

JESUS BLESSES A THANKFUL PERSON

Luke 17:11-19

Key Verse: 17:19

“Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well.’”

I was surprised to be asked to give this Thanksgiving message, but I agreed and said that I would do it. Then, suddenly, I became very sick last month with a heart problem. It was serious, and I did not think I could proceed with this message. But, God has enabled me to continue with writing the message by his grace alone. I have been walking every day for about 30 minutes and I am feeling better. This is God’s grace and healing for me. I can only thank God, and praise God, that I could be here today with you, and I thank you all for your prayers!

We are studying Luke’s gospel this week to commemorate our National Holiday, Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving has roots going back to the days of the Pilgrims and Native Americans coming together to enjoy God’s provisions in the new world. Back in the 1950’s a television show, *Father Knows Best*, was popular. In this short clip, we understand that the family suffered some unexpected problems with their Thanksgiving meal plans, and let’s see how the family handles their situation. (*Video*)

Thanksgiving is a special time to celebrate our families, love one another, and to thank God for our blessings and national freedoms. In many countries, we would not even be allowed to gather to worship like this, so we have many things to be thankful for. Thanksgiving is a time to remember his deep grace of forgiveness and for all of his many favors and provisions. Through today’s passage let’s remember in our hearts what God has done for us personally, as a congregation and as a nation.

I. Jesus Heals Ten Men with Leprosy Out of His Mercy (11-14)

In this passage, Jesus encounters ten men in a no-man’s land, the area between Galilee and Samaria. Verse 11 says, **“Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.”** While this was an area most people avoided, Jesus chose to travel directly through it. It shows that Jesus did not harbor the same bigotries that society held. He may have even decided to take this route specifically to meet the 10 suffering lepers. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him (12a). The ten guys were dwelling there burdened by misery, suffering and pain. They had developed the

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terrible and dreaded disease of leprosy. Leprosy was debilitating and fatal. It was highly contagious and feared. Leviticus 13:45-46 says, **“Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.”** The lepers were ostracized from society and they lost their affiliation with the temple, their jobs, families, friends, and possessions. They were left to languish in forgotten places like the land between Galilee and Samaria, a place that no one wanted to visit.

Though we are not physical lepers, we all have spiritual leprosy due to our sins. Leprosy has been compared to sin because of the similarities between the two. Like leprosy, sin is contagious. For example, when one person begins to complain, his or her complaints quickly spread and infect others and a complaining fellowship is formed. Like leprosy, sin is numbing. The first time we commit a sin, we feel the pain of a stricken conscience and become aware of God’s punishment. But when nothing happens right away, we become bolder to commit sin. In a short time, our conscience is seared as though with a hot iron and we feel no pain even though we commit great sin. As leprosy gradually disfigures a person’s body, so sin disfigures the image of God in people. Sin makes people very sick with selfishness, lustful desire, greed, pride, ingratitude, and so on. As a result, both sin and leprosy wreak havoc and destruction.

The men with leprosy were completely helpless to heal their disease. But they must have heard about Jesus, who had healed people with leprosy. And now Jesus was passing through their own region. They made the most of their opportunity and came to Jesus by faith. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, **“Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”** These ten men worked closely together, like friends regardless of ethnic prejudices. While they were rejected by society, at least they still had one another for company and support. We might not have seen them as friends if they were healthy. The ten lepers respected the law by keeping at a safe distance from the non-lepers, and they shouted in unison, demonstrating great effort and teamwork, to make sure that they could be heard.

Jesus heard their humble and sincere plea for pity, and had mercy on them immediately. Jesus hears our prayers for pity, healing and help as well. He hears us and begins to act on our behalf. Whatever we need, better health, help with a test for school, wisdom, someone to marry, a baby, a new job, etc., Jesus hears us and blesses us even beyond our expectations.

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Verse 14 states, **“When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed.”** Jesus gave them unusual instructions, to go and show themselves to the priests even though they were not yet healed (Lev 13:17). Jesus wanted them to express faith through obedience. If anyone wants to receive Jesus’ blessing, they should be ready to obey his words. Though the men were still very ill, they obeyed Jesus. Their obedience shows their faith in the authority of his words.

As the lepers obeyed Jesus’ instructions, great changes occurred within each one of them. Their skin, appendages and everything were restored completely like new! It was a miracle! They could join the temple and reunite with society. They could see their dear families again. They could go back to school or work. They experienced so much healing power, love and grace, that they were given a whole new life. When Jesus solves a problem, he does so completely. He did not give minor assistance to the lepers like sandwiches or some ointment to dull the pain. Jesus goes to the root of the problem and addresses it fully, perfectly and wonderfully. Jesus is our merciful and great healer. Amen.

