“The Ten Lepers: An Attitude of Gratitude”

Luke 17:11-19


11) “And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

12) And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

13) And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

14) And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

15) And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,

16) And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

17) And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

18) There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

19) And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.”

Introduction:

There is a great danger in forgetting to be thankful, especially when it comes to recognizing the great work that God has done in our lives. One day, Jesus appeared a little shocked that only one out of the 10 healed of leprosy recognized
the marvelous thing that was just done for them; recognizing it enough to show appreciation anyway.

Jesus wondered where the nines attitude of gratitude was. Where is the simple “thank you” for all God has done? Alice Walker says it like this, “'Thank you' is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.”

“Thank you” is two simple words that don’t take a lot of space in the mouth, but show the greatness of the heart (Word For Life Says). So, where were their hearts? Apparently, not on Jesus who spoke the miracle over them or on God who delivered them. Their hearts were on themselves and their world.

**Lesson Summary:**

Jesus was on His way to “Jerusalem” to celebrate the Passover one last and final time before He would become the Lamb that would save the world from her sins (John 1:29). In His going, He showed His compassionate heart in the care of others. At a time when most would have understood if He wanted to focus on Himself, but He chose not to. Rather, His focus was always on the kingdom of God and the people around Him whose life He could impact for the better.

Traveling through the region in the midst of “Samaria and Galilee” He carried that same caring nature with Him as He “entered a certain village.” We are not given the name of this specific village, but judging by its location and the fact that at least one of the ten lepers in this story is a Samaritan, we may be able to assume that at least some of this particular village are of Samaritan background.

Going through the village, He “met ten men that were lepers which stood afar off,” (vs. 2). According to Leviticus 13 there are very detailed and specific guidelines that a community and individuals are to follow in regard to dealing with cases of leprosy. Leprosy covered a myriad of skin ailments or infections which were not necessarily described as just one disorder, hence the reason for such detail for the priests to look into scabs, legions, discolored hair growth, pus, etc.
Leprosy not only made one physically unclean, but spiritually as well. The priests’ job in reviewing proposed cases was to determine if one could be allowed to worship or be banned (Lev. 13). This banishment would not only include from the sanctuary, but life as the one who is diseased is over as they once knew it. If they were found to be infected, one had to remove themselves from family and community as well. If we can take a moment to try to internalize what exactly this entails we will see that whilst going through one of the most difficult and dangerous health crisis’ of the day one didn’t have any familial or friendly support. They had no one to hold and comfort through the times of pain and affliction. This wasn’t just an attack on the body, but the whole being from the inside out was affected emotionally and spiritually as well because of this one disease.

Being the contagious and almost always deadly disease that it was, it was required for the one who had the disease remain a certain distance from other people hence the need for the men to stand “afar off.” This separation was also the requirement given in Leviticus for dealing with those bearing this plague. They were also commanded to give warning to other passerby’s by crying out, “Unclean, unclean,” (see Lev. 13:45-46). This would help to insure that those who would propose to come into close proximity of the diseased would avoid it and them thus keeping the possibility of infection and uncleanness spreading any farther.

Due to the distance, in order for Jesus to hear their plea “they lifted up their voices.” If you will recall this was the same strategy that blind Bartimaeus used in trying to gain the attention of Jesus (see Mark 10:46-52). And the request was the same in both instances to “have mercy.” The idea was, as they were dealing with this death sentence, so to speak, they turned to the only one who could turn such a horrendous situation into a favorable one through compassion and mercy. It is as the British Evangelist John Flavel stated, “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.” The Bible says that God is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,” (Ephesians 3:20). They are asking for the impossible to be made possible. “Have mercy and show us Your favor, “Jesus, Master!” (declaring He has the power and authority to heal them).
Having heard their pleas, Jesus gave them the command to, “Go, shew yourselves unto the priests.” As was previously stated, the priests would determine if one had to remain in isolation due to the infection or if they were free to rejoin society as a normal, functioning member. What they said and how they ruled was the final law on it and it was not to be contested.

Notice here, on other occasions Jesus previously encountered He spoke the words that signified the healing had taken place. Here, His strategy is to send them to the priests for verification of a healing that has not yet occurred. Jesus already knew what he would do in and for these desperate men. What He needed them to do is believe enough to go in obedience to perform what He already instructed as if they had already received their healing. It was truly an act of obedience and faith working together. If they had enough faith to call out to Him for a specific healing, then they should have enough faith to follow the formula He prescribed.

