

JESUS BLESSES A THANKFUL SAMARITAN

Luke 17:11-19

Key Verses: 17:17-19

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

The Bible says: “...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1Th 5:18). Giving thanks in all circumstances is God’s will for us. But not many of us can say that we give thanks in all circumstances. In one episode of the show, “the Simpsons,” Bart is asked to say grace before a meal. He prays, “Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves; so thanks for nothing.”

In this passage, Jesus heals ten men from their leprosy. But only one man comes back to thank him. Jesus asked, “Where are the other nine?” Then he blessed further the man who came back. I pray that God may help us to learn how to thank God in all circumstances.

I. JESUS, MASTER, HAVE PITY ON US! (11-14)

Look at verse 11. *Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.* Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. On the way, he traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. This border area was a no-man’s land. But a band of lepers from Galilee and Samaria lived together in the area. Leprosy was a dreadful disease that affected not only the person’s body but also his relationship with others. This disease begins with a small growth in the eyelids and hands. Then it starts to spread gradually throughout the entire body, causing painful open sores and inflammation. But it does not stop with the disfiguration of the skin. It begins to eat away the skin, the flesh and finally the bone. Fingers and toes fall off. No wonder the Jews saw the disease as a curse from God. The lepers were not allowed to live within the walls of any city. They were cast out from society and from their families. If they came out on the street, they had to shout from a distance, “Unclean, unclean,” to warn people not to come close.

Look at verse 11 again. Normally Jews did not associate with Samaritans (Jn 4:9). But for this group of lepers, their common bond—the sickness—broke down social barriers among them. They moved together to forage food. What made them most sorrowful was that they had to live in the border area, away from their families and friends. No doubt some of them were teenage boys and girls. Also, since there was no cure for the horrible disease at that time, they had no hope for future. Life was only a misery. Then one day they heard a wonderful story. They heard that this Jesus of Nazareth healed many sick people out of his compassion. They were even more excited to hear how Jesus touched a man with leprosy and healed him, saying, “I am willing. Be clean.” A ray of hope shined in their hearts at that moment. And when they heard that

Jesus was passing through their village, ten of them decided to come to Jesus. Their coming to Jesus was an expression of their faith in Jesus.

Look at verses 12-13. *As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"* They cried out to Jesus for his mercy. They cried out in humility. They did not demand. They didn't say something like, "Hey, you healed that guy. Now heal us!" Their crying out was their humble prayer. How did Jesus help them?

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die on the cross. He was bracing himself for the impending sufferings and death. But Jesus never ignored any person who came to him with a sincere prayer. His heart went out to them. Look at verse 14. *When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.* Now this was an unexpected answer. Going to the priests and showing their skin conditions was a procedure that one was to follow *after* the symptoms of leprosy were cleared (Lev 13:2-3; 14:2-32). So it was strange that Jesus told them to go to the priests. They could have protested, "But Master, you haven't done anything to us yet. Look at our ugly hands!" Amazingly, these men denied their own ideas and obeyed Jesus' words. Luke emphasizes the fact that as they went by faith, they were cleansed (14). When they took Jesus at his word and put their faith into action, they experienced the grace of healing. We too can experience the grace of God through obeying his words. But we must deny ourselves and obey his words fully. This is not easy, especially if we are going through a difficult challenge, but by faith we can take Jesus as his words and act on our faith.

II. YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL (15-19)

Look at verses 15-16. *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.* When this man realized that he was healed, the first thing he did was to come back to Jesus, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. However, there is no mention of what the other nine did. Perhaps they went home to their families. Perhaps they went to see their friends. We don't know for sure. What we do know is that they did not come back to Jesus to thank him. Only the Samaritan came back to thank him. Let us read verses 17-18. *Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."* Jesus blessed this man further. Because he returned to thank Jesus, he received the blessing that is more important than physical healing. It was a spiritual healing (7:50; 8:48,50). He came back to Jesus and established a personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus said, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." He was made well in body and in soul. Jesus praised his faith. His thankful heart came from his faith in Jesus. His thankfulness brought a real change in his life.

A woman had a bleeding problem for 12 years. Her suffering was unbearable, but no one could help her. Then one day, she heard about Jesus. She was convinced that

Jesus could heal her. So she decided to come to Jesus. But she didn't want to appear before him publicly because of her embarrassing problem. Instead, she came up behind him and touched the edge of his clothes, and her bleeding stopped immediately. At this, she began to walk away with a silent cry of joy. But Jesus stopped her. He asked, "Who touched me?" Then she realized that Jesus wanted to meet her personally. She had to come forward and tell everything. Finally, Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace" (Lk 8:48). We want some tangible blessings from our Lord and we are happy when he obliges. But we should know that, more than anything, Jesus wants us to know him personally.

Jesus asked, "Where are the other nine?" They did not come back to thank Jesus. They were not grateful. Unlike the Samaritan, they did not feel the need to return to Jesus. Perhaps some of them even said, "Well, Jesus didn't do anything for us. He just said, 'Go and show yourselves.' I think I was getting better anyway." They were satisfied with their physical healing. They were more concerned with their outside than their inside. They were like some people today who come to Jesus to ask for help from a distance but never come to him for a personal relationship with him. The nine men came near enough to bring about an outward change, but not an inward change. Their ingratitude was no small matter.