II. Two Responses to Jesus’ Healing (15-19)

Jesus revealed himself as the divine healer personally to the ten men. All of them should have opened their spiritual eyes widely to see who Jesus was and to give thanks to him. However, they responded like polar opposites. To thank, or not to thank, that is the question. Verses 15 and 16 tell us about the first man’s response: **“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.”** This man’s expression shows that he was completely overwhelmed with praise to God and thanks to Jesus. He was so joyful for being healed and for knowing Jesus, our healer personally. He was independent. He did not act in the same manner as all his friends. He was his own person, so he did not need to follow the crowd or be influenced by the bad peer pressure of the ungrateful nine. He stood up for what he believed and followed his heart. His humble and sincere offering of thanks and praise was a beautiful prayer and brought glory and honor to God. He gets an A plus in thanksgiving. What about the other nine?

Let’s read verses 17-18 together, **“Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?’”** Jesus lamented over nine of the healed men. They

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should have returned and given thanks to Jesus, remembering what he had done for them. There may have been many reasons. Most likely, they really wanted to get their certificates from the priest so they could resume social life. Suddenly they had many things to do with their new lives and they were so busy. One might have gone to visit his family, another to see his former fiancé and a third to the clothing store perhaps to buy a new suit and shoes. But whatever the reason, their absence was troubling to Jesus in light of the heartfelt and deep thanks pouring out of the one thankful man's soul. The lack of appreciation from the nine was like a slap in the face to Jesus and his gracious and powerful healing. It was disrespectful and rude. It revealed that the nine guys who hurried on their way were still sick spiritually. They somehow were too blind to see Jesus as their wonderful friend and healer. Jesus was astonished and disappointed by their cold absence. Where were they? We can ask ourselves, would I be one of the busy nine, or like the thankful one?

It was an issue to Jesus that the Jewish men were just so nonchalant and indifferent, while the Samaritan was so exemplary in his sincere praise of God, and thanks to Jesus. Jesus dealt with the other nine's ingratitude as a serious offense to God. Historically, God who brought his people out of captivity in Egypt in a powerful and dramatic way did not look kindly on his people who were full of ingratitude and complaints. Ingratitude and complaining are great sins. Romans 1:21 says, **"For 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."** God deals seriously with those with a complaining spirit. 1 Corinthians 10:10 says, **"And do not grumble, as some of them did – and were killed by the destroying angel."** It is very important not to grumble, but to be thankful to God. Of course, if we have a legitimate concern or issue about anything, we should always feel free to express it with a Pastor or Elder and pray about it. It is good to address concerns, but we should not develop a spirit of one who complains and grumbles. Like the ten healed men, the tremendous gift of forgiveness and restoration that has been bestowed upon each of us deserves a whole lifetime and more of sincere thanksgiving and praise from the heart, never ending.

It turns out that Jesus was not quite finished with his blessings in this episode. There was more to come for the one who returned. Let's read verse 19 together, **"Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'"** Here we learn the essence of faith: it is a relationship with Jesus characterized by thanksgiving. All ten men who came to Jesus had faith to cry out for healing. But

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nine of them did not praise God or thank Jesus. Their faith was incomplete and their relationship with God and Jesus was broken. They received healing but no more. On the other hand, this one thankful man was blessed further by Jesus. Jesus declared him “well.” Being well included physical health as well as mental, emotional, social and spiritual healing. He could always remember his precious time together with Jesus and his special blessing. His blessing is priceless and far better than whatever it was the other nine were doing. He had found the fountain of blessing that is ever flowing. Why drink from the fountain of blessing one time and stop, when you could drink from it again and again throughout your lifetime? Simply speaking, the thankful man had an ongoing relationship with Jesus. He could grow in knowing Jesus; his faith could grow stronger and stronger and he could rise to new heights.

III. How Can We be Thankful and Blessed?

In this passage we learn the significance of remembering God’s grace and giving thanks to him. This is the way we can bear God’s blessings. Our National Holiday of Thanksgiving is this week. It is a day steeped in history and prayers of gratitude. President Lincoln issued a proclamation on October 3, 1863, during the Civil War. He saw the victories of the Union Army in Gettysburg and Vicksburg as blessings from God. He was thankful that God used him to keep the nation together. He also was full of thanks for God’s protection during the war, in that no foreign country took an opportunity to invade us. Lincoln could have been full of complaints, thinking, “Why do I have to be the President during the Civil War?” But he did not grumble. Instead, he encouraged fellow Americans to “solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledge” God with thanksgiving for his blessings. He declared: "I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwells in the heavens." When Lincoln remembered what God had done, he was thankful even in the midst of the Civil War.