And, they did. The text tells us, “As they went, they were cleansed.” When they stepped out in obedience to follow the orders of Christ, their skin malady cleared up and their bodies were restored. Wow! We don’t know how long each individual suffered in their leprous conditions, but oh, what a feeling it must have been to feel that release of sickness come over one’s body and the joy to know that they can go back home once again and hug loved ones, share meals, and do all those normal mundane daily tasks people so often take for granted.

For “one” of the men, he was not content to continue on the path to the priests without giving God the praise for what He had done in His life. This was truly a miracle that he probably thought would never occur in his life and here he was a walking testimony to the power that God can perform to those who believe. Therefore, “when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,” (vs. 15). With a loud voice he cried out to gain Jesus’ attention for his initial healing and with a loud voice he worshipped God for his healing. How often are our cries for help louder than our cries of praise for the God who came to our help? With the same vigor one sought God for a miracle should be the same vigor, if not more, one offers Him the sacrifice of praise.
When he came to where Jesus was, he “fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks, and he was a Samaritan.” In humility and awe he placed himself at the feet of Jesus thanking Him for all He had done. This brings to mind the woman who cried over Jesus’ feet when she anointed Him with oil (Luke 7:36-50). When the King of all kings steps down in humanity, hears your personal cries, and releases you from whatever had you bound what better position to be in than to be prostrated at His feet. He and He only deserve our worship.

What struck his story as special to Jesus was this man who is humbling himself before the Lord in praise was a “Samaritan.” There was a great history of animosity between the Jewish people and the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people. Most Jews of the day had no dealings with the Samaritans. It was not a hidden fact to either party, just look at the response of the Samaritan woman at the well whom Jesus talked to in John 4. Yet she, as the man in today’s text, recognized Jesus for who He really was and at that time she testified of Him before her whole village.

Jesus at one time used a Samaritan man as the focus of a story teaching real, neighborly love. In that, we see the despised reject of Jewish society; one whom most considered a nobody, became the hero example of how to care for others despite one’s background (see Luke 10:25-37). And, here it is a Samaritan again that sees the need within himself to turn back and give thanks for the miraculous second chance at a normal life. To Jesus, it didn’t matter where one was from. All that matter was the true heart of faith that believes in Him with total abandon.

Jesus, taken aback at the scene, asked, “Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.” Jesus may have healed from a distance but He knew how many men cried out for His intervention. Knowing the death sentence that had been placed on their life, Jesus was dumbfounded that only one saw the right need in him to glorify God, and that was the one considered a “stranger.”

From a previous article title, Whatever Happened to Thank You, I wrote:
“A miracle had been done for the ten; something that seemed impossible was made possible through our Lord Jesus Christ. Their direful situation was healed and now, because of His blessings over their lives, they could resume normal societal activities and functions, for now they were made whole again.

Yet, only one seemed to appreciate it enough to say, “Thank you.” How sad is that. In their desperateness they cried out for mercy and our Lord being the compassionate Savior He is, rescued them and showed the mercy they humbly sought. But, after their healing that humility seemed to have quickly faded as they went forth in life as if no one had done anything for them.

Twice in Colossians 3 we are commanded to be thankful. Verse 15 says, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful,” (emphasis mine, NKJV). Also, verse 17 commands, “And what you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him,” (emphasis mine, NKJV).

1 Thessalonians 5:18 makes it super easy for everyone to understand if they should ever wonder if the situation calls for being thankful. It says, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” (NKJV).” (Word For Life Says)

Foregoing an attitude of gratitude can put us in danger of taking God for granted. Let us be mindful to give God His due for all the wonderful things He has done in our life.

Jesus said to the grateful man, “Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole,” (vs. 19). We know from the verses above that he already received his physical healing, but here we see his faith in Jesus took him to a deeper, spiritual level. He had been made “whole” from the inside out; not only healing is body, but saving his soul (compare Luke 7:50).

Conclusion:
Faith, as we have learned, is an inside job. What’s on the inside will manifest itself out to show the world the power of Christ in you. Let therefore, let us have an attitude of gratitude for all that our Lord has done for us and show the world how great our God is.