a place right now,

that you either you're in a place in your life, or you have something, or you live somewhere, or you're married to someone that at one point in your life you desperately prayed that the Lord would bring you to this place.

You desperately played, provide this for me, Lord. You did and you were convinced that Lord, if you brought that to me, it would make me happy, it would bring it together, whether it was the house you have, the job you have, the spouse you have, the kids you have, whatever it is, that season of life and you prayed and God gave it to you and you were so grateful for a minute.

It's like a piece of fruit stripe gum. It lasts about 45 seconds, right?

Y'all old enough to know what I'm talking about.

It lasts for about 45 seconds, but now that you're here, now that you've gotten the thing that you want, the thing that you were promised would be the thing.

You're already looking over the horizon and saying, "Lord, bring me there. "Give me that thing, and I can't be happy till I get there." Why is that? Why are we that way?

So you'll never meet a happy person who isn't a grateful person, and you'll never meet an unhappy person who's a grateful person.

But you'll also never meet a person that has sustainable gratitude, like a gratitude that will last longer than those 40 seconds, 45 seconds, whose gratitude wasn't anchored in their relationship with Jesus, more in their relationship with Jesus than the things that he does for them or gives them, period.

It's not that the things that Jesus gives us are bad. It's just, it's not.

It's not. It's just that they're things.

They're just things. And when those things that you prayed for they reveal themselves to be just things, you start smelling something.

You start smelling in the disappointment for what they are. There's something behind the walls.

But it gets stronger as your in gratitude begins to permeate your life.

Let me ask you a question.

Those nine lepers that went on and got themselves declared clean by the high priests, how long do you think they lasted before you they started wanting something different in their life?

How long do you think those nine lepers rode the wave of that healing that they got before they started looking like, "Oh, I need this in my life," or, "I need a bigger house," or, "A different boat," or, "This," or, "That," the other thing? How long do you think? Not very long, I bet.

I'm not saying that wasn't wonderful.

I don't hear what I'm not saying.

It is okay to be grateful for the gifts God gives us.

But if that is the end of the story, we are worshiping the things of God and not God himself.

And we will find ourselves in a very dangerous place, a place where we will be marked by ingratitude.

See, the gift of gratitude anchored in the person of Jesus is that it's sturdy, and we need it.

Because what happens is eventually there's gonna come a day when Jesus doesn't give us the things we want.

When God is running us through a trial, and where God once felt like his hand was wide open, they are closed. And the things that we need so desperate for our life, God is saying, "No, not yet," or, "Hold on," or, "Wait."

And when my gratitude and my appreciation of the Lord is anchored in the things he delivers, guess what? It becomes a very mercurial thing. But when it's anchored in Jesus himself, when it's anchored in the person of Christ, when I go through those seasons, I say, "Lord, you know, you see, you'll carry me through." I get it.

So I love this.

I want this. I want a gospel-fueled gratitude.

But I'll be honest with you, I know my heart.

And I know your heart, because I know my heart.

And I'm like those nine guys.

I love Jesus, I do.

I've devoted my life to him, and I wanted to have devoted my life to him. But I love the things he gives me sometimes more than him.

There are times where I will chase those things that he will give me and can provide for me more than I will just sit and be in his presence.

And that's a scary thing in light of this, because what does that leave me? Where does that leave me?

See, thankfully, before God calls us to a gospel-fueled gratitude, he calls us to a gospel of grace.

And here is the picture.

Our passage opens up in verse 11. Jesus is with his apostles. Remember, they're passing between Samaria and Galilee. And that description isn't just geographical, it's actually theological. Because what Luke is saying in that moment, Jesus is traveling in an in-between place,

in a deserted place. It's not Israel, it's not Samaria, it's a wasteland.

It's a godless place.

It's a place where only lepers would go,

people that were being rejected and were to live in isolation.

But then it gets even deeper. Jesus, he's not there by accident.

You think he just happened upon a village? No.

He enters this leper colony, this place where creation, God's design, was being unraveled.

It was a place of creation, of chaos.

But thankfully, what the world sees is chaos. When the world sees chaos, it sees it as evidence of God's absence.

But to Jesus, chaos is the arena in which God moves.

And Jesus willfully was on this mission, and he steps into this chaos. What's he doing there? Why is he there? Because he's pursuing the unclean.

He's finding the most rejected, unwanted.

And he finds these 10, one of whom was a Samaritan, which is the worst of the worst through the lens of a Jewish person.

And the crazy part is, when Jesus heals them, he healed them knowing that none of them deserved it, but he also healed them knowing that he would be forgotten by nine of them.

And he did it anyway.

That's the heart of the giver, of the gift. That's Jesus.

And we see this.

Because if I wanna have a gospel-fueled gratitude, I have to have an encounter with the heart of the giver.

And what it's saying in Luke 17, it's a picture of his heart, but not just for the lepers, it's the picture of God's heart for you. It's a picture of God's heart for me.

Because when Jesus became man, he chose to leave heaven. And to be born in this stable, he stepped in this in-between place,

this broken world, this way station between heaven and hell.

And like the lepers, Jesus chose to be rejected.

And when he climbed up on that cross, he chose to be broken and to absorb our spiritual leprosy.

And after the resurrection, when Jesus goes up to the Father and he sits and he ascends and he sits on the throne,

he turns around and he sends his Holy Spirit.

And for those of you who are in Christ, we have this indwelling Holy Spirit. What does that do for us? It's not just an air freshener.

It doesn't come in here and just make,

distract us from the bad smells in our life.

The Holy Spirit comes, and it tracks down what's dead behind the walls.

And sometimes it has to rip those things out and cut away things to get to a vulnerable place, to where we can see it. And we can see the ingratitude that lays there. And how does Jesus replace the ingratitude that lies deep in our hearts? How does he rip that out?

By revealing more of himself.

By revealing more of himself,

the expulsive power of a higher affection.

We quit looking at these trinkets, and we see the goodness and the love of God.

He reveals not only what he has already done, but what he reveals as well. My heart might be drifting, Jesus has a hold of it, and he'll never let it go.

That he is a God that sees me as one of the nine lepers that goes to, on my merry way, forgetting the gifts I've been given, and he will never let me go.

And the more he reveals his heart to me, the heart of grace, the more I am unraveled in gratitude before him. The more I see what he's doing, the more I see what he has done, what he is doing, and what he has promised to do in my life, the more my heart melts in gratitude.

And we surrender to this,

the air in our world changes as grace fills the room.

And we realize that gratitude isn't something that we achieve, but it's something that we receive.

It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that has come to open the eyes of our heart, that we may see the height and depth and breadth of the love we have been given in Christ, that we know that nothing can take us away from that, from the palm of his hand. Not our own ingratitude,

not my own inability or unwillingness to see the giver of the gifts, but to wallow in the gifts I've been given. And that is a picture of grace. And that is something that only Jesus can offer. Amen.