The Bible says, **“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”** (1 Th 5:16-18). The problem is, how can we be thankful in all circumstances? It is possible when we remember what God has done for us. It is true that we live in a difficult and stressful world. We see Christianity doubted, questioned and attacked more and more. There is the brutality of insurgents and terrorists in many parts of the

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Middle-East and North Africa. We all have plenty of our own personal struggles and issues to be concerned with. It is not so easy to remember God's grace and blessings, thankfulness does not always come naturally. We need to work intentionally to remember God's great blessings, but when we do so, we can be full of thanksgiving to God. Like Abraham Lincoln, we can look up and thank and praise God for the many blessings he has given, even in the midst of hardships. The character, George Bailey, in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life," was troubled by a greedy oppressor and he had huge legal and financial problems. But by the help of the angel Clarence, he could realize how many good things God had done in and through him. Then he could say, "It really is a wonderful life." And his influence of thanksgiving was a good influence to the whole community, and all of his problems dissolved.

When I began to prepare for this message, I found a hint of complaint in my heart. I wondered, "How did I get myself into this? Why didn't I say no when I was asked?" But when I remembered God's grace, little by little, a spirit of thanksgiving began to well up in my soul. I have received a lot of one-sided grace from God. As a college student at UIC, I had trouble with Algebra and Math in general. It could have prohibited me from graduating and getting a proper job. At that moment, Beth Joung met me in the UIC library. I kept trying to move around her, saying, "Excuse me," but every time she moved right in front of me again. After dancing around in this way for a while, she finally asked me, "Would you like to study the Bible?" She introduced me to Dr. James Joung and we began to study Genesis. The Genesis stories came to life for me. I experienced God's presence and found new peace and joy. Dr. James also patiently taught Algebra to me. Once, he even stayed awake all night to help me prepare for an exam, and then he went to work. This was a great help to me to graduate and go on to a successful career. Whenever I remember this grace, my heart is moved to be thankful.

In 1983, I went to S. Korea with Dr. Samuel Lee in a group of American students. God helped me to share my life testimony in the various cities, and finally before a large auditorium in Seoul. Through this wonderful experience, and many servants' prayers, I met Jesus very personally in Seoul. It was a miracle and life-changing event for which, I am forever thankful. I was just a sinful student from the south side, who did not like Algebra, but God had many graceful plans for me, and he still does.

I also studied the Bible with Pastor Ron Ward. He bore with my fearfulness and neediness and prayed with me a lot. He introduced me to lovely Maria. In

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1990, by God's grace I could marry her. She came from a large and wonderful family. She is humorous, wise, very prayerful and a great blessing. We prayed for a son and God heard our prayers by sending Paul, Joseph and Stephen. They are three amazing, witty and bright young men. God then heard our prayers for a daughter, and he sent us Isabella, who is so charming, intelligent and kind. At Truman college we were able to invite students to Bible study with wonderful people like M. Rebekah Chung and Diana Guzman. Boman Ou studied the Bible with me for three years. He came faithfully to our worship services and then returned to China. In an amazing display of God's providence, he went to Quang Dong, the very same city as Khadijah. Now they are mutually encouraging one another in China.

We all have lives full of such grace and God's blessings. It is good for all of us to remember what God has done personally. It is also good to remember what God has done in our community and nation. God has fed our weary souls with gracious words of God in a season of spiritual famine in the land. God has heard all of our prayers and healed many sick people. He has raised many young student disciples of Jesus. God has upheld and blessed our missionaries in various places and prospered their lives and ministries. God protected our nation from many kinds of attacks and is preserving our Christian values.

In life, it is easier to just run off like the majority of ungrateful and complaining folks, like a fish floating downstream. But let's buck that trend and be thankful, full of praise and worship for Jesus. Let's remember what God has done for us and give thanks to him. Let's give thanks to God for our graceful friendships and our family members, for our rich history in Christ and for the saints and family members who went before us. When we are full of thanks and praise like the thankful healed man, then we can bear God's blessings. We can have peace and joy in our hearts and find the strength to keep advancing the gospel message on the campuses and never give up. We can be the salt of the earth, the light of the world and a city on a hill. May God help us to remember Jesus and his marvelous saving grace and be thankful in all circumstances.