

Thanksgiving: Cultivating a Heart of Praise
Luke 17:11-19

Introduction: We live in a day of modern convenience unparalleled in both a universal and historical scope. Consider that 100 years ago, life expectancy for men was just over **48**, while women lived a smidge past **51** (fill in your own blank for the disparity of the two). 90% of doctors practiced medicine without a college education, the leading cause of death was heart disease, pneumonia/influenza, and tuberculosis, and only half of American children 5-19 years old were enrolled in school that ended formally by the eighth grade. You could buy marijuana, heroin, and morphine over the counter at the local drugstore (oops, apparently that HASN'T changed). In 1940, half of America lacked the trifecta of home comfort: hot/cold water, a tub or shower, and a flush toilet.¹ Adding to this profound discomfort, there are confirmed reports that there was no Target, Starbucks, Old Navy, or Disneyland, which pretty much means my family would have simply stayed in the house all day!

What's the point? We are in want for nothing, especially by comparison. We have choices in food variety and quantity, have access to unprecedented medical care, enjoy clothing that not only serves a function but actually fits culturally, have governmentally funded education through college, we have access to music and music lessons, can gain information in seconds, can shop from our homes and have anything delivered, can communicate visually, instantly with any part of the globe, and many of us have plans far into our 80's, not simply hoping to make it to 50. The question to ask is: **has all of this advantage, comfort, and growth of security created a thankful people, nation, or church?** In other words, have we seen an uptick of humble praise to God for all that He has and continues to give and grateful outlook of our youth that has been given everything to them. Or have we seen people becoming **angry, ungrateful, entitled, and depressed**, seeing parents who gave them everything as "nuisances", focused on the shortcomings and slights of their upbringing, and what they are lacking in terms of "everyone" else around them. Ingratitude, or thanklessness, is a rampant problem (not for any one generation mind you, but with us all), and I want to impress on you this morning that it is NOT A NEW PROBLEM, nor is it a secondary one. Thanklessness has everything to do with what we think about God and ourselves, what we believe we deserve, and how God operates.

Consider for a moment **2 Timothy 3:1-5**

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

Notice that this list is not only alive and well today, it was absolutely prophesied to be so. What we see today is not the anomaly but certainty. **Second**, notice that ingratitude is tied together with a litany of other sinful fruit. When selfishness is unchecked and hearts left hard, this list manifests together, feeding off each other, searching for answers to deep and sad problems, but only finding others to blame for their misdiagnosed misery. **Last**, these are not small or secondary issues, but those that are the heart of the gospel. This list is not compatible with gospel transformed, Jesus loving, God glorifying, people loving, and kingdom effective people. In fact, dishonoring God and failing to thank

¹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-life-was-like-100-years-ago-2015-12>

Him come from the same futile minds and darkened hearts (Romans 1:21). So we come to a story of ingratitude, mixed with unexpected and uncommon thankfulness.

God's Mercy: The Basis of our Thanksgiving

Luke 17:11 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 distance¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.

A Geographical Consideration (11)

A lot has happened in between Luke 17:10 and 17:11. Luke does not mention these events, but we see them in the book of John. At the end of John 10, Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah (which would have been in the winter, around December). He claimed that God the Father and He were One (John 10:30 - Different people, but same in essence and nature). At this declaration, the Jews picked up stones to put Him to death (10:31) and sought to arrest Him (10:39). As a result, Jesus left the area of Judea, where the Pharisees had jurisdiction, and went *across the Jordan River* to the area of Perea, where **Luke 13:22-17:10** took place. At the conclusion of His discourse, He received a message that would set into motion the events that lead to His triumphal entry.

John 11 tells the story of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus would be treading in land where people sought to arrest Him, so much so that even the disciples believed that if they went back, they would die as a result (see Thomas' comment in John 11:16). But this was not yet time for all of that. Jesus healed Lazarus and it became such a public spectacle that not only could He not be arrested, but it created a city wide buzz about Him. For the sake of our narrative in Luke, NOTE that the chief priests and Pharisees gathered and **made plans to put Him to death** (John 11:53).

"Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there He stayed with His disciples." Luke 17:54

Jesus was a fugitive, so every move that He made had to well thought out. As we pick back up in Luke 17:11, the note Luke gives us a note of geographical significance. Jesus is heading to Jerusalem for Passover, starting in Ephraim (see the Map on the screen). It then says He was moving *between Samaria and Galilee*. Notice that He was moving **North to go South!** This was not a practice of misdirection, but a strategic way Jesus could evade capture and get to Jerusalem at the exact day of His appearing. There would be Pilgrim saints travelling in a band that He would connect with, and they would have travelled on the Kings Highway on the *other side of the Jordan*. This was Jesus, in His humanity, knowing how His culture worked and shrewdly worked within its confines to accomplish His purposes. It is here that we pick up the story of the **10 lepers**.