In fact, the Bible teaches us that ingratitude is a root cause of sin (Ro 1:21). Adam and Eve brought sin into this world when they did not thank God for all the blessings that God lavished upon them. When they did not thank God, they began to complain and doubt about the love of God. Then they became vulnerable to Satan's temptation, and sinned before God by disobeying his word (Ge 3).

As I mentioned earlier, the Bible teaches us to give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus. It is easy to be thankful when things go very well for us. But things don't always go our ways. So how can we give thanks in all circumstances? Henri Nouwen said: "Gratitude as a discipline involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when my emotions and feelings are still steeped in hurt and resentment. It is amazing how many occasions present themselves in which I can choose gratitude instead of a complaint."

This is what Paul and Silas did in Philippi during their missionary journey. There was a teenage slave girl who was possessed by an evil spirit. Her owner used her as a fortuneteller to make money. But the apostle Paul had compassion for this girl and set her free from the evil spirit. When the owner saw that a source of his income was gone, he brought gangsters to beat up Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas were arrested on a false charge and thrown into prison. What did they do in prison? Did they complain to God for the injustice? No, they sang a song of praise for the privilege of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus at Philippi. They set a good example for us.

We live in an age of ingratitude. One businessman gave out Thanksgiving turkeys to all his 175 employees, but only four of them thanked him for the gift. The Bible also describes the last days in this way: "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money,

boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God..." (2Ti 3:2-4). One of the characteristics mentioned in this litany of bad character is that of being "ungrateful." This characterizes our generation. We live in an ungrateful age. When we look around, we see many people who are bitter. They complain not because they do not have anything, but because they do not have everything they want.

So why does God want us to give thanks in all circumstances? First of all, he has given us many blessings. We should be thankful. I think another reason he wants us to be thankful is that our happiness depends on it. Most unhappy people are unthankful people. At first glance, you may think that they are unthankful because they are unhappy. That is not true. In fact, the opposite is true. They are not unthankful because they are unhappy, but they are unhappy because they are unthankful.

Matthew Henry, a famous Bible scholar, was once robbed of his wallet. But he found at least four things to be thankful about the incident. He wrote in his diary, "I am thankful first because I was never robbed before. Second, the robbers took my money but not my life. Third, they took all the money I had, but it wasn't much. Fourth, I am thankful because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

During the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), a German pastor named Martin Rinkart had to bury 5,000 of his parishioners in one year, an average of 15 bodies a day. In the midst of the darkness, with the cries of fear outside his window, he sat down and wrote this prayer for his children: "Now thank we all our God / With heart and hands and voices; / Who wondrous things had done, / In whom His world rejoices. / Who, from our mother's arms, / Hath led us on our way / With countless gifts of love / And still is ours today."

A man had a habit of grumbling at the food his wife prepared. Then he would ask the blessing from God before eating. One day after his usual combination complaint-prayer, his little daughter asked, "Daddy, does God hear us when we pray?" "Why, of course," he replied. "He hears us every time we pray." She paused on this a moment, and asked, "Does he hear everything we say the rest of the time?" "Yes, dear, every word," he replied, encouraged that he had inspired his daughter to be curious about spiritual matters. However, his pride was quickly turned to humility at his daughter's next question. "Then, which does God believe?"

Even if you are not the kind of person who always looks on the bright side of things, there is one thing that should make you grateful in all circumstance. We can thank God even in the midst of hardships when we remember the most wonderful grace of God—the salvation of our soul through his Son Jesus. God sent his one and only Son to save us from the bondage of sin and death. God solved our greatest problem, our sin, by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to make the greatest sacrifice, his death, in order to give us the greatest gift, eternal life. God gave Jesus. Praise God for this indescribable gift! This is the gospel. It means "good news." And it is indeed good news! Those of us

who have experienced this grace know the gratitude we feel toward God. How can we ever thank him enough?

On the other hand, those who do not know Jesus personally may not feel that gratitude. They may see the world as a dark place, full of despair. Therefore, the basis for true thanksgiving is a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus. As we get to know Jesus better, we find that our gratitude grows. He can give us a heart to thank him in all circumstances. We begin to see things in light of God's unfailing love. We are not only different from the people around us, we are also different from the way we used to be. We are transformed in our thinking and in our behavior.

God has healed us from our sin-sickness by his mercy and grace. Like the Samaritan, we must come to Jesus to thank him for his grace. But there is one more thing to remember. The purpose of God's grace is not simply to save us from our physical weakness or solve our human problems. He did not heal us so that we may continue to live a selfish life. He set us free from our sins so that we may overcome our selfish nature and become a source of blessing to others. He healed us so that we can fulfill his purpose and mission in our lives. We must return to Jesus to have a personal relationship with him and find out what he wants us to do with our new life. By studying the word of God carefully and sincerely, we must find the purpose and mission in our lives.

May God help us to learn to be thankful in all circumstances! May God help us not to be like the nine men who did not come back to Jesus! The Samaritan was blessed when he returned to Jesus. He met Jesus personally. May God help us to come to know Jesus personally and follow him as his disciples!