A Cry for Mercy (12-13)

Jesus entered a non-descript village on this route, and was confronted from afar by 10 lepers who cried out for mercy. The term *leprosy* would have encapsulated a number of skin ailments, but the most devastating was today referred to as **Hansen's disease**. It was a common enough condition that Leviticus 13-14 gave regulations to those who suffered from it. It was believed to be communicated by touch and breath. It attacks the skin, peripheral nerves (especially around the wrists, elbows, and knees), and mucus membrane. Forming lesions on the skin, it can disfigure facial features by collapsing the nose and folding the skin. Because there would be a loss of feeling in the extremities, those infected would wear away fingers and toes without knowing it. This disease was greatly **feared, caused one to**

be deemed unclean, had a high level of shame, banished the infected away from family and friends, and left these waiting to die a lonely, painful, and certain death. One could imagine why they were so motivated to call to Jesus for healing as He entered into the town.

Notice *how* they called to Him. They had heard of His fame, and realized that he was **Master**, or one who has authority. They were clear about their desperation, and they could call out to the Messiah on the basis of **mercy**, meaning the only basis for Jesus to heal them was His love, nothing that they could offer. Mercy is NOT GETTING WHAT WE DESERVE. They knew that they did not deserve healing, but knew that mercy was the only way, through the LORD, master Jesus.

An Outpouring of mercy (14)

Jesus heard their cry, and responded differently than He had done previously. Instead of reaching out to them and touching the unclean, He gave them a simple command, "**Go and show yourselves to the priests.**" This was not some odd test of faith or a twisted joke. It was Jesus being fully aware of the plight of this hurting group of people. **Leviticus 14** gave specific instructions (an 8 day purification process) that would allow one healed from leprosy the opportunity to enter back into formal worship and familial culture. This was Jesus pouring out love on a group of marginalized, wounded, and hopeless people who asked Him to. Jesus again shows not only the nature of His love but also the extent of His power, as He healed at a word, and did so immediately.

God's Grace: The Outpouring of our Praise & Thanks

Luke 17:15 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.

The Unexpected Twist in the Story (15)

Its at this point of the story that we stop to ask ourselves a few questions. The **first**, is how you would feel if this was you. In desperation you called out to Jesus, but there was part of you that did not think it would work (much like the way we pray today). Yet as Jesus commanded you, you turn around and at once the flakey, whitened, and receding skin on your hands is restored. The sores on your body vanish, and your nose returns to its normal shape. Would it be disbelief, wonderment, and exhilaration? **Second**, what would be your response? I'm sure there would be a quickened gait, a burst of energy, and the desire to tell people. You'd want to find a mirror, find your mother, and go to the local priest, getting the process going (shave my head already!). There would be a flood of emotions that would overcome ones body. All of these would be understandable, and in the sense that they were obedient to the command Jesus gave, they did EXACTLY what Jesus asked. But there was something missing. Not secondarily, but fundamentally. This captured by the most unlikely of those healed.

The Essentials of Thanksgiving (16)

It seems clear that of the 10 who were healed, 9 were Jewish by heritage. There is a note given by Luke that one of them was a **Samaritan**. We remember that typically Jews and Samaritans would not intermix, but because those with leprosy would be put out of the city together, it makes sense that a newfound unity would trump old traditions. The Samaritans were spiritual half-breeds, Jews who intermarried with foreigners and mixed up both race and religion. They had an alternate place of worship, and were detested by Jewish people of the day. Yet it was this Samaritan that turned back when the other 9 continued on, moving on with life but forgetting the One who gave them mercy.

This Samaritan turned back and with a loud voice (the words were *phones megales*, the same idea of a megaphone - this guy was shouting in a way that Jesus heard, and everyone else around). He returned

praise in a spontaneous way, not out of obligation as much as a natural response to mercy given. Not only that, but He fell at Jesus' feet, burrowing his face into the sweaty extremities. This was an act and sign of worship, which would happen only when one of acknowledged lowliness would recognize a king or master. As he was declaring this praise, he continually **was giving thanks**. The other nine may have even said "thank you's" as they rushed off, but this Samaritan demonstrated the fact that He truly understood who He was, Who healed him, and what just happened.

So that begs the question for us: *what does it mean for us to be truly thankful? What is necessary for thankfulness to be genuine and pleasing to the Lord?*

- **Thankfulness' ultimate object is God in Christ** - This means that God must be the fundamental and foundational end of our gratitude. We are thankful **to** others (parents, spouses, servants, etc), but the ultimate source is God Himself. It is an acknowledgement in life that things come from His hand, and nothing happens outside of His sovereign will. When we fail to acknowledge God in worshipful thankfulness, we communicate that we believe we do not need Him or that we deserve the gift.
Not only is God the object, but Jesus becomes the means. The only way we can truly praise and worship God is through the work of Jesus on the cross. By Him taking wrath of sin and giving us His righteousness, we can now gain access to God and give Him praise. Notice the same rhythm in the following passages:

Colossians 3:15-17 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. **And be thankful.** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with **thankfulness** in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

1 Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory **through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

2 Corinthians 2:14 But thanks be to God, who **in Christ** always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

- **True Thankfulness Recognizes Our Entire Life is a product of mercy** - This is a continual remembrance that we deserve judgment alone, so anything and everything comes from the gracious hand of God. We seek to give thanks to God for everything, knowing that we receive everything from His hand. This means that we must review our standing before God often, which should lead to continual thanksgiving, praise, and continual dependence on His grace.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, **give thanks in all circumstances;** for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- **True Thankfulness and praise are NOT dependent on positive circumstances** - How do you know you are truly thankful in your life to God? It is not in simply responding to positive things in life - Hallmark has created a whole industry for that. No, being truly thankful as a response to God's mercy and grace means we can have thanksgiving as the **default setting** of our life, the first response out of our mouths. Thankfulness recognizes God is doing all things to bring Himself glory, even if that means hard circumstances in the short term.

Our Forgetfulness: The Attitude of Ingratitude

Luke 17:17 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?"¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

The Probing Questions (17-18)

Jesus is the master of the probing question, and He still gets to the heart today, using His Word through His Spirit to get behind the curtain of the masks we put on to help us understand what is really going on. He asked the Samaritan man who came back praising and thanking Him **three rhetorical questions** designed to expose what was missing with the other nine. By no means was this Jesus unclear about what really happened, but just as God asked Adam and Eve where they were after they sinned, Jesus' questions were designed to expose the heart.

So what happened to these nine? How did they miss the mark so badly? Why did only 10% of the dramatically healed acknowledge God through praise? The same reason we miss Him today. **They called out to Him for what He could give to and do for them, but only one truly wanted Jesus!** True thanks and praise comes out of seeing and savoring Jesus Christ, not reveling in the gifts He can give us. The nine took the gifts and ran, not even taking time to turn around and praise the one who gave them. The nine were the over-stimulated kids on Christmas morning or at the birthday party that are inundated with a mountain of gifts and get wrapped up in them, rather than enjoying the one who gave it to them. This comes from a heart that sees Jesus as a **genie in a bottle**. No one worshipped the genie, they simply wanted him around for the three wishes.

Is this how we see Jesus? Are our prayers relegated to the times we are asking for things from Him, evaluating our affections based on if He produces or not? Are we the type of people who pray at meals only, thanking Him for food in a cursory way? Thanksgiving as praise is the difference between writing a "thank you" note to your relative who sent a present for your wedding vs. the desire to spend time with your groomsman before the wedding. One is out of obligation with very little relationship, and once its given, is easily forgotten. The other has to do with a desire to enjoy the presence of men who are special in your life. The delight and enjoyment are categorically different. God is not looking for "thank you" notes from us, He wants to be enjoyed. The tearful response of the Samaritan brought Him glory, while the others quickly forgot Him.

The Fruit of Salvation (19)

Jesus' last statement to the Samaritan bears consideration. Jesus commanded him to get up and go, for his faith had made him **well**. There are several words Jesus could have used if He meant that the man was physically healed alone: *katharizo* (cleansed) or *iaomai* (healed) were both used in verses 14 and 15 already. But the word Jesus used was **sozo**, which is the term used in the NT when referring to being saved from sin (Matt. 1:21; 10:22, 19:25, 24:13; Luke 7:50, 8:12, 13:23; 19:10; John 3:17; Acts 2:21, 47, 4:12; Eph. 2:8; Titus 3:5, etc). Besides this, the man was already physically healed, just as the other 9 had been. what Jesus was referring to was this most unlikely man exercised saving faith, trusting in Jesus not only for the restoration of his hands and feet, but the restoration of his soul. This tells gives us a few practical insights into our thanksgiving and praise:

- **True Thanksgiving is a Fruit of saving faith** - In other words, when we come to Christ by faith alone, trusting in Him for salvation, a natural overflow of that new relationship will be praise and thankfulness. Like someone who is healed in the last stage of cancer or saved out of a deadly crash, one never gets tired of thanking and making much of the physician or hero who brought salvation. **The reverse is also true**. A lack of thanksgiving and praise of God in Christ

would signal that we may not have believed in Christ as our Savior and Lord. Thanksgiving and praise are not secondary issues, then.

- **Thanksgiving repulses depression and anxiety -**

Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; **do not be anxious about anything**, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This offers us a powerful prayer and promise, that we can have peace in the midst of anxiety in such a way that the world will see it and be amazed because its the type of peace that does not compute apart from a work of Christ Jesus. But we can read through and memorize this passage and MISS a very important phrase: *but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving*** let your requests be made known to God. This means that during times of uncertainty, times when we feel God has abandoned us, or that He is not near, or we cannot handle what is going on, or we feel like the weight of the world is bearing down on us, a **solution** is to begin by rejoicing in the goodness of God, continue with making our requests known to God, all with a mindset of focusing on the blessings we are thankful for. In doing this, Christ guards our hearts from what is untrue and directs us back to what is real.

This is a discipline like anything else, that a believer in Jesus can cultivate. So the question is: are we a thankful people? Thankfulness will breed contentment, humility, and praise to God. Is that what you experience everyday? When we remember our position in Christ, that we are products of His mercy alone, we can respond each day like the Samaritan man with leprosy, thanking Him in loud voice and burrowing our face in His feet.